



ABSTRACTS

Revisiting Byzantine Africa historical geography through medieval Arabic sources

Mohamed Benabbès

This paper will revisit Byzantine Africa from the perspective of historical geography, and focus on the contribution of medieval Arabic sources to our understanding of the province's history in this period. Since Charles Diehl's publication more than a hundred years ago, few new textual sources have been made available. It is true that archaeological research has led to considerable progress that must be acknowledged. However in most cases these data cannot be interpreted outside the framework provided by literary sources.

Today a major approach that can overhaul our vision of Byzantine Africa is historical geography. It can combine and superimpose multiple data from the various available sources. As regards Africa, it requires expertise in several complementary fields: sources about Ancient Africa (Latin and Greek texts, inscriptions, church documents and archaeological data), Arabic medieval sources considered through philological and palaeographical approaches, as well as the historical cartography of North Africa. Associating these various elements allows us to throw light on several still obscure or ambiguous aspects in the history of Byzantine Africa, especially in its last phase in the seventh century.

Although considerable progress has been achieved in the use of ancient sources, the contribution of medieval Arabic sources to the history of Byzantine Africa has long been systematically disparaged, suffering from prejudice like the hagiographical sources for western medieval history. In fact when submitted to scientific critical scrutiny, they can yield information that other sources do not always provide.

Most of these texts have been known and partially translated, notably into French, since the nineteenth century. But they have never benefited from the same philological scrutiny as the ancient Latin and Greek sources. All the more since the old editions were rarely updated to take into account recent advances in African ancient toponymy.

Although a few new texts have been recently discovered and some critical reeditions significantly improved, existing translations in European languages have rarely been updated. The old nineteenth-century translations, widely used by non-Arabic-speaking authors, must be checked systematically.

Two points will be highlighted here: the contribution of Arabic sources first to North African toponymy and second to our knowledge of North African tribes in the late antique/early Byzantine period.

Historical toponymy

Using Arabic medieval sources for toponymic research proves fruitful but demands great methodological caution: critical assessment of their context, of the narrative structure and most of all of the morphological aspect of the Arabic language within. Seventh-century place names were apparently transmitted correctly, through oral tradition, by the first Arab narrators. They were written down for the first time between the ninth and the eleventh century by Arab historians, mostly from the Maghreb, using transcriptions more or less close to the original pronunciation.

However, the Arabic language in this period lacks diacritics (punctuation, vocalization or accentuation) in the medieval manuscripts. Because of this characteristic the following generation of Arab historians or geographers were faced with great difficulties in deciphering these names that had by and large disappeared from current usage. In this context, through trial and error and often influenced by Eastern place names with analogous graphic form, they tried to fix the spelling of African toponyms. These place names were deformed and the process was often aggravated by scribes' and copyists' errors which then entered current usage with the first editions and moreover with the European translations of these Arabic manuscripts. It remains to assess and fix the ancient place names cited by Arab medieval authors through a new philological scrutiny of the data preserved in the narratives of the Conquest taking into account the characteristics of the Arabic language, its evolution and its relations with the other contemporary languages in Africa. Such an analysis will also allow a better understanding of the various aspects of transition from Latin and Greek names into Arabic.

History of African Tribes in Late Antiquity

Research on the history of African tribes in late antiquity made great progress recently, mainly thanks to the late Yves Modéran whose knowledge of Byzantine sources was unrivalled. Without diminishing their impact, his results are impaired by two shortcomings: as a non-Arabic speaker he relied on available translations and he was not very familiar with historical cartography. When Modéran's hypotheses are checked on a map of Tunisia or Algeria, the missing pieces of the puzzle come into order. Reading the Arabic sources in the light of the tracks suggested by Modéran and examining them against field data will allow significant advance toward identifying and localising all Berber tribes of North Africa in Late Antiquity.

In this way, through toponymic and other research on African ethnic groups, historical geography will participate in revisiting and revising the whole history of Byzantine Africa.

Sanctity and the Networks of Empire in Byzantine North Africa

Jonathan P. Conant

Byzantine North Africa was not enormously productive of saints, but it did witness the appearance of new religious devotions, most strikingly to the cults of eastern martyrs. The spread of these cults has much to tell us about how Africa was reintegrated into the networks of the Byzantine Empire, not in military and political terms, but rather in cultural and religious ones. Although the imperial authorities may well have played some role in this process, this paper argues that such sponsorship is unlikely to have been the primary motor behind the diffusion of eastern saints' cults in Africa. Rather, insofar as it is possible to tell from the epigraphic evidence, the initiative for the dissemination of eastern cults into the towns and villages of the African countryside would appear to have originated in the hinterland itself, above all among local clergy anxious to buttress their social positions and promote their own status through the divine patronage that these eastern saints offered. Indeed, the new enthusiasm for eastern saints in Africa in the sixth and seventh centuries was part of a larger cultural reorientation in the region that had already begun in the Vandal period and that saw the imperial city of Constantinople begin to exert a draw comparable in strength to that of Rome.

The Family in Byzantine Africa

Kate Cooper

This paper considers the household and family in early Byzantine Africa, posing a question which has rarely been asked and may in fact be unanswerable: how did the re-conquest of Africa change the family and household relations? We will consider the problem from the literary sources, dwelling in particular on two aspects. First, to what extent can we say that we know how households were governed? Sources from the Vandal period, such as the Albertini tablets, and sources not directly addressed to the household, such as the letter of Ferrandus of Carthage written to the *dux* Reginus in the 530s, may help us to position the African household under Justinian. A second line of inquiry will consider the Augustinian tradition on Christian marriage and family relations elaborated by Fulgentius of Ruspe. We will test the idea that during the Vandal period the African bishops may have taken advantage of the uncertainty over law and government to propose an agenda of reform in family law; whether these reforms were reinforced by Justinian, and whether any coincidence between the agendas of Fulgentius and Justinian in the law and ethics of the Christian family, are questions we will address.

Exegesis and Dissent in Byzantine North Africa

Leslie Dossey

A significant portion of the texts surviving from Byzantine North Africa relate to the Three Chapters Controversy, which was sparked by Justinian's condemnation of the writings of three fifth-century theologians who had been accepted by the Council of Chalcedon. In the decades after 544, the North African clergy defied the emperor, excommunicated the Pope, faced exile to distant places, and poured out hundreds of pages of theological polemic - texts that aside from a few fragments constitute the last literature written by Latin-speaking North Africans. The oddity is that no one in North Africa actually knew or cared about the works of the theologians in question - Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrhus and Ibas of Edessa. Historians have had to look for other reasons for North Africa's passionate opposition. For R. Markus, it represented a long-standing North African tradition of dissent against government interference in the life of the church; for R. Eno, a deep respect for the authority of the ecumenical councils to define dogma. Most recently, Y. Modéran has stressed the continuity with opposition to the Arians in the late Vandal period.

My paper will concentrate on the role of scriptural exegesis in both motivating and shaping North African participation in the Three Chapters Controversy (with some comparison with the Monothelite controversy of the seventh century). Historians have perhaps not sufficiently recognized the degree to which the Three Chapters Controversy was a debate by and about exegetes. The papal deacons consulted the North African church when the controversy first started because of their "scientia scriptorum." The early leaders of the North African opposition - Verecundus of Junca and Primasius of Hadrumetum - were themselves our main extant examples of North African exegesis from the Byzantine period, Verecundus writing a learned commentary on the Canticles, and Primasius a highly influential commentary on the Apocalypse. Primasius also instigated his fellow African, Junillus, to compose an important treatise on exegetical methods. The Fifth Ecumenical Council (553 CE), which was eventually called to settle the conflict, condemned several of the most influential eastern exegetes, not only Theodore of Mopsuestia, but also Origen, Didymus, and Evagrius. By examining the arguments made by Ferrandus, Primasius, Verecundus, Junillus, and Facundus - especially in their exegetical writings, I will argue that at the core of the debate was a concern over the censorship of texts. Emperors should leave it to the exegetes themselves to interpret and edit out "heretical" opinions rather than usher in a wholesale condemnation of the past by the present. The principles asserted here had wider implications than merely the Three Chapters Controversy: indeed the writings of these men will have an immediate impact on Cassiodorus's exegetical project at Vivarium and, indirectly, promote the preservation of pagan as well as Christian learning by early medieval exegetes in general.

However, this revises a question: if exegesis and the freedom of textual interpretation were so important to North Africans, why were Verecundus and Primasius the **last** of North Africa's scriptural interpreters? The final part of my paper examines the evidence for North African exegesis continuing into the seventh century, when the long sojourn of Maximus the Confessor gives us a glimpse into the region. After briefly surveying possible North African influence on Maximus's own exegesis, largely through the "Libyan" abbot Thalassios, whose questions about the scriptures prompted Maximus to compose his main exegetical work (*Ad Thalassium*), I will examine the (disputed) records of North African church's responses to Monothelite controversy at the Lateran Council of 646 and, perhaps more importantly, the *tituli psalmorum* of the Latin Psalter from Sinai, whose North African origin has been convincingly argued in the recent critical edition by A. Thibaut and R. Gryson. The main question here is whether North Africa's reputation for "scientia scriptorum" survives into the seventh century (and the absence of extant exegetical texts is a misfortune of transmission) or whether, as Averil Cameron has argued, there really was a collapse of the North African learned tradition (at least in Latin) and the region became little more than a playing field for theological battles fought by Greek immigrants.

The Garamantian Diaspora and the Southern Frontiers of Byzantine North Africa

Elizabeth Fentress and Andrew Wilson

Recent work on the Fezzan has revealed a pattern of evidence suggesting an ecological crisis at the heart of the apparent collapse of the Garamantian State. On the one hand, tree-ring data suggest an acute dry period in the Acacus, lasting a number of decades. On the other, close examination of the foggara irrigation systems of the Fezzan show a sequence which suggests a drastic fall in the water table over the first few centuries AD. This evidence may be connected with that pointing to the abandonment of the large number of the fortified *qsur* which characterize Garamantian settlement, as well as an apparent drop in Mediterranean imports. After the fifth century AD there is a similar collapse in settlement north of the Aurès mountains and along the Roman *limes*, at the same time as Saharan tomb types appear in the area. Finally, linguistic evidence may be used to suggest that a new wave of Tamazight-speakers entered North Africa at that time, a product of the Garamantian diaspora.

The Literature of Vandal and Byzantine Africa: Something Old, Something New?

Gregory Hays

In the century and a half that followed the Vandal conquest, North African authors produced a remarkable variety of Latin works: hexameter verse on biblical and mythical subjects, historical epic, epigrams, encyclopedic allegory, antiquarian lexicography, theological treatises, epistles, scriptural commentary, Vergilian interpretation, and more. The last several decades have seen an upsurge in interest in this period, with new texts, translations and commentaries for most of the major authors, and a variety of other contributions. Yet many questions remain. We still lack consensus on the basic chronology of several major writers. We also know less than we would like about the social setting—or settings—in which these works were produced and consumed. Other problems involve larger issues of framing and historical interpretation. Do these texts make sense collectively, as a distinctive product of North African culture, or are they better viewed against the broader spectrum of late antique literary production? Is it useful to try to distinguish religious and secular writers, or is this a false dichotomy? Finally, does the extant evidence give us a representative picture of the period's production? How and why did the surviving texts survive? This paper will attempt a stock-taking in light of recent work and suggest some possible routes forward. I shall focus in particular on texts from the later end of the period, after the Byzantine reconquest, in an attempt to assess the degree of continuity with the earlier literature.

Campaigns and Conquests in Context: Reconsiderations

Walter Kaegi

This is an essay of reflections on a selected number of historiographical and methodological issues that have emerged or remain unresolved since I completed my recent book on *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa*. I assess recent trends and controversies in wider Byzantine and Islamic historical scholarship for understanding fluidity, volatility, and outcomes in the complex process of the termination of Byzantine governance and its replacement with new and evolving Muslim authorities in seventh- and early eighth-century- North Africa. It is a stocktaking of what we know and do not know as well as an attempt to offer an interpretation. We should not think of any single continuous and unified Muslim conquest in North Africa, for the disappearance of Byzantine authority resulted from multiple discontinuous military, religious, and diplomatic processes and accommodations that did not form a holistic process. Topics include identity formation and dissolution, asymmetrical Byzantine and Muslim strategies, prioritization, Umayyad objectives (although most recent Umayyad scholarship concentrates understandably on Syria, Egypt, and Iraq), personalities of leaders, dilemmas of positional and mobile warfare, coping with and coaxing tribes, coalition building, efforts at assuring changeable loyalties. Also receiving attention are Byzantine efforts to devise

policies that would discourage their subjects and forces from desertion, flight, and switching sides. They faced problems of obtaining and interpreting information and met other challenges to policy formation. A simple persisting problem is Byzantine authorities' relative unfamiliarity with actual local conditions and options in a diverse and vast North Africa with multiple challenges to communications. They did not know their subjects well. The focus is North Africa but it is worthwhile to consider the implications of recent scholarship on wider Mediterranean contexts, even from relatively distant areas of the empire such as Egypt, Spain, Sicily, Italy, and Anatolia.

Prokopios's *Vandal War*: Thematic Trajectories and Hidden Transcripts

Anthony Kaldellis

Prokopios's *Vandal War*, books 3-4 of his *Wars*, is the most extended surviving narrative source about the political and military history of Vandal North Africa and a brilliant work of classical historiography in its own right. It is often, though not always, read as propaganda for Justinian and a defense of Prokopios's former patron, Belisarios. This paper will argue that the narrative of the *Vandal War* is, in reality, structured implicitly around the same themes that are more explicit in the damning *Secret History*. The war was a disaster for the empire and North Africa; the propaganda of liberation masked a reality of enslavement; Justinian was a diabolical *daimonion* more akin to Xerxes than God's representative; and random chance ultimately directed the course of events. These themes shape the narrative from beginning to end. The paper will also focus on Prokopios's deployment of classical parallels which act as hidden transcripts. Particular attention will be paid to his famous ethnography of the Moors, which acts as a mirror in which to reflect the decline of Roman society, precisely the decadence and servility that is portrayed openly in the *Secret History*.

Gelimer's Slaughter: The Case for Late Vandal Africa

Andy Merrills

The Byzantine reconquest of North Africa is commonly presented as a striking military success. The Vandals, we are frequently assured, were swept efficiently from the stage in a matter of months, while the triumphant regime steeled itself for the more substantial challenges posed by the resurgent Moorish polities, surly Romano-Africans and a succession of rebellious troops. While there can be little doubt that the Byzantine *coup de main* was a success, the cultural and political afterlife of the Vandals within the region deserves some consideration. The present paper will re-assess Vandal-Byzantine relations in the 530s, from a political, social and cultural perspective. Reference will be made to the ambivalent position of the Vandals in the considerable literary corpus of the period, and to the implications of the Carthaginian "regime change" to the political

balance of power in the region as a whole. It will be suggested that the complete erasure of the Vandals from the image of early Byzantine North Africa is a considerable simplification that underestimates the complexity of the task facing the new imperial power.

***“Regio dives in omnibus bonis ornata”*: African economy and society from the Vandals to the Arab conquest in the light of coin evidence**

Cécile Morrisson

In the 1890s the Académie des Inscriptions opened a “concours” on the “study of the history of the Byzantine domination in Africa from historical texts, inscriptions and monuments.” Charles Diehl’s great book *L’Afrique byzantine* (1894) brilliantly fulfilled the assignment and relied indeed on these three types of sources. Over the last fifty years, archaeological studies have largely changed the picture and highlighted the integration of Byzantine Africa and its productions in the western and eastern trade networks.

This paper will bring into this context the long neglected coin evidence. The revival under the Vandals of the Carthage mint, that had been hardly active since the Punic final defeat in 146 BC, and its full development under Byzantine rule reveal the secular permanence of African ideological themes, continuity and transformation of the monetary system over the successive dominations and their societies. Beyond the political message of the coins, the elaborate bi- and then tri-metallic systems with their multiple denominations and peculiarities, met the specific needs of a highly monetized province.

Relying on the two main inputs of numismatic research, quantification of coin issues, archaeological studies of coin finds within Africa and beyond, the paper will finally reflect on the evidence thus offered about the province finances, its monetization and its exports. The vitality of the seventh century through the 660s and the importance of Africa for the empire at large will receive special attention.

From Byzantine *Africa* to Arab *Ifriqiya*: Tracing Ceramic Trends through the Seventh to Eleventh Centuries

Paul Reynolds

This paper aims to present trends in the supply of ceramics (table wares, amphorae and utilitarian wares) through the seventh to eleventh centuries within Tunisia, concentrating on local production and the region’s changing role in exports.

The evidence available is somewhat variable, rich in the case of the seventh century and, to some extent, the late tenth/eleventh centuries, limited for the ninth century and practically nil for the eighth century. This overview, nevertheless, will attempt to identify continuities as well as shifts in production, and, in the case of *Ifriqiya*, some comment on parallel developments and contacts over the sea in *al-Andalus* and Sicily.

A Byzantine Afterlife at Carthage?

Susan Stevens

The paper compares the features of the seventh century Byzantine city, suggested by scattered and fragmentary historical and archaeological evidence, with the distinctly different character of the medieval Arab settlement of the late ninth through the twelfth century. The more intriguing conundrum lies in the transition of the eighth through mid-ninth century. Indeed, though this lacuna has become somewhat narrower chronologically in the last three decades, the persistent absence of bona-fide early medieval evidence at Carthage has not changed since the publication of Giovanna Vitelli's pioneering work on Islamic Carthage in 1981. It can no longer be argued, as she did then, that the lack of evidence may have been due to a lack of interest, inadequate recording or superficial analysis. While this mysterious 150-year period at Carthage was probably one of progressive urban decay and depopulation overall, the evidence of reuse, refashioning and realignment attests to the survival and resilience of old structures, traditions and material culture.

The Transformation of North African Land- and Cityscapes in the Byzantine and Early Arab Period

Philipp von Rummel

Archaeological research on North African land- and cityscapes has long focused on the Roman period, while pre- and post-Roman evidence has, with some remarkable exceptions, largely been neglected. New interest in the later period has recently begun to stimulate research in this field, but information is still scarce, and even the basic groundwork is yet to be laid. This paper presents an overview of the available data from field surveys and excavations and examines the relationship between the archaeological evidence and the literary sources. It draws on new excavation data from Simitthus (Chimtou) and Thugga (Dougga) and asks how towns and their rural hinterlands changed in the Byzantine and early Arab periods, and what social, economic and political issues determined this transformation. Urban change has traditionally been connected to political

and military history: the Vandal incursion in the fifth century, the Arab conquest in the seventh, and the invasion of the Banu Hilal in the eleventh century. This view is still popular; but, as Yvon Thébert suggested over twenty years ago, it is highly questionable. Apart from the fact that early medieval Africa continued to be characterized by lively urban cityscapes across all of these invasions, urban change itself is a very complex process. It is the aim of this paper to explain the diversity of the phenomenon, and to suggest some explanatory approaches for discussion.

Beyond Spolia: Architectural Memory and Adaptation in the Churches of Late Antique North Africa

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The archaeological record of churches has remained stubbornly intractable on some of the issues that have engaged scholars of the history of late antique North Africa most intensely, namely the vociferous and often violent conflicts between rival Christian groups: Donatists and Catholics, Arian Vandals and Orthodox Byzantines. In contrast to the rich, though not uncomplicated, textual testimony for religious opposition in North Africa, historians and archaeologists looking for material evidence of rival churches have found only scant and questionable hints.

Yet though it is often not possible to identify a given fifth-century basilica as either Arian or Catholic, the archaeological record nevertheless preserves abundant evidence for churches that experienced long periods of use and adaptation. This paper examines the long-term biographies of churches in late antique North Africa to examine how different Christian communities grappled with the architectural legacies they received. It focuses on how the experience of ritual space was conditioned by the appropriation, abandonment and transformation of pre-existing architectural elements. Whether through repurposed stones, reoriented apses, transformed baptisteries or reframed inscriptions, the material fabric of churches played a key role in shaping a community's experience of the present's relationship to the past.

