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THE CONDITIONS OF COMMUNICATION OF EXILED CLERICS IN VANDAL AFRICA IN THE WORKS OF VICTOR OF VITA AND FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE

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Abstract

The present paper is a study on the conditions of communication of exiled clerics in Vandal Africa (439-533). The historiography on the subject focuses on the martyrdom content of the writings of the exiled clerics and on the expansion of their network of interlocutors. This article starts from the identification of a certain disregard in this historiography to the concrete conditions of communication that exile structured to different clerics. Through the analysis of the works of Victor of Vita and Fulgentius of Ruspe, the authors investigate the conditions of communication of exiled clerics in the reigns of Huneric (482-484) and Thrasamund (508-523). Their aim is to understand the variations in the conditions of communication and the opportunities for the religious affirmation of exiled clerics in the period. These variations depend on the territories where the clerics were exiled, the forms of control established by the Vandals over their communication, and the social and material resources that distinct clerics possessed to assert themselves in exile.

Keywords

Clerical Exile; Late Antiquity; Vandal Africa; Victor of Vita; Fulgentius of Ruspe; Communication Conditions

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Resumo

O presente artigo é um estudo sobre as condições de comunicação dos clérigos exilados na África Vândala (439-533). Parte da identificação de certa desconsideração na historiografia sobre o tema pelas condições concretas que o exílio estruturou para a comunicação de clérigos diversos ao analisar o conteúdo martirial de seus escritos e a expansão de suas redes de interlocutores em si mesmos. A partir da análise das obras de Victor de Vita e de Fulgêncio de Ruspe, os autores investigam as condições de comunicação dos clérigos exilados nos reinados de Hunerico (482-484) e de Trasamundo (508-523) para compreender as variações de comunicação que estruturaram oportunidades desiguais para a afirmação religiosa de diversos clérigos exilados no período. Essas variações consistem nos territórios onde eles foram exilados, as formas de controle estabelecidas pelos vândalos sobre a comunicação deles e os recursos sociais e materiais que clérigos distintos possuíam para se afirmarem no exílio.

Palavras chave

Exílio Clerical; Antiguidade Tardia; África Vândala; Victor de Vita; Fulgêncio de Ruspe; Condições de Comunicação.

1. Introduction

The exile of clerics in Late Antiquity is intrinsically related to the importance of the communications that clerics established with their peers and their faithful. This is especially due to the intensification of the doctrinal controversies that divided Christian communities from the time of Constantine onward (Lim 1999: 196-219). Since the beginning of the 4th century, numerous ecclesiastical leaders were exiled by secular authorities (Roman emperors and later the barbarian kings) in order to accommodate the Christians of their territories to their views of orthodoxy, keeping them away from clerics who promoted different views (Washburn, 2013: 41-65). For exiled clerics, forced displacement resulted in the deprivation of their cult buildings and of all ordinary means of communication with the wider society (Magalhães de Oliveira, 2020: 205-229).

The recent interest of scholars in the study of clerical exile in Late Antiquity (Hillner, 2016: 11-47) stems, on the one hand, from the recent experience of forced migration (such as the refugee crisis) which led researchers to question how forced migrations occurred in the past (Frighetto, 2017: 255). On the other hand, it is also linked to the growing concern of historians of ancient and medieval societies with the approach to "global" or "connected" History that puts into perspective the circulation of people, objects, ideas and their historical implications (Cândido da Silva, 2020).

In studies on clerical exile in Late Antiquity, investigations oscillate between a normative approach, which analyzes the functions of exile from the point of view of those who applied them, i.e. the imperial and barbarian authorities, and an experiential approach, which explores the perspectives and experiences of those who were banished, deported or relegated, i.e. the exiled clerics themselves. An example of the first approach can be seen in the works of Renan Frighetto (2019). As for the second, we can cite the works of Daniel Washburn (2013: 126-144), Éric Fournier (2018) and Jennifer Barry (2019), who have demonstrated how banished and fugitive clerics in the religious controversies of West and East produced narratives to associate their images with that of the martyrs and thereby claim their Christian legitimacy. Other scholars have put into perspective the social and ecclesiastical circles in which these clerics were integrated during their exile. This was the objective of the pioneering, international and interdisciplinary project, *The Migration of Faith: Clerical Exile in Late Antiquity*, coordinated by Julia Hillner, which resulted in the production of an extensive prosopographical database on the relationships built by clerics in exile[3].

[3] Available at: https://blog.clericalexile.org/

The most recent studies on the relationship between exile and clerical communication emphasize the "positive" effects of banishment to increase the religious influence of exiles. Thus, these studies investigate the martyrdom intentions of the writings of these clerics in exile and the expansion of their networks of interlocutors. However, the emphasis on these effects seems to us to disregard that there are no mechanical cause and consequence relations between exile and the eventual success of the exiles. We can observe this in other historical contexts. Laurent Jeanpierre (2004: 13-44) and Miguel Soares Palmeira (2017: 1-31), investigating exiled intellectuals in the twentieth century, have underlined that although exile is often related to the construction of a "creative marginality" that would be beneficial to the academic rise of these intellectuals, exile never exerted this impact automatically. On the contrary, the academic renewal of exiled intellectuals depended on the confluence of complex factors that, in our view, can be synthesized in a balance between the conditions structured by exile and the strategies mobilized by particular exiles based on these conditions.

Starting from these observations, we need to consider that the communication possibilities of exiles in different historical periods depended on the confluence of multiple factors structured by the condition of exile itself. Exile, in this sense, implied, first and foremost, a forced rupture with how exiles communicated, forcing them to adapt and reconstruct themselves in the new conditions in which they found themselves. The exiled clerics in Late Antiquity, in particular, lived in a time in which the usual communication depended on physical proximity between people, while long-distance communication was rather slow, costly, and therefore less accessible to people from distinct layers of society. To overcome the difficulties imposed by the forced distance and recover or strengthen their religious influence in exile, clerics would therefore depend on being able to write and disseminate their letters, treatises, and books, as well as interact with people in their localities of exile and other regions of the Mediterranean, which varied between particular exiles.

In this paper, we explore this hypothesis by comparing the conditions of communication of exiled clerics in two contexts of the Vandal reign in Africa: the religious repressions ordered by the Vandal kings Huneric, between the years 482 and 484, and Thrasamund, between the years 508 and 523. From these contexts, we will trace the differences in the concrete conditions of the exiles, inquiring into their implications for their communication from three factors structured by exile: the connectivity of their exile localities with other regions of the Mediterranean, facilitating or hindering, for example, the circulation of their letter carriers; the access, monitoring, and control of the Vandals over the exiles, ensuring them greater or lesser freedom of communication; and the social and material resources that could facilitate more for some and less for

others this exilic interlocution, building networks of solidarity and disseminating their writings.

2. Clerical exile in Vandal Africa

The ancient Roman provinces of Numidia, Byzacena and Africa Proconsularis remained under Vandal control for nearly a hundred years between the taking of Carthage by Vandal chief Genseric in 439 and the Byzantine reconquest of Africa in 533. During this period, the promotion of the Arian Church by the new Vandal rulers resulted in the exile of numerous clerics from the Nicene Church, which is a unique case among the successor kingdoms of the Western Roman Empire. It is certain that other kingdoms, such as the Ostrogothic in Italy, were ruled by sovereigns who confessed the Arian doctrine. However, the Vandal rulers were the only ones to promote this doctrine by coercive means.

Scholars have suggested two complementary interpretations to explain this idiosyncrasy. On the one hand, the influence of the Nicene clerics in the cities implied a difficulty for the Vandals to impose their domination on African municipal structures (Modéran, 1993: 180-184). On the other hand, their refusal to recognize any sovereignty other than that of the Roman Empire created difficulties for the Vandal kingdom in the unstable Mediterranean diplomacy of the 5th and 6th centuries (Conant, 2012: 130-196). In this context, the conversion to the Aryan doctrine would have become a true "test of loyalty" to the Vandal sovereignty imposed by the new rulers on the elites of Africa, on which they depended to administer the conquered territories.

However, not all Vandal kings repressed the Nicene Church and the repression itself focused, in particular, on ecclesiastical leadership. During the reign of Genseric (439–477), conqueror of Africa, the religious policy of the Kingdom was not marked by incisive repressions against the Nicene Church. Once the Kingdom was established from Carthage, capital of the ancient Africa Proconsularis, only prohibitions against Nicene meetings in the city were instituted, the confiscation of some ecclesiastical properties, as well as the exile of particular clerics (Vict. Vit. I, 14; I , 29; I, 39, II, 1)[4]. After the repressive reign of Huneric (477-489), Gunthamund (484-496) promoted a certain pacification of

[4] The abbreviations for the Latin sources are those of the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae (TLL): <https://thesaurus.badw.de/en/tll-digital/index/a.html>. For abbreviations of sources not included in the TLL, I adopted: Lat. Reg. Vand. (Laterculus Regnum Vandalorum et Analorum), Aug. (Augesis), Hisp. (Hispani). Proc. (Procopius), B.V. (Bellum Vandalicum), Ad. Pint. (Adversus Paint). For Prosopography of Later Roman Empire: PLRE. The sentences and terms included in the article are translations from the original languages.

religious conflicts, calling for the return to Africa of Eugenius, bishop of Carthage exiled by Huneric (Lat. Reg. Vand. Aug. 9). Measures like this, however, were not applied throughout Vandal Africa, with some clerics remaining in exile (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 3, 1) and others being exiled during this reign (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 5, 2; 9 , 1)[5]. After a new repressive reign, under Thrasamund (495-523), Hilderic (523-530) granted freedom of worship to the Nicenes (Lat. Reg. Aug. 16), which made it possible for the exiles to return to their episcopal sees (Vita Fulg Rusp. 25, 1). Hilderic was deposed by Gelimer (530–534), whose turbulent reign created the pretext for the Byzantine "reconquest" of Africa between the years 533 and 534 (Lat. Reg. Vand. Hisp. 16; 19; Proc. BV III, 9-24; IV, 1-9).

In this context, the only reigns marked by the mass exile of Nicene leaders were those of Huneric and Thrasamund. In the first case, the repressive measures came after six years of a conciliatory religious policy (between 477 and 482) that allowed the Nicenes to meet in places formerly forbidden by Genseric (Vict. Vit. II, 1). It was during this period Eugenius was ordinated as bishop of Carthage, after this see had remained vacant for 24 years since the exile of Quodvultdeus (Vict. Vit. II, 2-3). However, in 482, Huneric carried out a mass banishment of Nicene clerics in the context of a more general purge of all actual or potential enemies of the new ruler, including members of his own court and royal family as well as their collaborators (Vict. Vit. II, 10, 13-15, 23, 26). In the year 484, Huneric carried out a second mass banishment of Nicene clerics after organizing a conference between them and the Arians in Carthage. This conference enabled him to apply against the Nicenes the anti-heresy laws provided in the Theodosian Code (Fournier, 2013: 395-409), engendering a year of great hardening of religious repression throughout Vandal Africa.

In the reign of Thrasamund, the second period of repressive measures, the relative religious pacification instituted by Gunthamund, Huneric's successor, continued to endure between 496 and 507 or 508. It was only after 507 and 508 that Thrasamund forbade the Nicenes to ordain new bishops in the ancient Roman province of Byzacena (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 13, 1). The leaders of the Nicene Church, after meeting together, chose to resist (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 13, 2). In retaliation, Thrasamund exiled all the newly ordained bishops (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 17, 1), who remained in exile until Hilderic's rise to power in 523.

[5] For a discussion of the exiles ordered by Gunthamund from a reinterpretation of the chronology of the life of Fulgentius of Ruspe: Móderan, 1993: 168-169. The Byzantine historian Procopius of Caesarea similarly describes Gunthamund's religious policy towards the Nicene Church as repressive: Proc. B.V. III, I, 8. Victor of Vita himself, as mentioned below, may have been exiled during Gunthamund's reign.

This paper focuses on the mass clerical exiles instituted during the reigns of Huneric and Thrasamund. Although religious repression had concrete effects in weakening the Nicene episcopate in Africa, the justification is that, in them, we can observe the conduct of a real project of "religious persecution" in which exile became a central instrument of the secular authorities. Moreover, the documents we have for analyzing the conditions of communication of the exiles in these contexts allow us to distinguish sharper variations between them. For the reign of Huneric, we will use the *History of the Vandal Persecution in Africa*, by Victor de Vita, an eyewitness of the hardening of repression in the year 484 and who maintained contact with some exiled clerics (Moorhead, 1992: XV-XVII; Lancel, 2002: 3-14). For the reign of Thrasamund, we will focus on the corpus of letters and treatises written by one of the exiled clerics, Fulgentius of Ruspe, as well as on the biography about him written by one of his disciples in the year 533 (Vita Fulg. Rusp. Prol. 3; Lapeyre, 1929: LIV-LXIII; Isola, 1987: 7-14).

We have little information about the life of Victor de Vita (Lancel 2002: 3-9). It is known that he was born between 440 and 445 in the city of Vita, probably located in Byzacena. He ascended to the clergy of Carthage around 480, the same year that Huneric's edict permitted Eugenius's ordination as the new Nicene bishop of the Vandal capital. He witnessed the secular violence against people who attended Nicene churches wearing Vandal costumes. He was at the first meeting of the Carthage conference of 484, among other evidence that shows his presence in various religious repressions ordered by Huneric. However, Victor of Vita himself does not seem to have suffered exile in this period. It is possible that he wrote his *History of the Persecution* in a later exile, in the year 486, during the reign of Gunthamund, in the ancient Roman province of Tripolitania, but the final years of his life are rather incomplete.

Regarding Fulgentius of Ruspe, the available sources allow us to trace the stages of his life in more detail[6]. He was born in 468 in the city of Thelepte, in ancient Byzacena, from a family of senatorial status (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 1, 1). In his youth he distinguished himself by the good management of his family's affairs, becoming "esteemed by the highest powers" of Africa (*sublimioribus potestatibus carissimus fieret*: Vita Fulg. Rusp. I, 5). He assumed the office of *procurator* in the Vandal administration, but renounced to it around 493, when he converted to the monastic vocation and became a Nicene abbot and missionary. Around the years 507 and 508, when Thrasamund forbade new ordinations, Fulgentius was ordained bishop in the city of Ruspe, Byzacena, which resulted in his exile at the end of 508. In exile, he remained in the city of

[6] Regarding the chronology of Fulgentius of Ruspe's life, I adopt the most usual and approximate approaches starting, however, from the important observations of: Móderan, Y. 1993: 135-188.

Cagliari, capital of the ancient Roman province of Sardinia, until 513, when he returned to Africa and settled in Carthage. In 515, however, Fulgentius was exiled again to Cagliari, where he remained until 523. After Hilderic's rise to power, he returned to Africa and resumed his episcopal see at Ruspe until his death in 533.

3. The conditions of communication of exiled clerics under Huneric (482–484)

Although Victor of Vita's account is the most detailed source on exile during Huneric's reign, it is marked by a dramatic rhetoric that constructs an image of "Vandal persecution" in Africa (Lancel, 2002: 29-49). This image associates exile with a martyrdom suffered by the "confessors of the faith" (Shanzer, 2004: 271-290), spreading a bleak view of the exiles' conditions. However, as Robin Whelan pointed out (2019: 143-145), some episodes nuance this image in the narrative itself. Habetdeum, for example, a Nicene bishop in the city of Tamalluna in ancient Tripolitania, who remained in the custody of Antonius, an Arian cleric prominent in monitoring and repressing exiles in 484, returned to Proconsular and presented his complaints to Huneric (Vict. Vit. III, 45-46).

Despite possibilities like this, we can state that some clerics exiled by Huneric faced rather restrictive conditions of communication. Regarding the territories to which they were exiled in the first banishment, Victor of Vita describes them as "deserts" (*ad exsilium eremi destinavit*: Vict. Vit. Lib. II, VIII, 17). These places were territories away from the African coasts and the Proconsular province, the Mauritanian hinterlands, southwestern Byzacena and Tripolitania, partly under Moorish control (Móderan, 2003: ch. 11; Vict. Vit. II, 28). In the second banishment, these localities were again destinations of exile, with less evidence regarding their control, Moorish or Vandal (probably both: Vict. Vit. III, 8; III, 42-46; III, 68). In this second banishment, others were exiled to Corsica (Vict. Vit. III, 20), controlled by the Vandals in the period.

Many of those exiled by Huneric in the first banishment had previously acted in the Proconsular (Courtois, 1954: 40-51). The distance between their places of exile and the African coasts implied difficulties of access to ports and, consequently, to the maritime connectivity that linked these regions to Proconsular and other Mediterranean regions. This would make it necessary for the exiles to travel by land and only then to proceed by sea. In this sense, Victor of Vita mentions that the clerics of Carthage were moved to the cities of Sicca Venerea (present-day El Kef, Tunisia) and Lares (present-day Henchir Lorbeus, Tunisia). In those cities, they were received by Moorish guards who escorted them into exile (Vic. Vict. Vit. II, 28). Until they arrive to their final

destination, they followed "roads" and "paths" (*testantur viae vel semitae*: Vict. Vit. Lib. II, XI, 18) during the nights (to avoid the sun), in the course of several days (Vict. Vit. II, 30). On the way, these exiled clerics were visited by various persons, among whom were Victor of Vita himself (Vict. Vit. II, 32) and Cyprian, bishop of Unizibir, in Byzacena (Vict. Vit. II, 33).

The road system that connected North Africa in Late Antiquity is less known to us for its actual layout than for the epigraphic information provided by the milestones. (Mattingly; Hitchner, 1995: 179). However, the mention of *viae* indicates localities connected to this system while the visits that the exiles received along the way indicate that they transited in the vicinity of settlements (urban and/or rural), thus suggesting that they did not suffer complete isolation in the 'desert' during their journey. On the other hand, the long duration of the trek suggests, at least, a great territorial distance from Carthage. From Sicca, the journey to the Vandal capital would take more than five days of overland travel over a distance of 166 km[7]. The stay in this city, like that of Lares, marked only the beginning of the journey of the exiles who were later visited by a bishop of Byzacena, beyond the Proconsularis limits.

In this first banishment, as Harold Eric Mawdsley (2018: 242) noted, we need to consider that a mass displacement of people and, in particular, clerics (suffering from physical difficulties arising, for example, from advanced age), on long journeys by land could result in a real 'logistical nightmare'. The circulation of such stories could be expected by Huneric to encourage apostasy in African society (Mawdsley 2018: 243), leading us to inquire whether the use of sea routes or a combination of sea and land routes would be possible, reducing a time eventually increased as an exemplary punishment.

Regarding the second banishment, Victor of Vita reports that after the Conference of Carthage of 484, Huneric confiscated the properties and relegated the clerics who participated outside the city walls (Vict. Vit. III, 15). Later, he negotiated whether they would accept that Hilderic, his son, would succeed him on the Vandal throne (Vict. Vit. III, 17). Those who accepted, however, were considered traitors to the Scriptures and exiled within Africa, and those who did not accept were considered opponents of the desired succession and exiled to Corsica (Vict. Vit. III, 20). The guards who escorted the exiles in the interiors of Africa mentioned in the source were not Moorish, but Arian clerics, who kept monitoring some of them in exile (Vict. Vit. III, 8; III, 42-46). This suggests territories outside the Proconsular which remained, however, under the control of the Vandals, although some of them remained, as

[7] The space and time measures of voyages in Roman Antiquity mentioned in this paper were all calculated from the tool built and made available by the project Orbis - The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World, accessible at: < https://orbis.stanford.edu/>

mentioned, also in Moorish territories (Vict. Vit. III, 68). The cases of Eugenius and Habetdeum, bishops of Carthage and Tamalluna, indicate precise locations: the city of Tamalluna itself, in Tripolitania (Vict. Vit. III, 43; III, 45; Not. episc. proc. Afr., 1), distant from the Proconsularis by land, but which could be reached by sea from port cities like Lepcis Magna (present-day Homs, Libya).

As for the exiles in Corsica, apart from the fact that we have no information about the exact localities where they were relegated, the evidence about the connectivity of the island in Antiquity is scarce. During the Roman administration, Corsica was part of the same province as Sardinia. The Latin sources refers to the production and export of timber favored by its dense woods (Vicente Ramírez, 2015: 335) which were used, for example, for shipbuilding by the Vandals (Vict. Vit. III, 20). The project *Orbis - The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World* describes two sea routes that connected the island to the Mediterranean in the Roman period: the first, from Aleria to Massilia (Marseille, France) on a route of 483 kilometers by sea or about 6 days' journey, and the second from *Gallicum Fretum*, at the southern end of the island, to the Balearic seas to the east and Tyrrhenian to the west. Archaeological data indicate a continuity in trade between Corsica and Africa until at least the seventh century (Pergola, 1984: 178-183; Spanu, 2002: 171-172). In any case, the conditions of communication of the exiles with diverse regions could be restricted or facilitated by their exact locations of establishment, on the coasts or in the interior of the island, facilitating or hindering their access to ports.

Beyond the localities, we can consider that the most restrictive structural factor to the communication of the exiles by Huneric was based on their geopolitical conditions, subjected to diverse forms of monitoring and control in exile. In the first banishment, we observe the Moors escorting the Nicenes into exile, who also ensured their maintenance in temporary confinements during the journey (Vict. Vit. II, 31) and, perhaps, continued to monitor them in their territories. In the banishment of 484, the Moors may have acted as monitors of the exiles (Vict. Vit. III, 68). In this period, however, Arian clerics took a leading role in the exercise of this function, going around the cities and villages of Africa together with armed people in search of various Nicenes in order to force them into rebaptism (Vict. Vit. III, 42; III, 48).

The change in those in charge of monitoring the exiles can be related to two factors. Firstly, Moors and Vandals established collaborative relations until the end of Huneric's reign. From 484 onwards, Moorish groups began gradual insurgencies against Vandal domains in Africa (Móderan, 2003: ch. 11). The earlier presence of the Moors in control of the exiles and their relative absence

in 484 may relate to these diplomatic changes, although conflicts of this nature appeared in the sources only from that year onwards, with some exiles still remaining in Moorish territories (Vict. Vit. III, 68). Second, it is possible that the mobilization of the anti-heresy laws against the Nicenes modified the instruments of religious repression in 484 in a more profound way, favoring the emergence of other coercive actors. In his decree, Huneric established the conversion of the entire African population under his sovereignty to the Arian confession (Vict. Vit. II, 12) and made members of all layers of society responsible for the surveillance of the Nicenes, threatening them with fines and banishment in case of disobedience (Vict. Vit. II, 10-12). This decree, therefore, not only made it possible for Arian clerics to repress Nicenes with legal justification, but it could also stimulate micro relations of surveillance among diverse people in African society.

The clerical banishment in 484 was accompanied, moreover, by the submission of the exiles to forced manual labor in the fields of Africa as *coloni*, in logging in Corsica for the Vandals' shipbuilding (Vict. Vit. III, 20) and in mining in unnamed localities (Vict. Vit. III, 68): mining, in particular, was a strenuous and dangerous work (Mawdsley, 2018: 227), usually performed by slaves (Millar, 1984: 140; Hillner, 2015: 243-244). As *coloni* or 'slaves', we can imagine that the exiles would be subjected to overseers such as land tenants, Vandal officials, local lords, etc. Consequently, some clerics were deprived not only of access to their churches, but also of other material means of establishing their religious influence in exile, subjected to forced labor under the control of the king's collaborators.

These conditions did not, however, result in complete religious isolation of all the exiles. In the first banishment, we observe people accessing them in their confinements by, for example, bribing the Moorish guards (Vict. Vit. II, 32). In the second banishment, armed persons in Huneric's service circled the African roads to capture travelers who were moving at the command of the Nicene clerics (Vict. Vit. III, 47), suggesting that the exiles were mobilizing messengers, informers, letter carriers, etc. As we have seen, Habetdeum, bishop of Tamalluna, a city where the exiles remained under the custody of an Arian cleric prominent in religious repression, went to the capital of the Kingdom on his own initiative and without suffering any reprisal for it (Vict. Vit. III, 45-46). In his decree, Huneric himself foresaw that many people might disobey the monitoring function he assigned to them, forbidding, in particular, landowners and city rulers to shelter Nicenes, as well as judges to favor them in civil courts (Vict. Vit. III, 11). The sovereign was also concerned to reinforce his prohibition on exiles building churches (Vict. Vit. III, 8), preaching, singing psalms, reading the Scriptures, ordaining, baptizing, and converting the faithful to Nicene doctrine (Vict. Vit. III, 20). However, as noted by Mawdsley, clerics in exile on

farms scattered across Africa were unlikely to have their social interactions completely controlled (Mawdsley, 2018: 246).

These observations lead us to the social and material resources that particular clerics could mobilize as a function of their communication in the banishments ordered by Huneric. We need to consider, first, that Arian communities could remain a minority in the ancient Proconsularis in the first decades of the Vandal reign. In 455, for example, a Nicene community from Carthage was able to reoccupy a church closed by Genseric in a locality named *Regia* for the celebration of Easter. This reoccupation resulted in a massacre of the community led by an Arian cleric, Anduit, with the aid of an armed group (Vict. Vit. I, 41). Despite the dramatic outcome, as observed by Yves Móderan, this episode suggests that the Arians remained unable to occupy all the churches confiscated by Genseric in Carthage, choosing more celebrated churches for their meetings (Móderan, 2003: 38-39). It is likely that this situation continued into Huneric's reign, although repressive measures like his weakened the Nicene Church in the long term.

The continued resistance of the Nicenes in Africa indicates that their clerics enjoyed some social influence that could be mobilized for their protection. This protection could vary among particular exiles according to the position they occupied in the Church and wider society. This is because, in Huneric's reign, exiled clerics belonged to the highest ecclesiastical positions, the bishops, but also to auxiliary and lower positions, their priests, deacons and other members of the Church (Vict. Vit. II, 26). Between the episcopal leadership and their subordinates, it is likely that asymmetries existed in the social and material resources they possessed to establish their religious influence in exile. Ferrandus, for example, a deacon of Carthage who corresponded with Fulgentius of Ruspe, lamented that he could not exchange letters with him more often because of his difficulty in hiring bearers for long-distance travel (Fulg. Rusp. epist. 13, 1). Fulgentius, on the other hand, never mentioned any such difficulties in sending his letters in exile, attributing the delays to causes such as illness or winter (Fulg. Rusp. epist. 1, 1). While Fulgentius was a bishop, Ferrandus was a deacon, like many bearers of Fulgentius' letters.

Ferrandus case illustrates a deacon's ability to communicate over long distances, but also some difficulties that lower-ranking clerics might face in doing so. As we have noted above, the application of the anti-heresy laws during the reign of Huneric unleashed a generalized and exceptional persecution. Even if it lasted less than a year, it should not be random that the writing of the *History of Vandal Persecution in Africa* dates from it, a work that suggests the hardening of religious repression not only in its author's rhetoric

(Fournier, 2008: 164-211; Id. 2019: 137-162), but, also, in the realities he observed (Mawdsley, 2018: 240-241).

These realities, in a sense, could be quite similar to the more coercive action of the Roman Empire in suppressing the Donatist schism after the Conference of Carthage of 411 (Fournier, 2013). However, Huneric's actions, as well as those of other Vandal kings, could have more profound coercive effects than the imperial actions in the religious controversies of Roman Africa. This is because the Vandal authorities were established with their warriors within the African territory itself: physically close to the clerics and, therefore, able to repress them more quickly and violently (Magalhães de Oliveira, 2020: 229-241). In this context, the exile in inland locations, the submission of the exiles to forced labor, the monitoring and the possible relations of micro-surveillance could make difficult the communication of exiles both from lower and higher ecclesiastical positions.

4. The conditions of communication of exiled clerics in the reign of Thrasamund (508–525)

During the reign of Thrasamund, the numbers of exiles attested to in our sources vary from 60 (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 18, 1) to 200 bishops (Vict. Tunn. Chron. [M.G.H., a.a., 11, p. 1990 apud Móderan, 1993: 170, note 151]). Among them, we know fifteen names mentioned in Fulgentius' sources (Fulg. Rusp. epist. 16; 17; 15; Vita Fulg. Rusp. 19, 1), about which we have no other information. Fulgentius, in effect, positioned himself as a "spokesman" for the exiles in these documents (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 18, 1; Fulg. Rusp. epist. 17; 15), making the investigation into their conditions dependent on his particular case, from which we can make generalizations about the others.

The evolution of Fulgentius' communication in exile can be summarized as follows. Between 508 and 513, he and other exiles built a monastery near Cagliari in Sardinia, communicating with local people (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 19, 1) and sending letters to bishops in unnamed locations that dealt with doctrinal questions, problems in their congregations, and other matters (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 18, 1-2). Around 513, Fulgentius was summoned by Thrasamund to return to Africa to discuss with him the issues that divided Nicenes and Arians (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 20, 1-2). During this period, he stayed in Carthage, wrote two treatises against the king (ad. Tras.; trin.), a treatise against an Arian cleric (Ad. Pint., mentioned in: Vita Fulg. Rusp. 21, 2), other doctrinal texts, and preached to Carthaginian Christians in the city's ports (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 21, 3-4).

From 515 until 523, Fulgentius was exiled to Cagliari again, where he built another monastery (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 24, 1). During this period he exchanged letters with clerics and aristocrats of Carthage, senators of the city of Rome, an abbot from nearby Naples, monks from the East, faithful from various localities, and wrote treatises (Fulg. Rusp. Ad. Monim.; Fulg. Rusp. ad. Eugipp.; incarn.; Fulg. Rusp. epist. 1; 2; 3; 4; 6; 7; 8; 16; 17). In 523, with the accession of Hilderic, Fulgentius resumed his episcopal see at Ruspe (Vita. Fulg. Rusp. 27, 1), presided over the building of monasteries in Africa, attended religious councils in Byzacena (Vita. Fulg. Rusp. 27, 1, 2), wrote new letters and treatises (Vita. Fulg. Rusp. 27, 4; rem. pecc.; Fulg. Rusp. c. fastid.; Fulg. Rusp. praedest.; Fulg. Rusp. fid.; Fulg. Rusp. epist. 15; 11-14; 18) until his death in 533.

Fulgentius' exilic communication has aspects that we can consider "positive" for his religious influence. First, before his exile, acting as a Nicene missionary in Proconsular, he was beaten by an Arian priest who rivaled the conversion of the faithful around the city of Sicca (Vita. Fulg. Rusp. 6-7). In this sense, his stay in Carthage and, in the second exile, exchange of letters with clerics and aristocrats of Vandal reign can be considered a surpassing of his pre-exilic territorial boundaries of communication. Secondly, he was able to build and strengthen Mediterranean solidarity networks by maintaining a regular exchange of letters with influential people from inside and outside Africa (Fulg. Rusp. epist. 16, 1). Thirdly, Fulgentius gained new followers, as did his biographer, who converted to the monastic vocation through him (Vita Fulg. Rusp. prol. 3).

This evolution depended on the balance between the concrete conditions of communication that we observe in Huneric's reign. Fulgentius and the others were exiled to Cagliari, capital of Sardinia, an island that had for centuries maintained maritime contacts with other regions of the Mediterranean: the island hosted successive waves of colonists in Antiquity, developing, under Roman rule, a production of cereals and extraction of minerals for export that made its cities dependent on the import of various products (Mastino, 1985: 51-54; Vicente Ramírez, 2015: 333). Under the Vandal rule, even though the exploitation of mines decreased, the circulation of ships carrying minerals continued (Mastino, 2005: 184). The flow of bearers of exiles' letters through Africa and Italy also indicates continuity in the use of the sea routes that connected Sardinia to these regions in the Vandal period.

On the other hand, this flow suggests that the communication between Fulgentius and his interlocutors from Carthage and Rome was not completely arbitrary. This is because exchanges between Sardinia and other regions of the Mediterranean had been for centuries oriented towards Africa and Italy (Mastino, 1985: 27-91). The port of Cagliari was located 306 kilometers from the

port of Carthage, with movement between the cities taking about 2 days of travel. For comparison, Thelepte, Fulgentius' hometown in Byzacena, was located 335 kilometers away from Carthage, only 29 kilometers more than Cagliari and Carthage, but because Thelepte was located inland, it would occasion an 11-day overland journey. The port of Cagliari was also connected to the port of Ostia, 432 kilometers away, from which it would be possible to travel 23 kilometers by land to Rome.

Fulgentius exchanged letters, too, with monks from the East. However, this exchange was established during a stay of the monks in Rome, where they sought recognition from Western interlocutors for their positions in religious controversies that arose in the East (Fairbaim, 2013: 3-25). Between Cagliari and Constantinople, the distances were 2833 kilometers by sea, providing for stopovers in different regions, as occurred in maritime journeys in the period (Arnaud, 2005: 56), and whose time could last more than 20 days, insulating it from delays arising from natural, political, and technological risks, as well as the skill of the sailors (Ibid.: 14-59).

The ease of circulation between Sardinia and Africa therefore helped the flow of exiled letter carriers. However, with the conquest of the island by the Vandals in 455, this proximity would also facilitate the circulation of Vandal officers who could watch over the exiles. In the Vandal period, an annual tribute was levied on the populations of Sardinia. We know, for example, that this was the function that, according to Procopius of Caesarea, Gelimer attributed to Golfas (Proc., B. V. I, 10, 25-34; Courtois, 1955: 187-190). This regular circulation of Vandal officials in the territory of Sardinia may, in fact, have been one of the sources of information for the Vandal kings about the actions of the exiles. It is likely, for example, that the informants who brought news about Fulgentius to King Thrasamund (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 20, 1) were royal officials charged with these tasks.

Despite this network of informants, however, there are no mentions in our sources of the exiles being subjected to restrictions other than exile itself, suggesting that they enjoyed great freedom of religious communication from Cagliari. Thrasamund, incidentally, established milder conditions of exile than those determined by his Huneric predecessor, perhaps to prevent the emergence of new Nicene martyrs.

From these conditions, the exiles spent social and material resources to establish their communication locally and over long distances in a religious position (despite being banished from their episcopal see). The expression of these resources can be seen in the monasteries that Fulgentius and the others built in Cagliari, from which they interacted with the local populations, as well as in the sending of letters and treatises, which dealt with religious, moral, etc. issues,

presenting the exiles as spiritual advisors and religious leaders in diverse Christian circles.

The construction of these monasteries and the circulation of these writings could be facilitated both by the social and religious position of the exiles, connected to solidarity networks of influential aristocrats and clerics able to assist them in their activities[8]. Indeed, the African exiles enjoyed, for example, the solidarity of the Sardinian-born Pope Symmachus, who sent them money and clothes every year (Lib. pontif. 53, 11; Symm. Pater. epist. XII et Cyprianus, epist. 77 apud Vicent Ramírez, 2015: 342, n. 86; Ibba, 2010: 419). This ecclesial network could have been built beforehand. In the particular case of Fulgentius, we know that he was connected to networks of influential people who could protect him even before the exile: after being beaten near Sicca, an Arian bishop provided him with support and made it possible for him to punish the preacher who had beaten him, a member of his diocese, because of the good relations the bishop had with Fulgentius' family (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 7, 1). His family, as we have seen, had economic affairs that enabled Fulgentius to rise to the office of *procurator*, and the Arian bishop's solidarity placed his aristocratic loyalties above his religious differences. Fulgentius was also able to build monasteries in Africa before his exile through prominent people like Sylvester, described as "the most distinguished man in Byzacena" (*provinciae Byzacenae primario*: Vita. Fulg. Rusp. XIV, 38), who donated him a plot of land near the city of Junca.

In exile, this position continued to benefit Fulgentius with bonds of solidarity and patronage favorable to his religious ventures. The second monastery built in Cagliari was located near a funerary basilica dedicated to an important local saint, Saint Saturninus (Martorelli, 2009: 21-22), and its construction took place under permission of the bishop of the Sardinian capital, Primasius (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 24, 1). It is possible that the building of this monastery did not only benefit from the secular position of Fulgentius and other exiles, corresponding to previous solidarity networks among Nicenes in Africa and Sardinia. At the Carthage conference of 484, for instance, five bishops from the main cities of Sardinia participated (Not. episc. Sard.). Sardinia and Sicily, moreover, were destinations of banishment for officials of the Vandal administration who did not accept the rebaptism into the Arian Church imposed by Huneric (Vict. Vit. II, 23). It is possible that these secular elites remained in these localities during the period of Fulgentius' exile, enabling him and others to relate personally to them.

However, beyond religious belonging and its associative possibilities, the social resources of exiles like Fulgentius facilitated the maintenance of these connections, as well as their expansion. Fulgentius' mother, in fact, ensured that

[8] On the social circle of Fulgentius de Ruspe: Stevens, 1982: 327-341.

he learned Latin and Greek from an early age so that he could excel in African society (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 1, 2-3). In exile, this education even enabled him to establish new relationships. This can be seen, among others, in the correspondence between Fulgentius and Galla (Greg. M. dial. IV, 14; "Galla 5", PLRE II. 491), rich widow of one of the senators of the city of Rome. In the letter sent to her, Fulgentius presented himself as a spiritual counselor and offered her consolation for her husband's death, but also tried to persuade her to donate the properties she had inherited to her monastic peers, mentioning a common interlocutor as an example: Proba ("Proba 1", PLRE II. 907), an aristocrat from Rome who had become a consecrated virgin under the influence of Fulgentius' peers (Fulg. Rusp. epist. 2, 31).

The realization of this communication through letters, however, depended on the circulation of the letter carriers. And, as we noted in the previous topic, not all people had the resources to hire these carriers. However, there is a fundamental difference between those exiled by Thrasamund and those exiled by Huneric: in the former case, they were all previously bishops. This position put them in front of clerics who could be mobilized for the performance of auxiliary functions. In this sense, when exiled, Fulgentius was accompanied by monks and clerics (Vita Fulg. Rusp. 17, 1). The letter carriers of Fulgentius mentioned nominally in his letters, in turn, were deacons (Fulg. Rusp. epist. 2, 1; 17, 1 [1]). Moreover, it is possible that these monasteries were endowed with a *scriptorium*, enabling their works to be copied exhaustively, as suggested by the letter sent by Fulgentius to Eugippius, abbot at *Lucullanum*, near Naples, with which he sent him books he had written to another interlocutor, Monimus (Fulg. Rusp. epist. 6, 12).

In sum, we can state that the clerics exiled by Thrasamund lost access to their episcopal sees and therefore the ability to communicate with their local faithful on a daily basis. However, from Cagliari, they accessed both people from their place of exile and from nearby regions through the city's strategic position in Mediterranean exchanges, by a low Vandal control over their activities, and by the resources available to them to found their monasteries and spread their letters.

5. Conclusions

The works analysed in this article seem to support the hypothesis that the conditions of the exiled clerics' communications were not always the same and that these variations offered unequal opportunities for the religious affirmation of some clerics to the detriment of others. During Huneric's reign, the exile of clerics to regions far from the ports, the monitoring established over them and

the social, religious and material differences between the exiles did not result in a total religious isolation of them all. However, the balance between these conditions apparently constructed much more restrictive margins of communication for those exiled by Huneric than for those exiled by Thrasamund. In the second case, they enjoyed a strategic territorial position in the Mediterranean exchanges and a low control over their religious activities in exile. In addition, the fact that the exiled clerics generally came from upper-class families benefited them with networks of protection and access to influential people.

In the book *Exiles and Expatriates in the History of Knowledge, 1500–2000*, Peter Burke discussed the intellectual innovations produced by exiles. He could therefore put into perspective the "silver lining of the dark cloud". Yet even so, he also drew attention to the fact that any exile always meant a traumatic experience, giving rise to feelings of denial, identity crises, material and social problems that, in extreme cases, could even led some individuals to suicide (Burke 2017: 4-8). This point underlines the fact that, despite the opportunities that were opened and that were sometimes exploited by particular exiles, the exile means, first and foremost, a *forced rupture* in their lives. It seems to us that it is only if we start from the logic of this rupture that we can understand the ways in which different exiles could or could not rebuild themselves in exile.

We hope that this paper has demonstrated some of the benefits we can gain by considering the concrete variations faced by exiled clerics. This research started from our perception of a recurrent problem in recent historiography on clerical exile in Late Antiquity: a certain disregard for the conditions that made the diffusion of narratives and the construction of solidarity networks possible for some exiles, but not for others. We hope to have shown that by putting these and other exilic conditions in perspective we produce a more nuanced and dynamic view on the forms and strategies not only adopted, but already available to the exiles. In this way, we can include in the history of clerical exile clerics who were mentioned only as numbers in the sources, remaining anonymous to posterity, but whose stories offer a less mechanical view of the effects of exile.

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