

The Donato - Catholic conflict and its repercussions in ancient North Africa (311- 411 D.C.)



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ABSTRACT

Donatism is an African schism, exclusively African ; as such it holds a special and very important place in the history of local Christianity. It was born in Carthage and Numidia. Thus, the Donatist schism has its origin in the persecutions of the emperor Diocletian during the period (303-305). The Donatist heresy appears in 311 following the consecration of the bishop of Carthage Caecilianus. It was Donat, the bishop of Carthage who gave his name to the Donatist schism. The African Church thus found itself divided between two bishops, two parties: the Donatist Church and the Catholic Church who excommunicated and accused each other. St. Augustine entered the race, and led the decisive struggle on the theological and polemical level, at the head of the episcopate of Hippo Regius (Annaba- Algeria) in 392, he presided over the synod of Hippo in 393, which condemned the Donatists. It is under the imperial aegis that the conference of Carthage was held in 411. The council pronounced a sentence condemning the Donatists, Donatism was abolished. This signals the decline of the schism. The Catholics having prevailed. The problem that arises is: What is the nature of the two churches Donatist and Catholic? What are their origins? How has the polemical confrontation between Donatists and Catholics evolved? What are its repercussions on ancient North Africa?

Keywords:

the Donatist church; the Catholic church; conflict; Carthage conference; St. Augustine; heresy; schism.

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نشرت هذه الدراسة في دورية كان التاريخية للأغراض العلمية والبحثية فقط، وغير مسموح بإعادة النسخ والنشر والتوزيع للأغراض تجارية أو ربحية.

Introduction

The idea of founding a religious movement called "Donatism", arose in Roman Africa at the beginning of the 4th century, following the persecution of Christians, under the orders of *Diocletian* during the period (303-305). And at the council held in Circa on 5 March 305 (*Concili Cirtensis*) for the consecration of a new bishop of the city. (Papier, A., 1879 :109) The essential causes of the appearance of Donatism are due to the election and consecration of *Caecilianus* as Bishop of Carthage in 311, and to some faithful and clerics who had been compromised in the persecution of *Diocletian*, for having delivered the scriptures and holy books to the persecuting Roman power (the civil authority), to be burned.

The Donatists persisted during and after the great persecution at the time of *Diocletian* (284-305), to describe their Catholic enemies as "*Pars Caecilianii*", i.e. the party of *Caecilianus*, and "the church of the Traditores". For, they still believe that they represent the true Catholic Church (fig.1-2). Donatism appeared in Numidia, and more precisely in Bagai (near Khenchela), which is considered to be the home of Donatism. This city has been home to most of the events in the history of Donatism, such as the battle of 347, and the Primianist Council in 394. Was it not necessary to clarify the circumstances and root causes of the religious quarrels that troubled Roman Africa in the 4th century? Should the social and religious unrest of this period in African history be put in relation to this deterioration of the African economy?

Problematic:

What were the beginnings of the Donato-Catholic conflict in ancient *North Africa*? Was Roman secular power involved in this conflict? How did Donatism transform itself from a local religious movement to a socio-political movement that was able to stand up to Roman secular power and the Catholic Church (Fig. 1-2) in North Africa?

The importance of the study (objectives)

1-This study aims to highlight the roots of the Donatist schism and the nature of the Donati-Catholic conflict in ancient North Africa

2-Clarify the problem of division, which has been raised strongly within the African Church.

3-Denounce the persecutions of the emperor Diocletian towards Christians during the period (303 - 305 AD), which led to a large number of apostates.

4-Refer to the main causes of the division of the African Church which found itself divided between

two bishops and two parties: the Donatist Church and the Catholic Church.

5-Clarify the role of Saint Augustine entered the battlefield on the theological and dialectical level since 392 AD at the head of the Epo-bishop of Hypo-Regius (today Annaba in the northeast of Algeria)

6-To know the essential causes and the consequences of the condemnation and the abolition of Donatism in the year 411 AD.

7- The objective of this study is to make some observations about the economic and social conditions under which the people of Roman Africa lived at the time of Donatism, and which led to the heresy and the Donato-Catholic conflict in ancient *North Africa*.

Research Methodology:

This study attempts to focus on the historical deductive analytical method in order to achieve the desired research results.

Study sections:

This study has been divided into an introduction and four titles and a conclusion. The first subject deals with The Birth of Donatism, the second subject studies the Origins of the Donato-Catholic conflict, the third subject addresses the Main periods of the Donato-Catholic conflict, finally the fourth subject deals with the role of Saint Augustine in the proscription of Donatism, and the conclusion that results from the results and recommendations of this study.

I- The Birth of Donatism

The history of the origins of Donatism remains in truth very obscure. (Monceaux, P., 1902 :193) The documents we have at our disposal, narratives or archival documents, (Duchesne, L., 1890 : 589-650) serve the purposes of the Catholic polemicists, who can hardly help but suspect them. (Julien, Ch. A. 1978 :215)

Church historians base themselves on the "Donatism Record" (Duchesne, L., 1890 :589) itself, which consists of administrative and ecclesiological documents dating between 314 and 330.

In fact, some Catholic clerics have been able to compile these documents in a special dossier for use in polemics with the Donatist polemicists, according to Duchesne. (Bouillet, M., 1878 : 1383) This file was in the hands of *Optat of Milev* (Boissier, G., 1891 : 82) considered the first Catholic polemicist, and from these documents he wrote the beginnings of the Donatist schism, addressing Donat's successor, *Parmenianus* (Cagnat R., 1913 : 66) around 366.

Donatism is an African schism, it occupies a special and very important place in the history of local Christianity. It was born in Carthage and Numidia from the passions and quarrels of the country, in ancient *North Africa*, it had an extraordinary success, it overexcited, like a new religion, the minds and passions of the people. It constituted an independent church, as powerful and rich in men and goods as the Catholic Church (fig.2). More powerful even for a century. He stood up to Catholicism and civil power, surviving for almost two centuries. It was finally defeated in the time of *St. Augustine*.

In this way, Donatism was an essential factor in the history, not only of local Christianity, but of Africa itself during the 4th and 5th centuries.

The African schism has been dealt with in important monographs, (Leschi, L., 1931: 262-293) or short sketches, (Optat de Milev, 1893 : 15) as it has attracted the attention of historians of the Church or of Africa (Monceaux, P., 1906 :314) or studies on the chronology of the origins of the African schism, (Duchesne, L., 1890 :589) archaeological and epigraphic discoveries (Leschi, L., 1931 : 262-293) , and some critical studies of the works of *Optat of Milev* and *Augustine* (Optat of Milev, 1893, XXVI, LI- LIII) and the restitution of a good part of Donatist literature. (Monceaux, P., 1906 : 314),

All this allows us to take up the question of Donatism on a new basis. It is not a question here of remaking the complete history of the African schism, but simply of laying down the milestones of this history, indicating the stages, marking with precision the essential features, determining the role of Donatism, in order to reconstitute the historical framework of our study.

The various literary and historical sources dealing with Donatism are very abundant and varied, reaching us from Constantine to *Honorius Flavius*, 16 who promulgated new anti-Donatist laws. (Bouillet, M., 1878 : 890)

In spite of the disappearance of many works and documents. To these sources we can add the recently discovered archaeological and epigraphic documents, ruins of basilicas, Benian or Numidian inscriptions.

Donatism appeared at the beginning of the 4th century, following the persecution of Christians under the orders of *Diocletian* during the period (303-305). However, the deep reason for the success of Donatism appears to be the social state of Africa, the discontent and misery of part of the population,

and also the abnormal organisation of the African Church. The immediate causes of the schism were : the difficulty of resolving the situation of the faithful and clergy who had been compromised in the persecution of *Diocletian*. The question of *Lapsi* (Gaffiot, F. 1936 : 353) is at the origin of the Donatist schism. As for the definitive rupture between the two churches, it was the election and consecration of *Caecilianus* as Bishop of Carthage in 311.

The divergence of historians on the date of the appearance of Donatism, explains the diversity of causes, which led these historians to determine this appearance, sometimes to the persecution of *Diocletian*, sometimes to the Council of Cirta (*Concili Cirtensis*) (Monceaux, P., 1902 : 13) in 305 which brought together the Numidian bishops, sometimes to the alleged schism of Donatus of the Black Boxes (Bagai today) in 306, (Brisson J.P., 1958 : 237) and sometimes to the council of Numidian dissidents - led by the Primate *Secundus* - who in 312 pronounced the deposition of *Caecilianus*. In reality, the last date was the main cause of the schism, the other dates simply mark the stages of the misunderstandings from which the schism arose. However, Optat traces the origins of the rupture back to the persecution of *Diocletian*. . (Optat St., I, 13-14) But he adds that this rupture broke out after the ordination of *Majorinus* 21 in 312.

It seems, therefore, that the main cause of the Donatist schism was the difficulty in resolving the situation of the many bishops, both clerics and laity, who were compromised in the persecution. (Optat St., I, 15) It should not be denied either, that the manifesto of the martyrs of Abitina (Beschouch, A., 1976: 255- 266) the scandalous scenes of the election and ordination of *Silvanus* (Monceaux, P., 1902 : 13) in Cirta, the attacks on *Mensurius* (Toulotte, 1892 :84) and his archdeacon *Caecilianus*, were certainly serious symptoms, but all this did not lead to the schism.

The various testimonies that have cited the beginning of the Donatist schism, have shown that the persecutions of the emperor *Diocletian* in ancient *North Africa* during the period (303-305), had surprised the African Church, and led to much disarray. (Optat St., I, 13- 14) Certainly the martyrs were numerous, which leads to necropolises (Fig. 3), but also the apostasies had been innumerable, especially in Numidia.

This caused the African Church to be divided, a Church that had always been unified throughout its history, as *St. Cyprianus* described it : *De Catholicae*

Ecclesiae Unitate. (Brisson, J.P, 1958 :70-71) These persecutions were fatal to the faithful, we had seen Christians denying their faith, clerics and bishops even hastening to hand over compromising holy books to magistrates. (Monceaux, P., 1902 :10) For the Donatists they were regarded as *Traditors* (Gaffiot, F., 1936 : 65) and *Lapsi*. On the other hand, many Christians courageously resisted persecution, were sacked and executed.

Whereas, the attitude of the Confessors was rigid towards the Traditors and Apostates, and rejected all contact with them after the appeasement of the persecutions in 305, following the abdication of *Diocletianus*. (Warmington B.H., 1954 :78)

The victims of these persecutions were none other than the martyrs of Abitina, near Carthage. After their interrogation and torture on February 12, 304, these Confessors were taken back to their prison in Carthage.

It seems that they had suffered a great deal, so they decided to excommunicate the Christians who had weakened in the persecution. They wrote a kind of proclamation which was considered a law, and was called the "*act martyrum*", (Julien, Ch. A., 1978: 209) and the text of which is as follows : "Whoever has been in communion with the translators shall not share with us in the heavenly kingdoms." (Monceaux, P., 1902 :4)

This proclamation invites all the Pure Ones and Saints on the need to apply the excommunication launched by the martyrs in Africa, on all the *Traditores*. (Allard, P., 1900 :261-273) As it had a virulent echo, and an extraordinary resonance, in various regions of ancient *North Africa* and especially in Numidia. And it became a weapon against *Mensurius* and his followers. (Monceaux, P., 1902: 13)

Since the incidents of Abitina on February 12, 304, the African schism begins its expansion, and its milestones to appear, after the last and violent persecution (311-312), and especially the persecutions of Emperor *Diocletian* which left a deep impact in the ancient *North Africa*. It is the schism of the African church, the church that has always remained unified, as mentioned before.

A curious document, and Catholic sources show that there were deep differences between the Numidian bishops, about the council held in Cirta (Papier, A., 1879 : 109) on March 5, 305 (*Concili Cirtensis*) for the consecration of a new bishop, after the death of *Paulus*. (Optat St., I, 13-14) In his place the Numidian bishops elected the sub-deacon *Silvanus* by intrigue and riot, despite the opposition

of the clergy and notables, who accused him of felony, and he himself was compromised during the searches. (Augustine St., III, 27- 30)

It seems that the apostasy spread through Numidia, where the Council of Cirta was held to ordain *Silvanus*, under the presidency of Primate *Secundus*, twelve Numidian bishops are present, among them : *Donatus of Mascula, Victor of Rusicade, Marinus of Aquae Tibilitanae, Donatus of Calama, Purpurius of Limata, Victor of Garbe, Felix of Rotarium, Nabor of Centurionis, Secundus minor*, all or almost all future Donatists. (Papier, A., 1879 :109)

The Numidian bishops present at the Council of Cirta in 305, became - seven years later - the main founders of the schismatic church. No doubt they would have used a different tone, consecrating the Bishop of Carthage. They considered themselves -*the Saints and the Pure*-. (Monceaux, P., 1902: 17)

The African Church underwent a radical change after the death of *Mensurius* Bishop of Carthage in 311, on his return from Rome, where he was received by the Emperor. This was a very significant event in the relationship between the secular power and the Church.

Following his death, the problem of the succession of the bishop of Carthage *Mensurius* begins, in an atmosphere of intrigue and conspiracy. This led to the evolution of the conflict over the episcopal consecration of the bishop of Carthage. The schism of the African Church begins there, to which is added an evolution in the empire with the arrival of *Constantine*. (Monceaux P., 1902: 14)

Following the election of *Caecilianus*, who was Diaconus of *Mensurius*, this Ordination took place in the absence of the Primate of Numidia, and outside the traditions of the African Church. The schismatic church quickly organized itself, *Secundus* Bishop of Tigisis and Primate of Numidia, (Episcopus Primae Sedis) therefore convened a council of seventy (70) bishops in Carthage, in the house of *Lucilla* (Mesnage, J.P., 1912 : 277) matron of the community of Carthage, in 312. They summoned *Caecilianus*, who refused to appear; he was excommunicated and the council elected *Majorinus*, a reader of the Church of Carthage, to replace him. The consecration of *Caecilianus* was invalidated because *Felix of Abthugni* (Babelon, M., 1893, I, 42, 52) was himself accused of having been a translator during the time of the persecutions. (Jacques-Paul D., 1847 : 646- 647) Along with two other clerics, *Botrus* and *Caelestius*, also accused of having ordained *Caecilianus*. (Mourre, M., 1978 : 1408)

According to the discipline of the Church of Africa, a consecration made by a translator was null and void.

They elected *Majorinus*, who was soon replaced by *Donat*. (Optat St., I, 19) The schism begins there. But it is based on a different doctrinal approach to the ecclesial question and to the question of baptism, so it was soon considered a heresy and therefore treated as such by the civil Roman authority. (Raynal D., 1973 : 46-47)

It is said that the interests of the Carthaginians opposed to those of *Caecilianus*, with the accusations of the Numidian bishops were able to concretize the schism in the African Church. Minutes of the consecration, cited that a wealthy and influential Carthaginian woman of Spanish origin named *Lucilla*, played a key role in the deposition of *Caecilianus*, and the consecration of a new bishop, the reader of Carthage *Majorinus*, a protégé of *Lucilla*. (Augustine St., *Epist.* 43, 2, 4)

If Augustine accused *Lucilla* around 400 - following investigations made after the ordination of *Majorinus*- of having corrupted the bishops of the Council of Carthage, by paying them a considerable sum which they shared out among themselves without giving anything to the poor or to the clergy, he was able to achieve his goal. (Augustine St., 43, 6, 17)

Martroye brings up the misunderstandings between the matron of Carthage *Lucilla* and *Caecilianus*, and that she did not forgive *Caecilianus* a reprimand which the latter had had to address to her while he was still a Deacon. (Martroye F., 1904 : 361) In my opinion, these misunderstandings between *Lucilla* and *Caecilianus*, reveal the deep conflicts between the church of Numidia, and the church of Carthage led by *Mensurius* and then *Caecilianus*, both compromised during the persecutions, for having delivered the scriptures and holy books to the pagan Roman power.

Majorinus was only a ghost, he disappeared quickly, he died after a few months, in 313 during the assizes of the Council of Rome, he was replaced by *Donatus of Carthage* known as "*Donatus the Great*", he was the author of the rupture, and yet we have many reasons to identify him with *Donatus* of the Black Boxes known as "*Donatus of Bagai*". (Augustine St., *Epist.* 43, 5, 16)

In any case, *Donatus of Carthage* had the qualities of a true leader : he constituted and strengthened -by all means - the new church, which claimed to be the true Catholic church, the church of the martyrs. He also gave his name to the Donatist

movement which was called the party of Donat "*Pars Donati*", or Donatism. (Augustine, St., *Epist.* 88, 2)

The African church is thus divided, the schism is consumed : for more than a century, the unity of Christian Africa had been achieved. The Catholic Church under *Caecilianus*, allied with the secular power, and the schismatic church under *Donatus* had against it the authority of the emperor and his representatives in Africa. It was persecuted by most Roman emperors. (Maier, J.L., 1973 : 95, 453)

Each party went to defend its opinions and convictions. The Donatists used every means to defile the Catholics. In return, the Catholics abused their share to denounce the Donatists.

This conflict led to a polemical confrontation between Donatists and Catholics. Although the Donatists refused - many times - to witness the polemics with the Catholics, who are, according to the Donatists, the translators and persecutors of the Donatist Church. (Lancel, S., 1972 : 9-25)

The conflict that divided Christians in Africa for a hundred years, and caused much bloodshed on more than one occasion in Africa in the fourth century, in religious quarrels, pushed the secular power to intervene. The Catholics, determined to put an end to these quarrels, sent an embassy to the Emperor *Honorius* through their council held in Carthage on June 14, 410, exposing the situation, asking for the repeal of the edict of tolerance, and the convening of a general conference between the two parties. (Augustine St., *Brevic. Collat.*, III, 2, 2; 3)

Immediately, the Emperor Honorius, by a constitution dated 25 August 410, annulled the edict of tolerance, and imposed the death penalty or proscription on all heretics who held assemblies. (Cod.Theod., XVI, 5, 51)

At the same time, he accepted the proposed conference and took steps to make it happen. He instructed *Marcellinus*, senator and tribune, and imperial notary, as a special commissioner, to go to Carthage, by the constitution of October 14, 410, to convene the conference. (Cod.Theod., XVI, 11, 3)

The Donatists only decided to attend the Carthage Conference in 411, under pressure and threats, and yet they knew that *Marcellinus* was Catholic. Their presence in Carthage led to the evolution of the controversy between the thinkers of two churches, some of whom played decisive roles in the evolution of Christian thought, such as *Tyconius*, (Brisson, J.P., 1958 : 84) and *St. Augustine*. (Congar, Y., : 80)

In conclusion, the history and organization of Donatism allow us to determine with sufficient precision the real and lasting causes of the schism, its principles, aspirations, and social and political role.

First of all, a distinction must be made between the apparent, accidental causes and the deep-rooted causes of the schism. The immediate origin of Donatism lies in the surprises of the persecution of the Emperor *Diocletian*, in the question of the *lapsi* which had already produced the schism at the time of *St. Cyprian*. In the difficulty of resolving the situation of countless Christians who had weakened in one way or another in the face of the persecutors. Misunderstandings erupted even before the restoration of religious peace, and appeared in the manifesto of the martyrs of Abitina in 304, in the meeting of the Numidian bishops in Cirta in 305, in the correspondence of Primate Secundus with *Mensurius*. (Optat, St., I, 13-16) To these misunderstandings are added personal quarrels, jealousies, grudges, the intrigues of *Donatus* of the Black Boxes, of *Lucilla*. (Augustine, St., III, 27-30) All these misunderstandings and intrigues lead to a definitive break, after the election of *Caecilianus* as Bishop of Carthage in 311. (Optat, St., I, 19-20) But the rapid spread of Donatism, and its popularity is due to deep causes :

- **The first cause** was in the abnormal organization of the African Church where the ecclesiastical provinces never had true autonomy. From the Cyrenaica to the Tingitana border all depended on the Bishop of Carthage. (Monceaux, P., 1902 : 164)

- **The second cause**, related to the first, was the traditional rivalry between the primacy of Numidia and the bishop of Carthage, the circumstances of the election of *Caecilianus* in 311 were abrupt, and in the absence of the Numidians (Augustine, St., I, 10, 16)

- **The last cause** is in the social state of Africa, where misery had been great since the middle of the third century. (Toutain, J., 1895 : 362)

To these rivalries and jealousies between the bishops of the various African provinces, we must add other causes, of a psychological, moral or even political nature. (St. Cyprien, *Epist.*, 69-74)

Thus, the history of the relationship between Christianity and Roman power over three centuries has been characterized by grudges and violent conflicts. Secular power used every means to destroy the Donatist Church, because it saw in it a factor of destruction of the Roman Empire.

II- Origins of the Donato-Catholic conflict

After the deposition of *Caecilianus*, the intrigues and plots continue to grow. By a twist of fate changed Christianity's relationship with the state : *Constantine's* victory, (Bouillet, M.N., 1878 : 452) soon followed by the Edict of Milan in 313, which guaranteed the persecuted not only full freedom of conscience and worship, but also the official protection of the state. (Lactantius, 1903: 44, 48 & Eusèbe, de Césarée, 1687 : X, 5, 2)

The end of the persecution (edict of *Licinius* 311) against Christians was followed by an unexpected turnaround in the situation of the Church. The conversion of *Constantine*, who embraced their religion and declared it the religion of the empire, by a famous edict issued in Milan in 313. As the sole master of the empire, he made the persecuted ancient church a protégé and then an ally of the state. (Meslin M., & Hadot P., 1957: 143)

Since *Constantine* took power in Rome, his vision has changed towards the Christians of Africa. He became interested in the affairs and quarrels of the ancient *North Africa*. He manifested himself in the need to restore and restore the property of the African Church after Diocletian's persecutions. Wishing to repair the injustices of the past, he ordered Proconsul Anulinus, during the period 212-213, to return the confiscated property of the Christian community. (Eusebius, 1687 : X, 5 ; 15- 17).

The situation worsened in the ancient *North Africa*, around the time of *Constantine's* death on 22 May 337, (Martroye F., 1914: 392) at the time of his son *Constantine*, (Bouillet, M.N., 1878: 451) who believed, after having taken rigorous measures against schismatics, that he had succeeded where his father had failed. He addressed an imperial constitution "to the Africans" in 338, (Cod. Theod., IX, 34, 5) in the context of the battle of pamphlets between Catholics and Donatists. He must have regretted his imprudence, in changing his policy, he first tried to be gentle, sending to Africa two commissioners : *Paulus* and *Macarius*, (Monceaux P., 1902:34) charged with preparing the union of the two churches, bringing back the sectarians, if he could, by persuasion, distribute relief to the communities, and probably gifts to the influential leaders of the party. (Brisson J.P., 1958: 292)

These two commissioners *Paulus* and *Macarius* are famous in the religious history of the ancient *North Africa*. They are the famous "artisans of unity", (*operarii unitatis*), so often accused, reviled,

slandered and cursed by generations of Donatists (Optat St., I, 6-7 ; III, 4-6).

Donatus primate of Carthage, and head of the schismatic church, received them very badly. He gave them a very haughty answer, which was summed up in this threatening formula : "What does the emperor have in common with the church ? ». *Donatus* had to deal with the effects of corruption, and he sent a circular letter to the schismatic communities and faithful forbidding them to accept help and alms, and the attempt was unsuccessful. (Julien Ch.A., 1978:217).

No one in the Donatist camp disobeyed *Donatus*. They soon realized that they would achieve nothing unless they were clearly authorized to use violent means. They had to refer the matter to the emperor, to whom *Donatus*, for his part, wrote an insulting letter (Optat St. John the Baptist, III, 3) In the middle of 347, *Constantius* decided to issue an edict of union, ordering the merger of the two rival churches, i.e. the dissolution of all schismatic communities, and the attribution of all Basilicas and other properties to the Catholic Church. (Augustine St., Psalm. C. Part. Donati., 145)

The edict of "Union" or "unity" promulgated by *Constantius* in 347, simply reinstated only the law of his father *Constantine* 316, which was never repealed, but whose application had been suspended by the edict of tolerance of 321 (Cod. Theod., XVI, 6, 2).

In the eastern part of the ancient *North Africa*, the edict of "Union" was executed in the Proconsular, Byzacena, and Tripolitania without too much resistance (Optat St. Peter, III, 4) Because the schismatics were, probably, less numerous ; they did not form compact groups ; or perhaps they had lost some of their fierce energy, during the thirty years of peace and prosperity that the ancient *North Africa* experienced from 316 to 347. (Optat St., III, 1)

On the other hand, violent incidents between the imperial commissioners and the Donatistas took place in Carthage, where there were many dissidents, since that city was the official capital of the party, the residence of the head of the dissident church, the venue for regular council meetings, and the centre of political action. (Monceaux P., 1902: 125)

These violent incidents date back to August 15, 347, when a proconsular edict was posted, relating to the union of the churches, probably to the measures taken by the consul, in agreement with the commissioners, to ensure the execution of the imperial edict (Passio Maximiani & Isaac, 768) A

certain *Maximianus* could not contain his indignation, decree 'poster. He was arrested by order of the governor, and put to torture. Another Donatist, named *Isaac*, who was present at the scene, insulted the Catholics ; he had the same fate. (Passio Maximiani & Isaac, 769-770)

The two fanatics were then condemned to exile. *Isaac* died in prison on August 15, pushed, it is said by the Catholics, the proconsul would have had the dead and the living thrown into the sea. But Lamer was an accomplice of the Donatists of Carthage ; his waves brought the bodies of their two martyrs ashore (Pallu de Lessert, 1901:243).

In Numidia, the Edict of *Constantius* unleashed a religious war in the regions of Thamugadi (Timgad), Theveste (Tébessa), and Bagai (near Khenchela), the centre of the dissidents, Donatism became a national religion, and schismatic communities were more numerous and more powerful than the Catholic communities. The city of Bagai was one of the regions that stood up to the imperial commissioners. Bishop *Donatus Casae Nigrae*, a fanatic who was resolute in everything, organized the defence of Bagai and appealed to the Circumcellions. He wrote a proclamation, which was shouted in the towns and markets of Numidia, urging true Christians to save their church. (Bouillet, M.N., 1878:1827).

Donatus fortified his city, turned his basilica into a granary, piled up supplies for his encounter troops. On learning of these preparations for war, the imperial commissioners did not hesitate to ask for the support of *Sylvester*, Count of Africa (Petit, P., 1974: 73-74) An army marched against the Circumcellions at Bagai, this time commanded by a bishop. In the vicinity of Bagai, a vanguard was mistreated by a group of Donatist supporters. The Roman officers were unable to hold back their attacking troops, and massacred a large number of Bagai's inhabitants (Optat, St., III, 4) *Donatus of Bagai* perished in the battle ; he was honoured as a martyr. (Augustine St., II, 20, 46)

As a result of these incidents, a Donatist Council met in Numidia in the summer of 347 to protest against the repressive measures led by *Macarius* and to advise on ways to restore peace and security in the region. The memory of this intervention has been preserved in our memory by a writer of the Donatist sect, who says: "a council of our bishops gathered, sent an embassy to *Macarius*, ten eminent bishops, chosen from the assembly, the deputies were to give *Macarius* salutary warnings, to divert him from such a great crime, or at least (which happened) to rush first to the field of religious battle

where the law was fighting. (Monceaux P., 1902: 335-336)

The ten Donatist deputies met with the Imperial Commissioner in Vegesela, (Cayrel, P., 1934:114 & Duval, N., 1989:174) and were to protest against the repression, and to try to restore peace. Before explaining the situation to him, they thought it necessary to insult him. They spoke with such insolence that *Macarius* was not able to contain his anger and ordered them to be tied to columns and beaten (Monceaux, P., 1902: 37) The public castigation of these bishops and ambassadors must have stirred up the schismatic population of the region. This led to fights between *Macarius'* army and the crowd, resulting in casualties. There perished the martyr *Felicianus*, whose reliquary has been found, and who, according to the inscription, appears to have been killed at Vegesela on June 29, 347. (Birebent J., 1961:364-365 & Gsell S., 1899 : 455)

The imperial envoy released nine of the bishops sent by the Council of Cirta, but retained the tenth prisoner, who had been marked by his insolence, a certain *Marculus*. He dragged him to several towns in Numidia, and then finished him off. According to the Catholics he committed suicide (Courcelle, P., 1936:166-197) by rushing from the top of a rock near Nova Petra, (Ragot, W., 1874:228) on November 24, 347 (Julien, Ch. A., 1978:217).

Later, *Optat of Mileva* reported that the Donatists affirmed that *Marculus* was thrown alive by the executioners of *Macarius*, and that his tomb became a very popular place of pilgrimage for schismatics. (Optat St. John the Baptist and the Donatists, III, 6) In reality, the edict of *Constantius* had raised a large part of the African population - according to Augustine -, and with the repression of the "artisans of unity", many bishops and clerics fled from Carthage and Numidia to other more secure cities. (Augustine St., LXXXVIII)

The dissidents fought real battles with the army of the "artisans of unity", which cost them many martyrs. For them it was the time of *Macarius*, (*Macariana tempora*), (Optat St., III, 1) or the persecution of *Macarius* (*Macariana persecutio*) (Augustine St., 44, 3, 5) And for whom the Catholics, accomplices of the executioner, became the (*Macariani*), the party of *Macarius* (*Pars Macarii*), and the Church of *Macarius* (*Macariana Ecclesia*) (Augustine St., XLIII, 9).

To complete the work of union and repression, *Donatus of Carthage* was exiled from Africa, and the principal bishops, as the basilicas were confiscated

for the benefit of the Catholics, it was a triumph for them.

The Catholics believed that the schism was the punishment for the schism, God had willed it. 108 This belief in divine intervention gave the Catholics back their confidence and they took the offensive. Three months after the Council of Cabarsussa, a great Catholic council met at Hippo Regius, *Augustine's* city, on October 8, 393, under the presidency of *Aurelius of Carthage*. (Mesnage J.P., 1912:5) This council contributed to the reorganization of the African Church, and decided on reforms, and canons that directly aim at the destruction of Donatism, among which we can quote:

1- To preserve the dignity of Donatist clerics who have rallied to the Catholics.

2- The ordination of converts baptized in their childhood by dissidents as clerics. (Monceaux P., 1902: 60)

It is said that these canons were inspired by *Augustine*, or it was the Council of Hippo Regius that suggested to him the idea of fighting the schism by all means in order to restore religious peace and the unity of the African Church. (Monceaux P., 1902: 61).

In spite of the sentence of the Council of Cabarsussa, the majority of Donatists rallied to *Primianus*, his followers responded to his call when he summoned them in 394, to attend the Council of Bagai (Mesnage, J.P., 1912 :253) Three hundred and ten bishops responded to *Primianus'* call on April 24, 394, under the presidency of *Primianus* himself. The sentence of the Council was as follows :

- The excommunication of *Maximianus* and the twelve bishops who had ordained him...

- To threaten the other *Maximianus* with the same punishment if they did not make amends within eight months.

Synodal letters were sent to all the African provinces threatening all the sects that dissented from the Primianist anathema (Brisson J.P., 1958: 226). Both sides sought the help of the secular powers to restore the Church's property to their adversary. The Primianists sometimes used violence to restore their Maximianist members. This confrontation ended with the victory of the Primianists in 397. They finally decided to shelter the repentant Maximianist bishops within the Donatist Church. (Monceaux, P., 1902:130)

It was probably around this time that the Donatist councils, mentioned by Augustine (fig. 4), forbade voluntary martyrdom to their faithful, which

had become a scandal for the Donatists because of the number of victims or the staging of suicides,¹¹⁶ and which was increasingly fashionable among circumcisers, fanatics, or party adventurers. In spite of prohibition, the epidemic of devout suicides that Africa had never seen so dreadful could not stop during the first twenty years of the fifth century. (Brisson, J.P., 1958:351).

It seems that Donatism spread in a prodigious way, it crossed the limits of Numidia, to reach the Proconsular, Byzacene, Tripolitania, and Mauritania, it took advantage of the circumstances of that period, and was able to stand up to the Catholics.

III -Principal periods of the Donato-Catholic Conflict

The Donato-Catholic conflict, has known through its history four periods, three of them during the Roman period, it is weakened at the end of the Vandal period, before disappearing during the Byzantine period at the end of the VI century. We can distinguish three periods during the Roman period:

III - 1- the beginnings of the Conflict (305-316)

This period starts from the holding of the Council of Circa in 305, before two months of the abdication of Emperor *Diocletian*, until 316 date of the condemnation of the Donatist Church by Emperor *Constantine*. (Monceaux, P., 1902 :365)

This period saw a further escalation of persecution, which led some bishops to apostasy and being translators, to have obeyed imperial edicts to hand over to secular power and then burn the scriptures and sacred books.

The Protocol of Circa (*Concili Cirtensis*) marked the rupture between those who resisted (Donatist Church) and those who betrayed their faith (Catholic Church) and delivered the Scriptures to the persecutors. The protocol of Circa was the beginning of a series of councils between the Donatist and Catholic Churches.

The persecutions of Abitina in 304, had produced a state of unease and general discontent among the population of ancient *North Africa*. The manifesto of the martyrs of Abitina (act martyrum) became a kind of religious and social charter. (Martroye, F., 1904, 354) In memory of these martyrs stelae (fig. 5) have been erected throughout various cities of the ancient *North Africa*. (Monceaux, P., 1920 : 4)

III - 2- Period of persecution and repression (317-392)

This period saw a very active movement in the history of the conflict between the two churches, the Donatist Church on the one hand, and the Catholic Church supported by the secular power on the other hand. This period starts from the first persecution in 317 in the time of *Constantine* until 392 when *St. Augustine* entered the battle, and leads the decisive struggle on the theological level, confronting the Donatist Church at the head of the episcopate of Hippo Regius (Annaba).

This period is marked by important events such as : the promulgation of the Edict of Tolerance in 321, (Audollent A., 1890 :526) and the Edict of Union of Emperor *Constantius* in 347, and the violent response of Emperor *Julian the Apostate* in 367, followed by a number of edicts aimed at the destruction of the schismatic Church in 373.

Following the condemnation of the detractors of *Caecilianus*, which only overexcited the disgruntled, and after some disturbances in Numidia, *Constantine* was forced to use rigor, he decided to promulgate a law that pronounced the confiscation, for the benefit of the tax authorities, of the basilicas and all the places where the dissidents held their assemblies. (Cod.Theod., XVI, 6, 2) The emperor ordered his commissioners on the necessity of watching over the practice of the law with rigour. Secular power with the help of the clerics of the official church prevented the Donatists from entering or taking refuge in the churches. (Augustine St., 92) The Donatists only had to retaliate against *Constantine's* Law of 317, bloody confrontations occurred in various churches in Carthage, many sectarians were massacred, and they were buried in basilicas where they had died. (Martroye F., 387-388)

It is said that *Constantine* was forced to follow a repressive policy after his victory over his enemy *Maxentius*. *Caecilianus* was the only one in ancient *North Africa*, to have benefited from this policy. This prompted the Bishop of Carthage to take action against the schismatic Church, and the condemnation of Donatism.

IV- Augustine and the proscription of Donatism (392-411)

The schismatic Church remained solid, unified for more than eighty years, it was able to stand up to the Catholic Church, considered as the official church supported by the Roman power. It was able to put the politics of this power out of harm's way,

from the election of Bishop *Majorinus* at the head of the Church of Carthage in 312, after the death of *Mensurius* in 311, until 392, when ancient *North Africa* experienced two important events: the first was the death of the heads and protagonists of the two churches, *Genethlius* (Mesnage, J.P., 1912 : 5) bishop of the Catholic Church of Carthage, who was replaced by *Aurelius*, and the death of *Parmenianus* the most famous of the bishops and heads of the Donatist Church, who had reconstituted the schismatic Church and restored it to full power, and who presided over its destiny for thirty years. (Monceaux, P., 1902 : 337) The second event was the ordination of St. Augustine as head of the episcopate of Hippo-Regius (Annaba), (Augustine St., XLIV, 5, 12) who played a major role in infiltrating the schism into the Donatist Church and using all means, including the legitimacy of violence, to reintegrate the dissidents into the Catholic Church. (Lepeley, C., 1967 :194)

In his campaign against the Donatists, and in the context of the controversy between the two churches, St. Augustine multiplied his speeches and writings, and was led by the necessities of the struggle, to clarify the essence of the Church, and to formulate a formidable principle, the need for a "useful terror" exercised by the public powers to bring the heretics back to Orthodoxy (the Catholic Church), in the name of Christ: "force them to enter" (*Compelle Intrare*). He legitimated the coercion of the state. (Julien, Ch.A., 1978:226- 227)

After the death of *Parmenianus*, leader of Donatism in 392, the Donatists elected *Primianus* (Mesnage, J.P., 1912 : 5, 202) in his place. (Monceaux, P., t.V, 224 ; t VI., 111)

But the new Numidian primate had not been slow to sow anxiety and mistrust around him. From the very first months of his episcopate, by his incoherent policy, made up of clumsiness, tyranny, and partiality. Thus, *Primianus* was definitively condemned by the Council of Cabarsussa in Byzacene in 393, when he was stripped of the episcopate and excommunicated for a large number of faults which were reproached to him and which are reported, as grounds for the sentence pronounced against him, this condemnation was pronounced on June 24, 393. After *Primianus*' deposition, his enemy *Maximianus* was elected in his place, and was ordained in Carthage by twelve bishops. (Monceaux P., 1902: 224) Now the church in Carthage has three bishops, and in the whole of the eastern half of Donatist Africa a Maximianist church was organized opposite a Primianist church.

So far, nothing has changed the imperial policy towards dissidents. It can even be concluded that from 392 to 405 the civil authority allowed the two rival churches to empty their quarrel into the field of the Africans.

It was only in 405 that Emperor *Honorius* took a clear stand against Donatism, proclaiming the assimilation of schismatics to heretics, and promulgating a new edict of union on February 12, 405.

The Catholic bishops decided to put an end to the dissidents, ensuring success through the intervention of the secular power. For this reason, they held a council in Carthage in 410, sending an embassy to the emperor to explain the situation, to ask for the abrogation of the edict of tolerance, and the convocation of a general conference between the two parties. (Augustine St., IV, 6,) Thus *Honorius*, by a constitution dated August 25, 410, annulled his previous edict, at the same time accepting the project of a conference. On October 14, 410, he charged a special commissioner, *Marcellinus*, senator, tribune and imperial notary, to go to Carthage, to convene the conference, to preside over its debates, in order to re-establish religious unity in Africa. (Cod.Theod., XVI, 11, 3) It was a solemn moment, an epoch in the history of Christian Africa, when the Carthage conference was to bring out the definitive condemnation of the Donatist schism.

The debates took place on June 1, 411, and lasted 8 days, in a vast and luxurious building in Carthage, the *Thermae Gargilianae*. (Augustine St., Brevic. Collat., I, 14) the two parties were about equally strong. 286 Catholic bishops were present, 120 absent, 64 seats vacant ; on the Donatist side, 279 bishops were present, about as many absent and vacant seats as for the Catholics. It was the third session of June 8 that decided the fate of the schismatics, and the sentence was proclaimed : Donatism is officially proscribed. (Collat. Carthag., III, 1)

Conclusion

The study reached a number of results, the most important of which are:

1-Donatism, which had not changed at all since his birth. It is not certain, therefore, that *Augustine* is right on this point against *Cresconius*, the Donatist polemist. But the legal fact had been established : since the law of 405, confirmed by many others, and except for the short entr'acte of the conference of Carthage in 411. Donatism was definitively assimilated to heresy, treated and outlawed as such.

2-It is said that the invasion of ancient *North Africa* by the Vandals (Evagre, 1686, IV, 16 & Courtois, C., ,1955 :15-19) in 430, contributed indirectly to safeguard what remained of Donatism. This invasion must have weakened the Roman power, which was the greatest enemy of the Donatist schism, a power that began to lose these African provinces, one after the other, on the one hand, and the Vandal persecutions that reached the Catholic Church on the other hand.

3-We can conclude from this historical shortcut that Donatism presents itself as a schismatic attitude and a form of heresy in ancient *North Africa*, through deep doctrinal divergences in the ecclesiological and sacramental fields. But to this is added a rejection of a new attitude of the Catholic Church towards Roman power, in favour of Constantinian peace.

4-In spite of the proscription of Donatism, and until the end of the sixth century, Donatist communities will remain, or they will never be dissolved, or they will be reconstituted after the turmoil, despite the support of the secular power.

Appendices

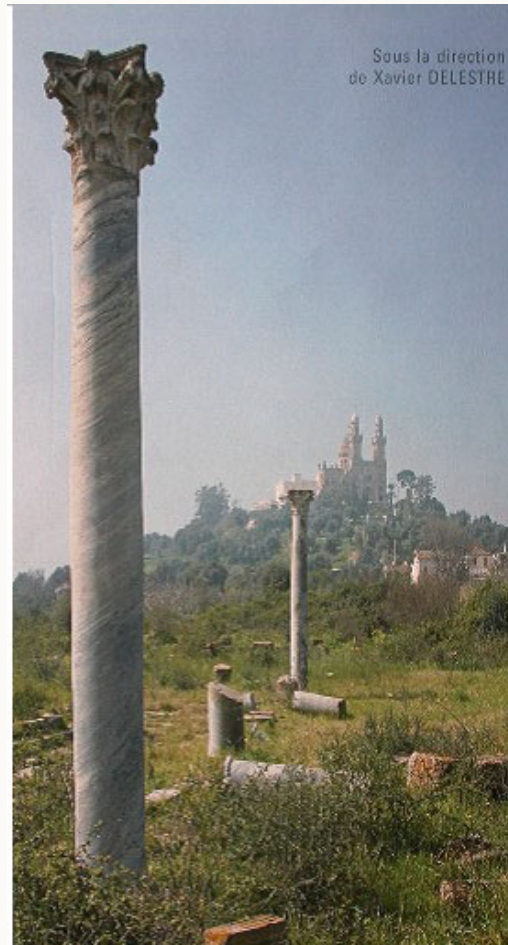


Fig.1 : Church of Saint Augustine in Annaba (Algeria) Xavier Delestre, Hippone the city of Saint Augustin : an archaeological unknown, p. 5.



Fig. 2: Catholic Church of Saint Augustine in Annaba from the inscriptions of the forum portal (Algeria) Xavier Delestre, p. 11.



Fig. 3: Necropolis of the Martyrs near the Northern Baths, Xavier Delestre, p. 49.



Fig. 5: Paleochristian funerary stele
Xavier Delestre, p.53.



Fig. 4: Byzantine inscription mentioning A(u)gustinus. Xavier Delestre, p. 54

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ملخص الدراسة:

الصراع الدوناتى الكاثوليكى وأثاره فى الشمال الأفريقى القديم (٣١١-٤١١م)

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شكلت اضطهادات الإمبراطور "ديوكليتيانوس" للمسيحيين خلال الفترة (٣٠٣م-٣٠٥م) القطرة التي أفاضت كأس، مما أدى إلى بروز مشكلة الانقسام والانشقاق بقوة داخل الكنيسة الإفريقية. هذا الانشقاق الذي تكرر على إثر سيامة الأسقف "كاكيليانوس" بعد وفاة الأسقف "مونسيوريوس" أسقف كنيسة قرطاج سنة ٣١١م، لذا وجدت الكنيسة الإفريقية نفسها منقسمة بين أسقفين وحزبين: الكنيسة الدوناتية والكنيسة الكاثوليكية. وقد لعب القديس "أوغسطين" دوراً بارزاً فيما عرف في أدبيات الكنيسة بالصراع الدوناتى-الكاثوليكى فى الشمال الأفريقى القديم. وكان قد دخل حلبة الصراع على الصعيد اللاهوتى والجدلى منذ ٣٩٢م على رأس أسقفية هيبوريديوس (عناية حالياً شمال شرق الجزائر)، وترأس مجمع هيبون سنة ٣٩٣م الذي أدان الدوناتيون. وعلى مدى أكثر من قرن من الزمن احتدم الصراع بين الكنيستين الدوناتية مدعمة من قبل الجماهير الشعبية ومن الريفين الأوراسيين من جهة، والكاثوليكية حليفة السلطة الزمنية الرومانية من جهة ثانية، والتي دعمتها فى كل المحافل حتى انعقدت مناظرة قرطاجية بطلب من الإمبراطور "هونوريوس" والتي أقرت مبدأ حظر وتحريم الدوناتية رسمياً سنة ٤١١م.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الانشقاق الدوناتى؛ الهرطقة؛ الكنيسة الدوناتية؛ الكنيسة الكاثوليكية؛ القديس أوغسطين؛ مناظرة قرطاجية