

L'HISTORIOGRAPHIE CONTEMPORAINE DU
CHRISTIANISME DANS L'AFRIQUE ROMAINE

Contemporary Historiography on Christianity in Roman Africa

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Abstract

This essay follows the broad contours of patristic and ecclesiastical history relative to African Christianity. Rival Catholic and Protestant narratives of the origin and trajectory of African Christianity in the early modern period continued to influence historiography, even after the acceptance of critical historical methods in the 19th century. The advent of archeological research in the colonial period opened new vistas on African history and ushered in the sociohistorical approach which characterized early Christian studies in the 20th century. Finally, the “linguistic turn”

Résumé

Cet essai suit les larges contours de l'histoire patristique et ecclésiastique relative au christianisme africain. Les récits catholiques et protestants rivaux sur l'origine et la trajectoire du christianisme africain au début de la période moderne ont continué à influencer l'historiographie, même après l'acceptation des méthodes historiques critiques au XIX^e siècle. L'avènement de la recherche archéologique à l'époque coloniale a ouvert de nouvelles perspectives sur l'histoire africaine et a inauguré l'approche sociohistorique qui a caractérisé les premières études chrétiennes au XX^e siècle. Enfin, le

in early Christian studies inspired by critical theory has directed recent research toward issues surrounding the identities of African Christians, rhetorical and real.

Keywords

Augustine, Early Christianity, Historiography, Late Antiquity, North Africa, Patristics

« tournant linguistique » dans les premières études chrétiennes inspirées de la théorie critique a orienté les recherches récentes vers les questions entourant les identités (rhétoriques et réelles) des chrétiens africains.

Mots-clés

Afrique du Nord, Antiquité tardive, Augustin, Christianisme primitif, Historiographie, Patristique

CHRISTIANITY FLOURISHED FOR A RELATIVELY BRIEF MOMENT IN NORTH AFRICA, from the 3rd to the 8th cent. CE. Yet its impact on Christianity, and by extension on European culture, has been disproportionate to its duration. As Adolf von Harnack observed, “[i]t is one of the most paradoxical facts of history that, after St. Paul, Christianity received its strongest impulse for further development from the seashore of Tunisia”¹. From African controversies emerged the Western doctrine of the church and the sacraments and the theologies of grace and predestination. Africa was home to some of the best-known early martyrs, and in Africa the Latin Bible has its roots. When that church disintegrated during the Great Reform, a protracted battle ensued over this authoritative North African theological patrimony as Protestant and Catholics returned *ad fontes*. Each side grappled for a version of history which supported their own positions, and the great African ecclesiastical controversies were read in light of contemporary dogmatic disputes. These interpretive tendencies gradually morphed as religious affiliation merged with national identities in the 19th century, and African Christianity became a symbol of European civilization during the colonial era. Even after critical approaches to church historiography were adopted in the 20th century, ecclesial and national commitments have continued to determine how the story of African Christians is told.

This essay follows the broad contours of patristic and ecclesiastical history as it touches on African Christianity. The concept of “North African Christianity” is relatively recent². Until the age of exploration, Africanity bestowed no special identity. In 1531, Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives coined the term *africitas* to designate African Latinity in response to the contemporary humanist preoccupation with the “national” characteristics of the Latin tongue³. At the time, and for centuries to follow, Africa was held in contempt. Augustine, Cyprian, and Tertullian wrote in Latin and were understood in terms of their Christianity rather than Africanity, indistinguishable from a Jerome or an Ambrose. Erasmus, deploring Augustine’s origins, said that Africa was “primitive, hedonistic, anti-intellectual and addicted

1. A. von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (tr. J. Moffat, 2nd ed.), London, 1908, II, 30.

2. There are few surveys of the historiography of North African Christianity. The best is D. Wilhite, *Ancient African Christianity. An Introduction to a Unique Context and Tradition*, New York, 2017, 1-78, *passim*.

3. C. Conybeare, “Augustini Hipponensis Africitas”, *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 25, 2015, 111.

to scandal”⁴. Africans continued to be linked to violence and fanaticism until the 20th century, when scholars began to revise this view and to appreciate the unique geographical and culture context⁵.

As the designation “patristics” indicates, scholarship on early Christianity has often been limited to these men, and specifically to their theological work. Yet in the case of North Africa, historical context has been inescapable. African polemics were far removed from the seemingly abstract philosophical debates of the East; they were more explicitly concerned with authority and power, clergy and laity, confessors and bishops, regional autonomy and centralized Roman authority. Thus, even when doctrinal concerns were central, something of the social and historical context had to be grasped. This essay will move briskly from the rival sectarian narratives of the early modern period to the development of critical ecclesiastical histories in the 19th century. The advent of archeological research in the colonial period opened new vistas on African history and ushered in the sociohistorical approach which characterized early Christian studies in the 20th century. Finally, the “linguistic turn” in historiography inspired by critical theory has directed recent research toward issues surrounding the identities of African Christians, both great theologians such as Tertullian and the ordinary folk.

1. Apologetic Historiography (1600-1850)

While certain early African churchmen were considered authoritative throughout the middle ages, it was only with the Protestant reformation that the whole “early church” assumed a special status⁶. Luther believed that the Roman church of his day was corrupt and degraded, no longer corresponding to its original truth and purity. The history of the church was thus a story of the decline and fall of the pristine church of the early centuries. Church history was born from the Lutheran effort both to recover the spirit of the primitive church and to document its degeneracy into Roman Catholicism. The triumph of this version of history was the seven volumes of the *Magdeburg Centuries*, edited by the Lutheran Matias Vlacič (1520-1575) between 1559 and 1574. This method reversed traditional historiography by elevating antiquity – or rather temporal proximity to scripture – to the level of orthodoxy. Tertullian, for instance, who had been largely excluded from the patristic canon by Catholic writers, was embraced by Protestant historians as a brilliant apologist and proto-Protestant⁷.

4. Quoted in A. Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation. The Flexibility of Intellectual Authority in Europe, 1500-1620*, New York, 2011, 37.

5. For example, see J.K. Coyle, “Particularities of Christianity in Roman Africa”, *Studia Patristica*, 39, 2006, 13-26.

6. See P. Polman, *L'Élément historique dans la controverse religieuse du XVI^e siècle*, Gembloux, 1932.

7. R. Bellarmine, *De Controversiis*, vol. II, col. 1163: *Tertullianus, quem tamen inter Catholicos non numeramus*.

Catholics responded with the *Annales Ecclesiastici* of Cardinal Baronius (1538-1607). Baronius defended the continuity and reliability of Catholic tradition by reaffirming Petrine authority using early Christian sources, none more essential than Cyprian's *De Unitate*⁸. To the extent that there was a regional history of Christianity in North Africa, it was read through one of these two broad narrative arcs. In the Catholic telling, African Christianity originated with Roman missionaries, affirmed Petrine primacy, and culminated with Augustine's crushing defeat of Manichaeism, Donatism and Pelagianism. Protestants typically held an Eastern origin for African Christianity, either Egypt or Asia Minor. The church slowly fell under Roman sway and devolved into high liturgy, ecclesiastical hierarchy, state-churchism, and other unscriptural practices. Cyprian's dispute with Pope Stephen over rebaptism and the Donatist schism were celebrated moments of genuine Christian autonomy from Roman authoritarianism.

In both Catholic and Protestant narratives, the Donatist controversy of the 4th and 5th cent. was pivotal, a fact reflected in the earliest historical works on North Africa⁹. The jurist and Catholic apologist Francis Baldwin published Optatus of Milev's anti-Donatist account of the schism in 1563 as well as his own history of the period entitled, *Historia Carthagenesis Collationis sive disputationis de ecclesia* (1566). Lutheran scholars challenged Optatus' account and defended the Donatists, beginning with Friedrich Staphylus's *Disputatio circa circumcelliones* (1568) and later by Svante Gustavus Dietz in his *Dissertatio historica* (1690). English Protestants likewise saw their struggle reflected in the Donatist controversy: Thomas Long's *The History of the Donatist. Mutato nomine de te, Anglia, narrator* (1677) and *Lucilla and Elizabeth, or, Donatist and Protestant Schism Parallel'd* (1686). Despite their Donatist sympathies, however, early Protestants continued to claim Augustine as their own¹⁰.

Despite the divergent narrative frameworks, confessional competition between Catholics and Protestants forced close readings, raised scholarly standards, and improved the stock of manuscripts¹¹. Under the leadership of Jesuit and Benedictine scholars, church history became a scientific endeavor. The French Benedictine Jean Mabillon (1632-1707) developed

8. E. Norelli, "The Authority Attributed to the Early Church in the *Centuries of Magdeburg* and the *Ecclesiastical Annals* of Caesar Baronius", in I. Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West. From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, Leiden, 1997, 756. On Cyprian specifically, see A. Goudriaan, "Cyprian's *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate*. Why Did Reformed Theologians Consider It a Useful Book (1559-1655)?", in H. Bakker, P. van Geest and H. van Loon (eds.), *Cyprian of Carthage. Studies in His Life, Language, and Thought*, Leuven, 2010, 225-241.

9. On the Donatists, see M. Gaumer, "Donatists Abound!!!: The Polemical *Ressourcement* of Late Antique Villains in the Mediaeval and Early Modern Periods," in A. Dupont, M. Gaumer and M. Lamberigts (eds.), *The Uniquely African Controversy. Studies on Donatist Christianity*, Leuven, 2015, 36-45. For a more extensive bibliography, see M. Gaumer, *Augustine's Cyprian. Authority in Roman Africa*, Leiden, 2016, 8-14.

10. A. Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation...*, *op. cit.*, n. 4.

11. According to I. Backus, "[C]ontroversy...often acted as a spur to learned editions". See I. Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)*, Leiden, 2003, 130. For more on this, see P. Petitmengin, "*De adulteratis partum editionibus*. La critique des textes au service de l'orthodoxie," in E. Bury and B. Meunier (eds.), *Les Pères de l'Église au XVIIe siècle. Actes du colloque de Lyon, 2-5 octobre 1991*, Paris, 1993, 17-32.

the discipline of paleography and diplomatics¹². His fellow Maurists committed themselves to publishing critical editions of ancient writers using the highest quality manuscripts, beginning with the works of Augustine¹³. Their eleven-volume edition, published from 1679-1700, remains the last critical edition of the complete works of Augustine. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the works of Tertullian were not included in the series¹⁴.

Sectarian bias persisted through the 17th century. Emmanuel Schelstrate (1649-1692), a Belgian theologian and Vatican librarian, wrote what may be the earliest regional history of North African Christianity: *Ecclesia Africana sub Primate Carthaginiensi* (1679). His scholarship was respected, but he was a staunch defender of papal supremacy. The divisions of his work give a sense of the history of this period: 1) “The Carthaginian Primate is not Autocephalous”; 2) Rites and Doctrines of the African Church; 3) African Councils; and 4) Episcopal Succession in Carthage. In response, the Calvinist theologian Melchior Leydecker (1642-1721) wrote *Historia Ecclesiae Africanae Illustrata* (1690)¹⁵. Leydecker began his history with a strong denial of Schelstrate’s work, opening the treatise: “*maxime contra E. Eschelstraetium*”. Throughout the book, Leydecker defended the African church’s independence *contra Romana studia*, with an emphasis on the authority of Cyprian.

Sectarianism was not necessarily an impediment to good historiography. A signal achievement in the study of early African Christianity was the chronicle of Louis-Sébastien Le Nain de Tillemont (1637-1698)¹⁶. Tillemont was a devout Jansenist who wrote a 22-volume history of the early church in the hopes of edifying and saving souls. His religious commitment to truth resulted in an obsession with historical accuracy and the development of rigorous critical standards. His scientific approach earned him the moniker “the accurate M. de Tillemont” from Edward Gibbon, who relied heavily on his chronicle for his own history of Rome. Though Tillemont wrote as if the early Christians were proto-Jansenists and their pagan opponents proto-Jesuits, his “bigotry” was “overbalanced by the merits of his erudition, diligence, veracity, and scrupulous minuteness”, at least in Gibbon’s estimation¹⁷.

12. J.-L. Quantin, “Reason and Reasonableness in French Ecclesiastical Scholarship”, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 74, 2011, 401-436.

13. D.-O. Hurel, “Les Mauristes, éditeurs des Pères de L’Église au XVIIe siècle”, in E. Bury and B. Meunier (eds.), *Les Pères de l’Église...*, *op. cit.*, n. 11, 117-136.

14. On the historiography of Tertullian in modernity, see J.C. Fredouille, “Tertullien en Allemagne et en France”, in J. Fontaine, R. Herzog, and K. Pollmann (eds.), *Patristique et antiquité tardive en Allemagne et en France de 1870 a 1930: Influences et échanges*, Paris, 1993, 93-101.

15. Lydecker was an acolyte of Gisbertus Voetius, who sparred with Cornelius Jansenius on Pelagianism and Donatism. See M. Lamberigts, “Voetius versus Jansenius”, in J. Van Oot *et al.* (eds.), *De Onbekende Voetius*, Kampen, 1989, 148-167.

16. D. Jordan, “Le Nain de Tillemont: Gibbon’s Sure-Footed Mule”, *Church History*, 39, 1970, 483-502.

17. Cited by D. Jordan, “Le Nain de Tillemont...”, *op. cit.*, n. 16, 497. African history was also a battleground in the Gallican Controversy; see F. Gabriel, “L’usage gallican (1552-1771) de l’Afrique chrétienne tardo-antique: les modalités de l’unité ecclésiale”, *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions*, 3, 2009, 349-374. Gallians upheld North Africa as a model of autonomous Christianity.

2. Critical Ecclesiastical History (1850-1900)

2.1. French Colonialism

As Reformation polemics receded in the 19th century, European scholars found a new motivation to study early African Christianity history: colonial expansion. Just as Catholic scholars had emphasized the Romanness of (true) Christianity in Africa in order to further their sectarian agenda, French scholars, still mostly Catholic, now depicted the Roman African church as a civilizing force in the *Maghreb*¹⁸. The most significant study on North Africa to date was the groundbreaking three-volume work of Italian Jesuit Stefano Antonio Morcelli (1737-1821), *Africa christiana*, published in the twilight of his career in 1816-1817¹⁹. Morcelli dedicated the work to Pope Pius VII, explaining in the preface that he wrote to extol the civilizing work of the Romans and in hope of spreading Christianity; specifically, for the rise of a “second Belisarius” who would defeat the Muslims and restore the Catholic faith to Africa. Like Tillemont, however, his partisanship was not an impediment to evidence-based work. Morcelli was a pioneer in the science of epigraphy; his three-volume work on Latin inscriptions, some of which was incorporated into his history, marks the beginning of the use of material evidence in African historiography²⁰. Regarding the significance of epigraphy, Brent Shaw observed:

“A survey of synoptic histories produced since the 1870s and 1880s reveals a radical shift in our knowledge, almost to the point where modern historical accounts bear little resemblance to those of a century and a half ago. But in so far as one can judge from the histories written, the immense increase in our knowledge is due to one source alone: epigraphy”²¹.

Still, Morcelli primarily drew from the literary record, and his history, with its lists of bishops and sees, resembles the old annalistic form of Baronius and the Centuriators.

French occupation of Algeria initiated a tidal wave of what William H.C. Frend dubbed “Catholic archaeology”²². The first modern bishop of Algiers, Monseigneur Antoine-Adolph Dupuch (1800-1856), was installed in 1838. He immediately set to work reviving the Augustinian church of the 5th cent., partly through his advocacy for the recovery of early Christian

18. North Africa was “Orientalized” and opposed to the West. In 1881, B. Smith called Tunis “the most Oriental of Oriental towns”: B. Smith, *Rome and Carthage. The Punic Wars*, New York, 1881, 285. For a brief review of colonialist historiography on Christianity, see D. Willhite, *Ancient African Christianity... op. cit.*, n. 2, 7-10.

19. W.H.C. Frend, *The Archaeology of Early Christian. A History*, London, 1995, 51-52.

20. S.A. Morcelli, *De stilo inscriptionum latinarum*, Rome, 1781.

21. B. Shaw, “Archaeology and Knowledge: The History of the African Provinces of the Roman Empire”, repr. in *Environment and Society in Roman North Africa*, Aldershot, 1995, 32.

22. W.H.C. Frend, *The Archaeology of Early Christianity... op. cit.*, n. 18, xvi.

sites²³. In 1847, he published *Essai sur l'Algérie chrétienne, romaine et française*, which translated sections of Morcelli's *Africa christiana*. Charles Lavigerie (1825-1892) became archbishop of Algiers in 1867. A former professor of ecclesiastical history at the Sorbonne, Lavigerie understood the importance of history in reclaiming North Africa for Christ. To further his goals, he founded the missionary order of the White Fathers in 1868²⁴.

The White Fathers were instrumental in the recovery of material data on ancient Christianity, both epigraphic and archaeological. Fr. Alfred Louis Delattre (1850-1932) investigated ruins around ancient Carthage and published many works, including *Souvenirs de l'ancienne église d'Afrique* in 1893. Delattre oversaw the excavation of the Basilica of Damous El Karita outside of Carthage, one of the greatest Christian monuments from the region²⁵. Fr. Anatole-Joseph Toulotte relied on epigraphic evidence in his four-volume *Geographie de l'Afrique Chrétienne* (1892-1894), a compilation of bishops and their sees in each Roman province²⁶. His work was revised and updated to include new material evidence by fellow White Father Joseph Mesnage, in *L'Afrique chrétienne: Évêchés et ruines antiques* in 1912. Over 1,800 sites are catalogued. Mesnage also wrote a three-volume synoptic history, *Le christianisme en Afrique* (1914-1915)²⁷.

Around the same time, Henri Leclercq (1869-1945), a Belgian priest and historian published his two-volume *L'Afrique chrétienne* (1904), which was one of the first major synthetic treatments of North African Christianity to thoroughly assimilate archaeological evidence²⁸. He also took account of the land of North Africa, beginning his history with descriptions of the geography and climate. Like the White Fathers, Leclercq joined "practical work in the propagation of Christianity with investigation into the past history of the local mission"²⁹. Leclercq went on to compile the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, published between 1907 and 1951, which remains unparalleled for the wealth of primary material. Like

23. B. Effros, *Incidental Archaeologists. French Officers and the Rediscovery of Roman Africa*, Ithaca, 2018, 78-124. Also, K. Francis, "Catholic Missionaries in Colonial Algeria. Faith, Foreigners, and France's Other Civilizing Mission, 1848-1883", *French Historical Studies*, 39, 2016, 685-715.

24. See A. Shorter, *Les Pères Blancs au temps de la conquête coloniale. Histoire des Missionnaires d'Afrique 1892-1914*, Karthala, 2011. Also, J. Gadille, "L'Idéologie des missions catholiques en Afrique francophone", in G. Ruggieri (ed.), *Eglise et histoire de l'Eglise en Afrique. Actes du colloque (Bologne, 22-25 octobre 1988)*, Paris, 1988, 43-61.

25. A.L. Delattre, *Archéologie chrétienne de Carthage. Fouilles de la basilique de Damous-El-Karita*, Lyon, 1884. See comments by N. Duval, "Études d'architecture chrétienne nord-africaine", *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome – Antiquité*, 84, 1972, 1107-1108.

26. A minor work from the period, which does not utilize Toulotte, was G. Rabeau, *Le Culte des Saints dans l'Afrique chrétienne d'après les inscriptions et les monuments figurés*, Paris, 1903. Rabeau used epigraphic evidence to define African Christian terms like *sanctus*, *martyr*, *memoria*, and *nomen*.

27. W.H.C. Frend, *The Archaeology of Early Christianity...*, *op. cit.*, n. 19, 126.

28. T. Klauser, *Henri Leclercq 1869-1945: von Autodidakten zum Kompilator grossen Stils*, Münster, 1977.

29. H. Leclercq, *L'Afrique chrétienne*, Paris, 1904. In his introduction, Leclercq reflects on the theological dimension of historiography: history is not meant to be a mere chronicle of events, but a revelation concerning the nature of humanity (xviii-xx).

the White Fathers, Leclercq associated Christianity with Romanization; he also shared their anti-African colonial prejudices.

Archaeologist Stéphane Gsell (1864-1932) brought a Protestant perspective to his research on North African history³⁰. The second volume of *Monuments antiques de l'Algérie* (1901) is almost exclusively devoted to Christian remains. He includes descriptions of 169 churches, from urban basilicas to rural chapels. His *Atlas archéologique de l'Algérie* (1911) described every site known, together with references to archaeological reports. Breaking with the dominant Romanization model, he argued that African Christianity was distinctive, shaped by pre-existent "Semitic" culture and local practices such as the cult of Saturn³¹. Gsell speculated that the Donatists were the best representatives of this indigenous Christianity, and he focused his attention on ancient Numidia, the center of Donatist activity. He developed some of the first methods for identifying Donatist sites and artifacts. His landmark eight-volume *Histoire ancienne de l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris, 1913-1929) stopped short of the Christian period, though he left copious notes for further volumes³².

The most important work in this era was Paul Monceaux's (1859-1941) magisterial seven-volume *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne depuis les origines jusqu'à l'invasion arabe* (Paris, 1901-1923), an eminently readable and refreshingly nonparochial narrative of Christian history³³. Though he did not ignore material evidence, Monceaux's method was decidedly literary. Beginning with Tertullian, he analyzed all available Christian African texts century by century. Like Gsell, Monceaux was not captive to the Catholic prejudices which distorted the work of clerical scholars; for instance, he posited multiple origins for Christianity in Africa, though he does lean toward an Eastern rather than Roman source. A large portion of his work, the last four volumes, is devoted to the Donatist movement (and very little space is given to Augustine, despite his voluminous writings). Though critical of the schismatics, Monceaux was the first scholar to try to understand Donatism on its own merits. Using the Donatist inscriptions identified by Gsell, he reconstructed the organization, liturgy, and theology of Donatist Christians³⁴.

30. See W.H.C. Frend, *From Dogma to History. How Our Understanding of the Early Church Developed*, London, 2003, 59-81.

31. He published this thesis in "Exploration archéologique dans le Département de Constantine (Algérie)", *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome – Antiquité*, 13, 1893, 461-541 and "Ruines romaines au nord des monts de Batna", *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome – Antiquité*, 14, 1894, 17-86.

32. Frend inherited his notes, and was much influenced by his work: W.H.C. Frend, *Dogma to History...*, *op. cit.*, n. 30, 3.

33. For the broader cultural context, see J. Fontaine, "Les laïcs et les études patristiques latines dans l'université française au XX^e siècle", *Revue Bénédictine*, 94, 1984, 444-461.

34. Mention should be made of another liberal Catholic historian, the Italian priest Ernesto Buonaiuti, who wrote a survey *Il cristianesimo nell'Africa romana* in 1928. Like his friend and fellow priest L. Duchesne, he was tarred as a modernist by the Vatican and his writings were placed on the Index. Cf. R. Morghen, "Louis Duchesne e Ernesto Buonaiuti storici della chiesa e del cristianesimo", *Publications de l'École Française de*

2.2. The European Academy

While French missionaries were unearthing basilicas and inscriptions in Algeria, Protestant universities in Germany, England, and the United States were organizing the new academic discipline of “church history” rooted in the same historical-critical method which had revolutionized biblical studies³⁵. Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) exemplified this approach³⁶. The discipline advanced with the influx of new literary material. One major source of texts was the *Patrologia Latina*, published between 1844 and 1855 by the French priest Jacques Migne (1800-1875)³⁷. Migne was not an academic, and his editions were only lightly edited diplomatic copies. The goal was to make early Christian sources available, quickly and cheaply. The majority of the *PL* texts are theological treatises, but the series also includes works of history, sermons, liturgical texts, and conciliar acts. Only a decade later, in 1864, the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften in Vienna began publishing a critical edition of Latin texts called the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (CSEL)*, which became the standard editions for the African Christian works. As Charles Kannengiesser observed,

“The late 19th century and the early 20th were times of intense philological work. In Great Britain, Germany, and France, but also in Italy and in other countries, scholars were busy with their many acquisitions of new manuscripts and with the inventory of existing manuscript collections. At an accelerated pace new identifications were announced and new first editions secured”³⁸.

Previously unknown sermons of Augustine were discovered. Some material thought to be Augustinian was declared spurious and labeled ps.-Augustinian³⁹. Similarly, the works attributed to Cyprian were organized by Hartel’s classification into the three categories of authentic, dubious, and spurious in volume 3 of the *CSEL*⁴⁰. The appendix of Optatus’ *De*

Rome, 23, 1975, 375-393. Monceau, Buonaiuti, and Duschne all sought to apply “scientific” standards to historiography.

35. For an overview of the disciplinary history of ancient Christianity, see E. Clark, “From Patristics to Early Christian Studies”, in S.A. Harvey and D. Hunter (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, Oxford, 2008, 7-41. Due to old prejudices against theology, the French academy was late to adopt ecclesiastical history as an academic discipline.

36. W.H.C. Frend, *From Dogma...*, *op. cit.*, n. 30, 9-31.

37. See C. Chauvin, *Labbé Migne et ses collaborateurs, 1800-1875*, Paris, 2010. Also, the essays in Á. Mandouze and J. Foulheron (eds.), *Migne et le Renouveau des études patristiques. Actes du Colloque (Saint-Flour, 7-8 juillet 1975)*, Paris, 1985.

38. C. Kannengiesser, “Fifty Years of Patristics”, *Theological Studies*, 50, 1989, 640. See also M. Wallraff, “Whose Fathers? An Overview of Patristic Studies in Europe”, in C. Harrison, B. Bitton-Ashkelony, and T. De Bruyn (eds.), *Patristic Studies in the Twenty-First Century. Proceedings of an International Conference to Mark the 50th Anniversary of the International Association of Patristic Studies*, Turnhout, 2015, 57-72.

39. P.-P. Verbraken, *Études critiques sur les Sermons authentiques de saint Augustin*, Steenbruggen, 1976.

40. On the fraught history of Cyprian’s texts, see H. Bakker, P. van Geest, and H. van Loon, “Introduction”, in H. Bakker, P. van Geest, and H. van Loon (eds.), *Cyprian of Carthage...*, *op. cit.*, n. 8, 8-22.

Schismata was disputed, then verified⁴¹. Scholars turned their attention to anonymous works such as the *Liber Genealogus* and minor literary figures like Tyconius and Quodvultdeus.

Critical analysis of these texts likewise improved. The number of international journals devoted to early Christian studies increased rapidly after 1870⁴². For instance, von Harnack and Oscar von Gebhardt created the monograph series *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* in 1882, which produced a number of articles on African figures (Tertullian, Cyprian, and Ps.-Cyprian, though little on Augustine) and stimulated the production of new critical editions⁴³. These new journals reflected the increasing specialization of early Christian studies, which included hagiography, iconography, liturgies, history of missions, history of dogma, and religious anthropology.

Harnack's attention to the *Sitz im leben* of patristic texts prompted novel insights on old debates. A Westphalian Evangelical pastor named Wilhelm Thümmel argued in *Zur Beurtheilung des Donatismus* (1893) that the Donatist schism may have been motivated more by "Berber nationalism" than theological allegiance⁴⁴ (Harnack had already called the Donatists the "African national party")⁴⁵. He associated Donatists with native Punic-speakers and noted Donatist support for the rebellions of Firmus and Gildo in the late 4th cent. Though Gsell was coming to similar conclusions regarding the non-theological causes of Donatism, he was sharply critical of Thümmel's thesis⁴⁶. The scholarly debate reflected contemporary national tensions between Germany and France, a shadow of the old Protestant-Catholic rivalry.

3. Social History (1900-1970)

The collapse of European empires in the early 20th century led to renewed interest in the late Roman period. German scholars coined the term *die Spätanike* for a period between 2nd and

41. L. Duchesne, "Le Dossier du Donatisme", *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome – Antiquité*, 10, 1890, 589-650.

42. J. Fugmann and K. Pollman, "Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Tendenzen zwischen Frankreich und Deutschland in der Patristik von 1870-1930 am Beispiel von Rezensionen", in J. Fontaine, R. Herzog, and K. Pollmann (eds.), *Patristique et antiquité tardive...*, *op. cit.*, n. 14, 240, 254-257.

43. See essays in J. Fontaine, R. Herzog, and K. Pollmann (eds.), *Patristique et antiquité tardive...*, *op. cit.*, n. 14.

44. Protestant attention to Donatism had been increasing. See D. Voelter, *Der Ursprung des Donatismus*, Freiburg, 1883 and O. Seeck, "Quellen und Urkunden über die Anfänge des Donatismus", *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 10, 1889, 505-568. For an analysis of this historiography, see B. Shaw, *Sacred Violence. African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*, Cambridge, 2011, 828-839.

45. Quoted by A. Fortescue, *Donatism*, London, 1917, 14.

46. This may be attributed to his ambivalence to German scholars working in "French Africa". See his review in *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome – Antiquité*, 15, 1895, 526; also, W.H.C. Frend, *From Dogma...*, *op. cit.*, n. 30, 69-70.

8th cent. CE⁴⁷. The shift to “late antiquity” challenged the dominant narrative of decline – still held by scholars such as Harnack – by emphasizing continuity between antiquity and the middle ages⁴⁸. This new periodization encouraged cooperation between Classics and patristics, best represented by Catholic theologian Franz Josef Dölger (1879-1940), who began the journal *Antike und Christentum* in 1929⁴⁹. Dölger, who had been trained in dogmatic history, recognized the necessity of understanding the non-Christian environment in which Christianity was flourishing. Whereas the Hegelian Harnack had studied culture in order to isolate Christianity from its social background, Dölger’s phenomenologically-inspired *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* believed Christianity was inseparable from its cultural milieu.

One of the first classical historians to cross over into the history of Christian North Africa and render “non-theological and non-ecclesiastical considerations integral to the study of ancient Christianity” was Frend (1916-2005)⁵⁰. Peter Brown remarked:

“there was no English scholar who showed, with such conviction, that the history of late antique Christianity – and especially of its ‘dissenting’ variants – must be seen rooted in a real world, with real social structures and real social conflicts, among local cultures whose particularity was revealed, by Frend the archaeologist, with an almost mystical zest for the concrete”⁵¹.

Frend was initiated into North African studies by working alongside André Berthier in his archaeological survey of Numidia in 1938-1939. Berthier uncovered nearly 50 early Christian sites in central Numidia, and numerous Berber and Punic artifacts. Using the fresh discoveries, Frend published *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in North Africa*

47. On this history of periodization, see P.E. Hübinger, *Kulturbruch oder Kulturkontinuität im Übergang von der Antike zum Mittelalter*, Darmstadt, 1968, 201 and *Zur Frage der Periodengrenze zwischen Alertum und Mittelalter*, Darmstadt, 1969, 51.

48. A. Piganiol was an early exponent of this. See A. Piganiol, *L'empire chrétien*, Paris, 1947. The decline narrative was also challenged by Italian historian A. Momigliano, “Christianity and the Decline of the Roman Empire”, in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Oxford, 1963, 79-99. Momigliano believed von Harnack had allowed his theological instincts to cloud his historical judgements. See also L. Cracco Ruggini, “Arnaldo Momigliano e il tardoantico”, in L. Cracco Ruggini (ed.), *Omaggio ad Arnaldo Momigliano: Storia e storiografia sul mondo antico*, Como, 1989, 159-184. Momigliano was a major influence on Peter Brown.

49. G. May, “Das Konzept *Antike und Christentum* in der Patristik von 1870 bis 1930”, in J. Fontaine, R. Herzog, and K. Pollmann (eds.), *Patristique et antiquité tardive... , op. cit.*, n. 14. Also, E.A. Judge, “«Antike und Christentum»: Towards a Definition of the Field. A Bibliographical Survey”, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, II, 23, 1979, 3-58. For the most recent developments, see A. Cameron, “Patristics and Late Antiquity: Partners or Rivals?”, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 28, 2020, 238-302.

50. É. Rebillard, “William Hugh Clifford Frend (1916-2005): The Legacy of The Donatist Church”, *Studia Patristica*, 53, 2013, 55.

51. P. Brown, “The World of Late Antiquity Revisited”, *Symbolae Osloenses*, 72, 1997, 12.

in 1952⁵². He argued that the Donatist controversy should be understood first in social and political terms, rather than theological. Donatism was a “Numidian and agrarian movement” rooted in the rural high plains; its religious form should not be divorced from the preceding religious traditions of the Berbers or from the Arab conquerors who followed in the eighth century⁵³. Echoing Harnack, he believed genuine African Christianity was rooted in the Jewish dispersion⁵⁴. Moreover, Donatism was a revolutionary movement opposed to the Roman occupiers and the Romanizing Catholic party of Optatus and Augustine⁵⁵.

Frend’s description of the Donatists was groundbreaking, if not entirely original. His argument was anticipated by the Belgian historian François Martroye, who wrote of Donatism as “une tentative de révolution sociale”⁵⁶. He was also influenced by the Russian historian Michael Rostovtzeff’s not-quite-Marxist *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (1926), which pitted city against the countryside, Romans against non-Romans, elites against peasants. The Marxist historian Jean-Paul Brisson paralleled Frend in *Autonomisme et christianisme dans l’Afrique romaine* (1958), though highlighting socio-economic factors above Frend’s national and ethnic dimensions. Brisson argued that the Donatists were the inheritors of the Cypriatic African patrimony, while Augustine and the Catholics who had broken with the tradition. Social historian Arnold H.M. Jones effectively overturned Frend and Brisson’s arguments, thus ending any reductionistic explanation of Donatism⁵⁷. However, the social dimensions of North African church could no longer be ignored⁵⁸. According to Robert A. Markus, North African scholarship was being recontextualized after modernity’s theological decontextualization⁵⁹.

52. Clarendon Press, reissued in 1971 with a new two-page preface, again in 1985 with a new preface, and again in 2000.

53. This position was reinforced by the archaeology of M. Le Glay (*Saturne africain, Monuments*, 2 vol., Paris, 1961 and 1966) and G.-Ch. Picard (*Les Religions de l’Afrique antique*, Paris, 1954). See A. Gavini and J.C. López-Gómez in this volume, respectively 289-307 and 265-288.

54. W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, Oxford, 1965, 31-68.

55. W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in North Africa*, Oxford, 1952, 333-336.

56. Fr. Martroye, “Une tentative de révolution sociale en Afrique: donatistes et circoncillions”, *Revue des Questions Historiques*, 38.76, 1904, 353-416 and 39.77, 1905, 5-53. E. Woodward developed a similar thesis in *Christianity and Nationalism in the Later Roman Empire*, London, 1916.

57. A.H.M. Jones, “Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?”, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 10, 1959, 280-298. More recently, D. Wilhite, “Were the ‘Donatists’ a National or Social Movement in Disguise?: The Quest of North African Theological Identity (-ies) in the Patristic Era”, paper presented at the International Oxford Patristics Conference, August 2015.

58. É. Rebillard, “William Hugh Clifford Frend”, *op. cit.*, n. 50, 63: “recent works on the religious context of the schism have tended to adopt Frend’s conceptual framework with its divisions between political, social, and religious factors, even while rejecting his project”.

59. R.A. Markus, “Evolving Disciplinary Contexts for the Study of Augustine, 1950-2000: Some Personal Reflections”, *Augustinian Studies*, 32, 2001, 191.

Augustine was among the last of the African Christians to be recontextualized. The process was initiated by the classicist Henri-Irénée Marrou (1904-1977)⁶⁰. Like Dolger, Marrou rejected the decline narrative; he also sought to understand Christianity against the wider classical background (though Marxist historiography offended him)⁶¹. His *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (1938, reissued in 1949 and 1958) challenged the idea of decadence, emphasizing the continuity of culture and the resilience of empire⁶². He was interested in understanding the transformation of classical to Christian culture from late antiquity to the middle ages; more broadly, he hoped to discover a foundation in Late Antiquity for the revitalization of Christian humanism in the aftermath of the war⁶³. In the 1940s, Marrou would be the center of a Catholic Renaissance in French intellectual life that continued through the decade after the Second Vatican Council. His cultural approach would rival the narrower neo-Thomistic reception of Augustine by Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson.

Marrou was at the forefront of Nouvelle Théologie movement's efforts at *ressourcement*, the renewal of theology, liturgy, art, and social practice based on the early church. Together with the Jesuits Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou, he founded *Sources Chrétiennes* in the 1940s, a bilingual collection of annotated patristic texts designed to be accessible to educated laypeople⁶⁴. Around the same time and for similar reasons, the Institut d'Études Augustiniennes in Paris began publishing the works of Augustine in the *Bibliothèque Augustinienne*. Marrou also assumed editorship of the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* after Leclercq died, completing the series in 1951. He published with Jones *The Prosopography of the Late Roman Empire*, and encouraged André Mandouze in his publication of *Prosopographie de l'Afrique chrétienne (303-533)*, an invaluable resource providing 2,964 individual biographical sketches of African Christians⁶⁵. He directed many students of North African history, including Yvette Duval who produced meaningful work on North African epigraphy and manuscripts which complemented her husband Noël Duval's work on African basilicas⁶⁶.

60. O. Pasquato, "L'agiografia tra cultura, società e Chiesa in H.I. Marrou", *Augustinianum*, 24, 1984, 315-332.

61. C. Leppelley, "The Perception of Late Roman Africa", in C.E. Straw and R. Lim (eds.), *The Past Before Us. The Challenge of Historiographies of Late Antiquity*, Turnhout, 2004, 25-32; F. Bolgiani, "Decadenza di Roma o tardo antico? Alcune riflessioni sull'ultimo libro di Henri Irénée Marrou", in *La storiografia ecclesiastica nella tarda antichità, Atti del Convegno (Erice, 3-8 XII 1978)*, Messina, 1980, 535-587. On the rejection of Marxism, see H.-I. Marrou, *De la connaissance historique*, Paris, 1954.

62. Continuity continued to be a theme in his work, down to one his last publications: H.-I. Marrou, *Décadence romaine ou antiquité tardive?*, Paris, 1977.

63. C. Kannengiesser, "Fifty Years of Patristics", *op. cit.*, n. 38, 638.

64. É. Fouilloux, *La Collection 'Sources Chrétiennes': Editer les Peres de l'église au XXe siècle*, Paris, 1995.

65. A. Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire, I. Prosopographie de l'Afrique chrétienne (303-533)*, Paris, 1982.

66. Her dissertation on martyr inscriptions, *Loca sanctorum Africae. Le culte des martyrs en Afrique du IVe au VIIe siècle*, 2 vols., Rome, 1982; and her fine-grained analysis of the dossier of Optatus of Milev, *Chrétiens d'Afrique à l'aube de la paix constantinienne: Les premiers échos de la grande persécution*, Paris, 2000. For more, see J.-C. Fredouille, "Yvette Duval", *Revue d'Études Augustiniennes et Patristiques*, 53, 2007, 1-2.

In 1954, Marrou organized the Congrès International Augustinen to celebrate the sixteenth centenary of Augustine's birth. The event resulted in an explosion of Augustinian studies⁶⁷. Since then, something like 2,000 titles have been published just on Augustine. Five international journals devoted to Augustine began in this period or shortly after⁶⁸. No longer simply a theologian or philosopher, Augustine was anchored in the society and culture of North Africa. Perhaps the single most influential work on Augustine was Peter Brown's critical biography, *Augustine of Hippo*, published in 1967⁶⁹. Like Marrou, Brown depicted his subject as a man of his time; unlike Marrou, Brown's analysis extended beyond the major works such as *Confessions*, *City of God*, and *On the Trinity*. Brown read Augustine's letters and sermon⁷⁰. This was social history "from below". In addition to bringing sociology and psychology to bear, he pioneered the introduction of anthropology to studies of late antiquity, especially the work of Mary Douglas⁷¹. This led him to revise earlier questions about "local culture" in terms of power, reframing Frensd's town-countryside dialectic as conflict between traditional local aristocracy (which tended to be Donatist or pagan) and the new aristocracy loyal to the empire (which tended Catholic)⁷². English Dominican historian Robert Markus embraced the methodology of Brown and Frensd, but suggested in *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (1970) that the Donatists and Augustine were both part of an African tradition of dissent, which he related to "an abiding Berber presence

His dissertation, *Les églises africaines à deux absides*, 2 vols., Rome, 1971 and 1973; and, with I. Gui et J.-P. Caillet, *Inventaire des basiliques chrétiennes d'Afrique du Nord: Inventaire des monuments de l'Algérie*, 2 vols., Paris, 1992.

67. R.A. Markus, "Evolving Disciplinary Contexts...", *op. cit.*, n. 59, 191-192.

68. *Augustiniana* (1951), *Revue des Études Augustiniennes et Patristiques* (1955), *Augustinus* (1956), *Augustinianum* (1961), and *Augustinian Studies* (1970).

69. On the relation between Marrou and Brown, see M. Vessey, "The Demise of the Christian Writer and the Remaking of Late Antiquity from H.-I. Marrou's 'Saint Augustine' (1938) to Peter Brown's 'Holy man' (1983)", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 6, 1998, 377-411. Also, R.A. Markus, "Between Marrou and Brown: Transformations of Late Antique Christianity", in P. Rousseau and M. Papoutsakis (eds.), *Transformations of Late Antique: Essays for Peter Brown*, Farnham, 2009, 1-14.

70. He was aided by new research in this area, notably, A.-M. Bonnardière's chronology of Augustine's sermons (*Recherches de chronologie augustiniennne*, Paris, 1965). As Brown himself observed in the Afterward of his revised edition of *Augustine of Hippo*, a vast number of primary material was produced in the years following his original publication such as S. Lancel's masterful critical edition of the 411 Conference at Carthage (*Actes de la Conférence de Carthage en 411*, SC 194-195, Paris, 1972); C. Munier's critical edition of the African councils (*Concilia Africae*, CCL 149), the Divjak letters and the Dolbeau sermons (CSEL, 88, 1996).

71. P. Brown, "The World of Late Antiquity Revisited", *op. cit.*, n. 51, 21.

72. See especially P. Brown, "Christianity and Local Culture in Late Roman Africa", *Journal of Roman Studies*, 58, 1968, 85-95. All of this in line with the attention to social mobility and *novi homines* in British society in the 1960s.

behind the religious history of North Africa”⁷³. Historiographical concerns were migrating towards questions of identity.

4. The Linguistic Turn (1970-Present)

Under the influence of Michel Foucault and other critical theorists beginning in the 1980s, early Christian studies began giving more attention to existential than social matters⁷⁴. Binary oppositions between Roman and African, Catholic and Donatists, Christians and pagans have been increasingly understood as discursive constructs, thus reducing the importance of professed confessional identities⁷⁵. The new emphasis on rhetoric has been dubbed the cultural or “linguistic turn”. As Dale Martin explained,

“‘The cultural turn’ in late ancient studies thus refers not to one particular theoretical or methodological innovation, but to a broad shift in textual historical analyses of a newly defined field of study, analyses influenced, to be sure, by cultural anthropology and the social sciences, but more recently by a wide diversity of theories and methods borrowed from poststructuralism: various literary theories, discourse analysis, ideology critique, theories of the construction of the body and the self, feminist and gender studies, ritual studies”⁷⁶.

Within North African studies, Catholic historian Maureen Tilley has embodied this approach. In *The Bible in Christian North Africa. The Donatist World* (1996)⁷⁷ she tracked changes in African use of scripture over several generations, correlating those changes with alterations in the social and political environment. She attempted throughout to reconstruct a Donatist metanarrative, or worldview. Methodologically, she relied as much as possible on Donatist sources rather than the hostile testimony of Optatus and Augustine.

Tilley was part of a multi-year workshop on Christian North Africa called *Devotion and Dissent. The Practice of Christianity in Roman Africa*. Patout Burns, an American former Jesuit, organized and led the group; like the Nouvelle theologians, his primary interest has

73. R.A. Markus, “Christianity and Dissent in Roman North Africa: Changing Perspectives in Recent Work”, *Studies in Church History*, 10, 2016, 32.

74. Peter Brown considered Foucault a personal friend. His *The Body and Society. Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York, 1988 is a prime example of the cultural turn.

75. Perhaps the most significant text has been A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire. The Development of Christian Discourse*, Berkeley, 1991.

76. D. Martin, “Introduction”, in D. Martin and P.C. Miller (eds.), *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies*, Raleigh, 2005, 9. For more, see E.A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text. Historians and the Linguistic Turn*, Cambridge, 2004, 158-185.

77. The same year, F. Decret published a little synoptic history, *Le christianisme en Afrique du Nord ancienne*, Paris, 1996 (translated into English by Edward Smither in 2009 as *Early Christianity in North Africa*, Eugene, 2009). He provides a clear and succinct narrative, which reflects French colonial prejudices in some a minor ways.

been in reconciling doctrine and practice⁷⁸. Funded by an NEH grant, *Devotion and Dissent* convened for several years at Villanova University, the American Academy of Religion, and North America Patristics Society meetings; they also traveled to Tunisia and Algeria to tour archaeological sites. The group analyzed the relationship between changing social context in Africa, Christian rituals and religious practices, and corresponding theological developments. Primary participants included Robin Jensen, Graeme Clarke, Susan Stevens, and William Tabbernee, an ecumenical mixture of Catholics and Protestants specializing in both literary and material evidence. The goal was to explore the religious lives of practicing faith communities, focusing on public worship, catechesis, and sacraments. The program culminated in a new standard work on North Africa Christianity, *Christianity in Roman Africa. The Development of Its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids, 2014)⁷⁹.

A second synoptic history of North Africa followed soon after written by the Baptist historian David Wilhite, *Ancient African Christianity* (New York, 2017). Wilhite's work is chronological, with more emphasis on pre-Christian background and the 2nd century CE. Like the *Devotion and Dissent* group, Wilhite views North African Christianity as a distinct regional expression of ancient Christianity. Wilhite's research has focused on Tertullian, and he has made an effort to recover the "Africanity" of Tertullian, much as Augustine's Africanity was recovered in the mid-20th century⁸⁰. Wilhite helped form the Contextualizing North African Christianity group of the Society of Biblical Literature, which carries on the work of *Devotion and Dissent*. Using David Brakke's historiographical categories, many of these scholars could be classified as "nostalgic postliberals" who use scholarship to support more or less traditional forms of Christianity (in the American context, a post-denominational form)⁸¹.

Another North American scholar, Brent Shaw, has also contributed tremendously to the study of North African Christianity⁸². By far his most important work has been the monumental *Sacred Violence. African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*⁸³, a discursive analysis of the role of violence in the 4th and 5th cent. CE. He considers the symbolic value of narratives of violence, particularly how certain events were remembered and recorded. Shaw treats religious belief seriously while cutting through old sectarian debates: both sides

78. For instance, P. Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, New York, 2002.

79. A similarly wholistic approach was taken by R. Burris, *Where is the Church? Martyrdom, Persecution, and Baptism in North Africa from the Second to the Fifth Centuries*, Eugene, 2012.

80. A process which flowered in the Augustinus Afer Colloquy in 2001. See J.-M. Roessli, O. Wermelinger, P.-Y. Fux (eds.), *Augustinus Afer, Saint Augustin: africanité et universalité. Actes du colloque international, Alger-Annaba, 1-7 avril 2001*, Fribourg, 2003.

81. D. Brakke, "The Early Church in North America: Late Antiquity, Theory, and the History of Christianity", *Church History*, 71, 2002, 473-491.

82. See B. Shaw, *Environment and Society in Roman North Africa. Studies in History and Archaeology*, Ashgate, 1995; and B. Shaw, *Rulers, Nomads, and Christians in Roman North Africa*, Ashgate, 1995.

83. B. Shaw, *Sacred Violence. African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*, Cambridge, 2011.

“were moved by the logical, if fulfilling, credulities of religious faith and by not much more”⁸⁴. In *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity: North Africa, 200-450 CE*, Éric Rebillard advances this line of thought by investigating how North African Christians might have understood their own identities apart from social constructs imposed from above. His work integrates religious identities with other social identities such as class and ethnicity in an effort to see the lives of ordinary people who balanced their material interests with faith commitments. Other recent studies have also sought to recover the lives of ordinary Christians of the period. Julio Cesar Magalhães Oliveira’s *Potestas Populi* (Turnhout, 2012) contributes much to our understanding of how the non-elites of Africa influenced processes of decision-making by ecclesiastical and administrative authorities. Leslie Dossey, in *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa* (2010) draws on archaeological data as well as anonymous sermons (whose confessional differences she downplays) to show how the increased prosperity of 4th and 5th cent. led to tensions between *urbani* and the *rustici*, who were beginning to affect some of the Roman cultural distinctives of the elites, thus disrupting the social order⁸⁵.

There continues to be robust institutional support for the study of North African Christian history, both academic and ecclesiastic. From its early exclusive focus on the theological contributions of the African “Fathers” Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, research has shifted to the social, cultural, and rhetorical contexts in which these figures flourishes. The scope of study has also expanded to include women, heretics, and other subaltern groups. Yet as long as early African theology holds its central place in western Christianity, the narrative of North African Christianity will continue to be shaped by confessional and perhaps nationalistic concerns. In the incontrovertible words of Marrou, “History and the historian are inseparable”⁸⁶.

84. B. Shaw, *Sacred Violence...*, *op. cit.*, n. 83, 1.

85. An excellent bibliography of recent works, focusing on Donatism but broadly applicable to North African Christianity, is maintained by Elena Zocca. See <https://www.zotero.org/groups/301130/donatism>.

86. H.-I. Marrou, *The Meaning of History* (trans. R. Olsen), Ann Arbor, 1966, 53.