

CLERICAL EXILE AND COMMUNICATION NETWORKS IN VANDAL AFRICA: THE CASE OF FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE

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Abstract

This article is a discussion of the effects of clerical exile on the communication networks of exiled clerics in Vandal Africa. The article develops a case study of a cleric who was exiled by the Vandal king Thrasamund in late 508 or early 509, Fulgentius of Ruspe, based on his letters, treatises, as well as a biography of him written by one of his disciples after his death in 533. The aspect that guides the study consists in investigating the various factors that helped the deepening and expansion of Fulgentius' contacts with important interlocutors from different locations in the Mediterranean during exile. We argue that the expansion of Fulgentius' communication networks in exile depended on his previous social resources, derived from his family of senatorial origins, from diplomatic relations between Churches from different localities, as well as from his ability to take advantage of numerous concrete communication opportunities that were opened to him in specific situations.

Keywords

Communication Networks; Clerical Exile; Late Antiquity; Vandal Africa; Fulgentius of Ruspe.

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Resumo

O presente artigo é uma discussão sobre os efeitos do exílio clerical sobre as redes de comunicação dos clérigos exilados na África Vândala. O artigo desenvolve um estudo de caso sobre um clérigo exilado pelo rei vândalo Trasamundo no final do ano de 508 ou início de 509, Fulgêncio de Ruspe, por meio de suas cartas, tratados, bem como de uma biografia sobre ele escrita por um de seus discípulos depois de sua morte, em 533. O problema que orienta o estudo consiste em indagar os diversos fatores que auxiliaram o aprofundamento e a expansão dos contatos de Fulgêncio com interlocutores importantes de localidades diversas do Mediterrâneo no exílio. Argumenta-se que a expansão das redes de comunicação de Fulgêncio no exílio dependeram de seus recursos sociais prévios, derivados de sua pertença a uma família de origens senatoriais, de relações diplomáticas entre Igrejas de localidades distintas, bem como de sua capacidade de aproveitar numerosas oportunidades concretas de comunicação que foram abertas a ele a partir de situações específicas.

Palavras-chave

Redes de Comunicação; Exílio Clerical; Antiguidade Tardia; África Vândala; Fulgêncio de Ruspe.

Introduction

The exile of clerics in Late Antiquity has sparked increasing interest from historians in recent years. These forced migrations occurred in the religious controversies over the definition of Christian orthodoxy in the period. They involved building alliances between secular authorities, Roman emperors, and barbarian kings with Christian leaders by affirming their doctrinal positions as legitimate. In a context marked by disagreements among Christian leaders about the views of the doctrine they considered correct (Lim, 1999: 196-219), the affirmation by secular authorities of the views of some of these leaders as legitimate resulted in official condemnations of others. The exile of clerics was instrumentalized by these authorities to force the conformity of the Christian groups under their dominion to the doctrinal views they considered correct, physically removing clerics who promoted different views of the faith in certain Churches. Distanced from their Christian communities, exile made it impossible for the exiled leaders to have any kind of daily interaction with their believers, making it difficult to promote and defend their doctrinal conceptions in the daily life of these communities and, thus, diminishing the religious influence of the exiles in the wider society.

In recent years, scholars have approached this topic from two major interests. Some have sought to understand the motivations of secular authorities and the normative meanings of clerical exile (e.g., Frighetto, 2019). Others put into perspective the experiences and views of exile from the exiled clerics themselves. In this second approach, scholars have sought to understand the narratives about exile constructed by the exiled and their supporters (e.g., Washburn, 2013: 41-65; Fournier, 2018; Barry, 2019), as well as the communication networks or social circles into which these clerics integrated themselves in exile.

In the latter case, the project *The Migration of Faith – Clerical Exile in Late Antiquity*, coordinated by Julia Hillner² stands out. The aim of this project was to build a broad database on the relationships of exiled clerics in Late Antiquity, as well as to apply social network analysis to this data to construct graphical representations of exiles' communication networks. In general, Hillner's project aimed to understand the effects of exile on the transformation of the social circles of exiled clerics, as well as on the transformation of the Churches in Late Antiquity (Hillner, 2016: 24-28).

² The project can be accessed at: <<https://www.clericalexile.org/>>.

In addition to the usefulness of the database, the great merit of the project is that it puts the relationships of exiled clerics into perspective. The exile of clerics was, after all, a way of reducing their religious influence in society by their ecclesiastical isolation. This leads us to ask: what happened to these clerics after their exile and, consequently, their placement in ecclesiastical hiding? Where were they exiled to and who did they come into contact with? How could the integration of exiled clergy into diverse circles contribute to a rehabilitation of their religious influence, as well as to the defense of the Christian views that triggered their exile?

The purpose of this article is to observe the transformation of the communication networks of a cleric exiled from Vandal Africa. This is Fulgentius of Ruspe, exiled by the Vandal king Thrasamund in 508 for being ordained a bishop in Africa against the prohibition of new ordinations instituted by the sovereign. This case is opportune for discussion since, in Vandal Africa, Fulgentius is the only cleric whose communication evolution before, during, and after his exile we can follow in detail. Fulgentius bequeathed to posterity a substantial *corpus* of letters and treatises written by him during and after his exiles. In addition to these letters and treatises, we also have access to a biography of him written by one of his disciples after his death in 533, addressed to Felicianus, his successor in the episcopal chair of Ruspe. Based on these documents (Fraipont, 1968; Isola, 1987; Eno, 1997; McGregor, Fairbain, 2013), we will discuss the effects of exile on Fulgentius' communication networks in the Mediterranean, exploring the various factors that made it possible for him to build them.

Vandal Africa and the exile of Fulgentius of Ruspe

Between 439 and 533, the former Roman provinces of North Africa remained under the control of the Vandals. The Vandals, in turn, confessed a Christian doctrine different from that considered correct by the Roman Empire. This is the "Arian" Christian doctrine, which established a relationship between the Father and the Son in the Trinity distinct from that made official as the doctrine of the Empire. In control of Africa, the Vandal authorities established measures to promote this doctrine in society. These measures ranged from the imposition of rebaptism on Christians in African territory. as a prerequisite for their participation in the Vandal administration, to attacks on the Church of the Empire, the Nicene, in the African provinces, characterized by the confiscation of the ecclesiastical properties of its leaders, redistributed to Arian clerics, and by

the deterrence to the ordination of new Nicene bishops in Africa and the exile of many of them.

Despite Vandal Africa being marked by repressions to the Nicene Church, not all Vandal kings acted in a repressive manner. Some of them tried measures of religious conciliation between the Arians and the Nicones (such as Gunthamund: *Lat. Reg. Vand. Aug.* 9). The only reigns marked by systematic repressions ordered by the Vandal authorities against the Nicene Church occurred under the reigns of Huneric and Thrasamund.

The reign of the former was marked by the institution of two collective banishments of clerics and other members of the Nicene Church, between the years 482-489 (*Vic. Vit.* II, 10, 13-15, 23, 26), as well as by the organization of a religious council in Carthage that resulted in the official condemnation of the Nicones as “heretics” in 489, resulting in a year of great hardening of religious repression by the application of the anti-heresy laws provided for in the Theodosian Code (Fournier, 2013: 395-409). The reign of the latter, in turn, was marked by some milder repressive measures against the Nicene leadership. The Vandal sovereign instituted a ban on the ordination of new Nicene bishops in Africa (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* 13, 1). The Nicene leadership, however, deliberated and agreed to resist this prohibition by presiding over the ordination of new bishops in the ancient Roman province of Byzacena (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* 13, 2). In retaliation, Thrasamund decreed the exile of the approximately 60 or 200 leaders recently ordained in Africa (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* 17, 1; *Vic. Tunn. Chron.* [M.G.H., a.a., 11, p. 1990 apud M6deran, 1993: 170, footnote 151]). They were banished to Sardinia and remained there until Hilderic’s rise to power in 523, who revoked the repressive measures against the Nicones, enacted in the previous reigns.

Fulgentius, an ordained bishop in the ancient African city of Ruspe, was one of the clerics exiled by Thrasamund in late 508 or early 509. In his exile, he remained with fellow exiles, clerics of his Church of Ruspe, and monks in the vicinity of Cagliari, the capital of the island. During this period, he acted as a “spokesman” for other exiles, writing letters on their behalf to various interlocutors in the Mediterranean (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* 18, 1). Between 513 and 515, Fulgentius returned and remained in Africa at the summon of King Thrasamund to discuss the issues that divided Nicones and Arians in Africa (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* 20, 2). During this period, he settled in Carthage, the capital of the Vandal Kingdom, and wrote two treatises against the religious arguments of King Thrasamund (*ad. Tras; trin.*), other treatises against Arian clerics of the capital (which have not reached us: *Ad. Pint.*,

mentioned in: *Vita Fulg. Rusp.* 21, 2), as well as preaching to the Christians of the city (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* 21, 3-4). Under pressure from the Arian clerics of the capital, Fulgentius was exiled again to Cagliari, where he remained until Hilderic's rise to power. In his second exile, Fulgentius wrote letters on behalf of the exiles and himself to various interlocutors in Africa, the Italian Peninsula, as well as the East.

The issue that guides this article is to understand the evolution of this exilic communication of Fulgentius and the various factors that influenced it. Fulgentius, in this sense, always occupied a position of centrality in African society. He was descended from Gordianus, an ancient member of the Carthage curia who took refuge in Italy when Africa was conquered by Gaiseric. Later, his sons returned to Africa to claim their family's property confiscated by the Vandals. Claudius and Mariana, in particular, won a partial restoration of these properties in ancient Byzacena, in the city of Thelepte (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* 1, 4; *Gordianus I, PLRE.* II. p. 517-518). Their son, Fulgentius, soon after his father's death, while still in his youth, acquired legal possession of these properties and began to administer them, gaining a position in the Vandal administration itself as *procurator* (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* I, 5). Through Faust, an African bishop who had probably been exiled under the reign of Huneric to the vicinity of the city where he was active, as well as Fulgentius' hometown of Thelepte, Fulgentius decided to abandon his secular duties to follow the vocation of a monk (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* III, 1). Fulgentius then transferred his property to Mariana, his mother, and began a monastic career that would gradually confer on him religious authority until he was elected and ordained bishop in the city of Ruspe.

Fulgentius' background explains part of his initiatives in exile. He belonged to a rich and powerful family, which ensured him influence and access to circles of prominent people from an early age. Still in Africa, for example, the monastic initiatives of Fulgentius, the monasteries whose construction he presided over, had the help of important aristocrats of the territory. This is the case of Sylvestrius, described by Fulgentius' biographer as "the most distinguished man of Byzacena," who donated to him a piece of land where he began the construction of a monastery, in the vicinity of the city of Junga (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* X, 1: *provinciae Byzacenae primario*). In addition to the material investments, Fulgentius also enjoyed the protection of people linked to the center of Vandal power. In an initiative by Fulgentius and Felix – one of his friends from his youth with whom he then shared the leadership of a monastery – to move their

community from ancient Byzacena to the ancient Proconsular, the center of Vandal power in Africa, Fulgentius was protected by an Arian bishop.

This occurred after Fulgentius and Felix, with their missionary activities in the Proconsular, rivalized and were suppressed by an Arian preacher who held influence in the vicinity of the ancient city of Sicca Venerea. This preacher sought to disrupt the activities of Fulgentius and Felix by capturing and torturing them (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* VI). However, as soon as news of the event reached Carthage, a “bishop of the Arians” (not named by Fulgentius’ biographer), to whose diocese the Arian preacher belonged, offered Fulgentius the opportunity to denounce the preacher so that he would suffer the appropriate reprisals (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* VII, 1). In this case, Fulgentius’ biographer reports that the preacher was motivated by his close relations with Fulgentius’ family, indicating that he placed his aristocratic loyalties above his religious differences.

In exile, Fulgentius wrote letters to equally powerful interlocutors from other regions of the Mediterranean, such as members of ancient senatorial families from the Italian Peninsula. Susan T. Stevens hypothesized that these contacts of Fulgentius, for the most part, came from his previous connections, stemming from his aristocratic family of senatorial origins (1982). As we study the nature of Fulgentius’ epistolary relations in exile, however, a more nuanced view will be proposed to this hypothesis, although without invalidating it. We shall see, in effect, that Fulgentius’ exilic communication benefited from his previous position and social relations. However, not all of their exilic interlocutors were previously known to him, with his connections depending on other factors.

Fulgentius’ communication in Sardinia

We do not possess writings of Fulgentius with Sardinian interlocutors. The study of his communication with people in the territory depends on the account of his biographer. From his biography, we have evidence that achieving a good reputation and developing ties with important interlocutors in the locality depended on several factors, marking a true novelty in his trajectory.

In Sardinia, Fulgentius is described by his biographer as acting in three ways: first, as a “spokesman” for other exiles, Fulgentius wrote letters (which have not reached us) from which he discussed and interfered in the problems of diverse Christian communities (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* XVIII, 1-2).

Second, Fulgentius and other exiles constituted a monastery where exiled bishops, clerics, and monks lived together. This first monastery had no recognizable material structure (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* XIX). Third, on their return to exile after their stay in Carthage, Fulgentius and other peers conquered another space in Sardinia, in the suburbs of the capital of Cagliari, where they built a second monastery (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* XXIV, 1). This monastery, unlike the previous one, probably had a recognizable material structure.

Fulgentius' activities in Cagliari, in general, suggest a period of adaptation to a new circumstance. In the role of "spokesman" for the exiles, he acted for his own benefit and that of other clerics, suggesting a first moment of adaptation to the exilic condition shared with them. Fulgentius' choice for the writing of these letters probably stemmed from his previous resources. From an early age, in fact, Fulgentius was educated in Greek and Latin because of Mariana, his mother (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* I, 2-3). He must have had a previous prominence among the exiles, since Thrasamund elected him as a guest to hold his debates.

The construction of the monasteries in Cagliari, in turn, indicates a deepening of relations between Fulgentius and the exiles with important people in the locality. In particular, the construction of the second monastery of Fulgentius and his peers took place by permission of Primasius, the Nicene leadership in the capital of Cagliari. The biographer informs us that the monastery was built where there was space available in the city (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* 24, 1). However, this monastery was located near an important center of worship in the city, the church of San Saturninus, a local saint. The available space, therefore, should be marked by the strong attraction of believers in its vicinity for celebrating the cult of this saint, keeping Fulgentius' group in great physical proximity to these flows.

The establishment of the relationship between Fulgentius and Primasius was probably influenced by the activities and increasing visibility acquired by the former in the territory. However, the Sardinian clerics maintained prior contacts with the African clerics around the very controversies that resulted in the exile of the latter. We can see this relationship in the *Notitia Provinciarum at Civitatum Africa*, a document prepared in the context of the Carthage conference of 489, organized by the sovereign Huneric, which listed the Nicene clerics who participated in it. Most of the clergy belonged to the ancient Roman provinces of Africa. However, five clerics from the main dioceses of Sardinia are mentioned to have participated in the

conference in defense of the African Nicenes (*Not. Prov. Civ. Afr. Sard.*), indicating earlier collaborative relations between the Nicene leaderships of Sardinia and Africa that could, in turn, be decisive for the support provided by the exiles in Cagliari far beyond Fulgentius's position in wider society.

Fulgentius' interlocutors in Africa

Africa is the territory from which Fulgentius was exiled, and also where his high social position was recognized. However, the history of his family and his own history before the exile indicates a difficulty of religious communication at the center of the territory's political and economic power, the ancient Proconsular Roman province, with its capital at Carthage. Gordianus, Fulgentius' grandfather and a member of the Carthage curia, fled the town (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* I, 1) and, later, Fulgentius' parents achieved a partial restoration of their estates in Byzacena, a province neighboring the Proconsular (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* I, 2). As an African monk and abbot, Fulgentius and Felix, despite having the collaboration of an Arian bishop, were beaten by a rival preacher in this province, in the vicinity of Sicca Venerea. They then decided to move to a different location (*Vita Fulg. Rusp.* VII, 1).

During the exile, Fulgentius was summoned by Thrasamund to return to Africa. During this period, he stayed in the capital of the Proconsular, the city of Carthage. He then wrote and circulated two treatises that contradicted the religious arguments of King Thrasamund (*ad. Tras.; trin.*), as well as writing against the Arian clerics of the capital (*Ad. Pint.*).

After being exiled, once again, to Sardinia, Fulgentius maintained long-distance communication with people from Carthage. Such is the case of Ferrand, a Nicene deacon in the capital, who established a lasting exchange of letters with Fulgentius (*Ep.* 11; *Ep.* 12; *Ep.* 13; *Ep.* 14). Ferrand's first letter to Fulgentius probably dates from Fulgentius' second exile (*Ep.* 13). Ferrand asked Fulgentius a series of doctrinal questions, as a true apprentice, to which Fulgentius responded. When Fulgentius probably returned from his second exile in Africa, with Hilderic's rise to power, Ferrand asked Fulgentius for clarification on how to proceed in a controversial case in his Church (*Ep.* 11).

Probably, all this communication of Fulgentius with Carthaginian interlocutors was influenced by his recognized social position in the

territory, especially after being summoned by Thrasamund. What we see in Fulgentius' activities in Carthage, in turn, is an effort to seize the opportunity to spread his religious ideas and strengthen his ties with local people. Regarding Thrasamund, as noted by Robin Whelan (2018: 162-163), although Fulgentius' treatises contradicted his religious arguments, they were marked by a formal language of true recognition of the Vandal king's sovereignty, suggesting an attempt at conciliation. On the other hand, the placing of his treatises in circulation beyond Thrasamund indicates an initiative of collective communication with the believers of the locality undertaken by Fulgentius.

This effort likely resulted in the expansion of his communication with important interlocutors in the locality. This is suggested by his ongoing communication with Ferrand. Although the latter was only a deacon, he exercised the office in the capital of the kingdom itself, and with their correspondence Fulgentius later acquired sufficient authority to speak up about the internal affairs of that Church. From the exile and, above all, from the invitation made to him by Thrasamund, therefore, Fulgentius began to overcome the limits of religious communication that he faced before the exile, spreading his words and deepening his relations in the very center of Vandal power in Africa.

Fulgentius' interlocutors in the Italian Peninsula

A large part of the letters from Fulgentius' exile were addressed to interlocutors in the Italian Peninsula. These interlocutors were the basis of Susan Stevens' hypothesis. In fact, many belonged to senatorial families, and Fulgentius wrote to them in family terms, offering them spiritual advice in various circumstances, as well as hinting at a long-standing relationship. These are the cases, for example, of Theodore (*Ep.* 6; *PLRE* II. 1097-1098), consul from 505 to 526, and Proba, descendant of a family of consuls (*Ep.* 3; *Ep.* 4; *PLRE* II. 907).

However, when we look closely at the contents of these letters, we observe that not all of Fulgentius' Italian correspondents were previously known to him. This is the case, for example, with Galla. Galla (*Galla* 5, *PLRE* II. 491) was a wealthy aristocrat, daughter of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, consul in 485 under Odovacer, who had become a widow, inheriting the estates of her late husband. Fulgentius' epistolary exchange with her took place after he was informed of her widowhood by a deacon of his community. This deacon spent some time in the city of Rome, learned of

what had happened, and then informed Fulgentius of the death of Galla's husband (*Ep.* 2, 1). From this information, Fulgentius wrote her a letter in which he lamented the death of her husband and offered her spiritual consolation. However, Fulgentius seemed to have another concern. Galla's husband had recently taken a religious vow, and Fulgentius feared that with his death, she would not keep it. In his letter, Fulgentius warned her about the seductions of the world, to which she should not yield by not spending her fortunes on material things. He also mentioned a common interlocutor as an example: Proba (*Ep.* 2:31), who had become a nun under the tutelage of Fulgentius' peers and was a close friend of Galla. With these warnings and mention, Fulgentius had the expectation that Galla would stay on the spiritual path of her late husband, reverting her fortunes to the benefit of the Church.

Galla, in fact, joined the monastery of St. Peter in Rome in the future. In the letter sent by Fulgentius to her, unlike others, however, we have no hint of an anteriority or continuity in his communication. This case suggests, therefore, that not all of Fulgentius' Italian correspondents were known to him in advance. His access to a person like her probably derived from his position in the wider society, descended from senators and close to people in Galla's social circle. What Fulgentius' letter shows us, on the other hand, is his active investment in expanding his ties with such interlocutors in exile. We also observe Fulgentius taking advantage of an opportunity, the death of Galla's husband and her widowhood, to get closer to her and influence her in favor of his peers' Church.

The exiles of Thrasamund and the monks of the East

In addition to his interlocutors from Sardinia, Africa, and the Italian Peninsula, Fulgentius also corresponded with monks from the city of Scythia in the East. This communication took place during a stay of these monks in the city of Rome. The monks moved to the city in an effort to win over Western supporters in religious controversies they promoted in the East. These controversies concerned the nature of Christ and brought trouble to the monks in relation to the Nicene Church of Constantinople. The problem was not the nature of the ideas they espoused, but the fact that they promoted debates on Christological questions at an inconvenient diplomatic period between the Churches of Constantinople and Rome, which had recently resumed their alliance after a long period of rupture.

The rupture between these Churches had been triggered by circumstances derived from the same Christological debates that the monks of Scythia were promoting. These debates were at the root of a long history of ecclesiastical divisions in the East, intensified by the outcome of the ecumenical council of Chalcedon in 451, which defined an ambiguous Christological conception that displeased the many divergent Eastern Christian parties. The emperor in the East, Zeno, sought to act in a conciliatory manner, publishing a confession of faith that reaffirmed the authority of the councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus, without making reference to the council of Chalcedon. In the West, however, the Church of Rome interpreted this confession as a rejection of the authority of that council, whose legitimacy was to be recognized by both Churches, leading it to break with the Church of Constantinople. The public recognition of the authority of the council of Chalcedon, and thus the re-establishment of the alliance between the Churches of Constantinople and Rome, took place only under the rule of Justin. It is quite possible, therefore, as Roy McGregor noted (2013: 16-20), that both the ecclesiastical authorities of Rome and those of Constantinople saw the controversies fostered by the monks as a potential risk to the fragile healing of the schism.

In Rome, the monks sought recognition from important interlocutors. Among these interlocutors, they wrote to the Africans exiled in Sardinia, explaining the circumstances in which they found themselves and seeking recognition of their religious ideas by the exiles. In this case, therefore, the monks seemed to recognize in advance the religious authority of the African exiles. On the other hand, they also opened up to the exiles an opportunity to communicate with a wider Eastern audience. In the first letter that the monks wrote to the exiles, in fact, they promised that if the exiles recognized the legitimacy of their ideas, the Christians of the East would rejoice (*Ep.* 16, I, 1), implying that the recognition of their ideas by the exiles would be widely disseminated. Moreover, Fulgentius, in particular, possibly saw in the communication with the monks an opportunity to publicize the cause of the African exiles in the East. The first letter he wrote to the monks was as a “spokesman” for a larger group of exiles (*Ep.* 17). However, after returning permanently to Africa, Fulgentius wrote his treatise *The Truth about Predestination and Grace* to John Maxentius, the leader of the monks of Scythia (*Ep.* 15), on his own initiative.

Unlike the rest of Fulgentius’ epistolary *corpus*, the letters exchanged with the monks of Scythia are the only ones in which exile is mentioned. In the first letter, dated of 519, Fulgentius mentioned that he was glad that the

monks were undertaking an investigation into the “secret reasons” of their exile (*Ep.* 17, 1, [I.]: *agnoscenda nostri excilii secreta perquirere*). In Fulgentius’ second letter to the monks, in 523, when he returned to Africa, he claimed that the letters they had exchanged in the past eased the pains of exile (*Ep.* 15, 2). Although exile is not the subject of the letters, these mentions suggest informal conversations between correspondents regarding its causes. In conjunction with the promise made by the monks to publicize the exiles to an Eastern audience, Fulgentius and his peers possibly saw in the communication with the monks an opportunity to spread their own cause in the East.

This case is interesting since it has become a common hypothesis among scholars of Vandal Africa that African exiles strove to spread the cause of exiles in the East to win imperial supporters. The communication between Fulgentius and the other African exiles with the monks, in turn, shows us the particular circumstances that could favor this narrative. However, it is equally important to note that, at the time when the communication was initiated, nothing had been decided, and the monks themselves were not recognized by the Nicene Churches of Constantinople and Rome.

Final considerations

Fulgentius’ communication in exile suggests some positive effects for the re-establishment of his religious authority, as well as for the publicity of the cause of African exiles to multiple audiences. In this sense, Fulgentius expanded and strengthened his ties with correspondents from different localities, from his land of exile, Sardinia, from the Italian Peninsula and the East. In addition to the interlocutors of these localities, the opportunity to return to Africa opened by Thrasamund also allowed Fulgentius to spread his words in the center of the Vandal power, the capital of Carthage, in the Proconsular province, where Fulgentius, before his exile, encountered difficulties in developing his religious activities.

What we observe from his documents is that this expansion of Fulgentius’ communication networks was not an automatic effect of exile, nor was it only a result of his previous family resources. It depended on the confluence of multiple factors, diverse opportunities built from specific situations. In this sense, Fulgentius’ religious communication at the center of Vandal power in Africa took shape among his exiles. The call for Fulgentius’ return to Africa, in turn, may have depended on his previous social prominence among his fellow exiles. However, from Carthage on,

Fulgentius undertook a real effort to spread his words and, consequently, to establish or strengthen his ties in the Vandal capital. Regarding his correspondents in Italy, they shared with Fulgentius a similar family situation, consuls or descendants of consuls, many of which belonged to senatorial circles and were previously known by Fulgentius. Based on these previous resources, in the situation of exile, Fulgentius seems to have acted to deepen and expand these ties. Fulgentius' family resources, however, seem to have been irrelevant for his interlocution in Sardinia and with the monks of Scythia. On the contrary, for the former, he relied on prior collaboration between the Nicene Churches of Africa and Sardinia, and, for the latter, on prior recognition by the monks of Scythia of the overall religious authority of the African exiles.

These factors suggest, therefore, that more than representing the communication networks of the exiled clerics in the period, a detailed study of the conditions and strategies mobilized by the exiles for the dissemination of their cause and recognition of their authority before multiple audiences is opportune for investigations on the subject. In this article, we investigate some of the factors and actions of a particular cleric, Fulgentius of Ruspe. Fulgentius, on the other hand, may have stood out among his fellow exiles for numerous factors. In addition, the ways in which he sought to win potential allies occurred from strategies mobilized by him in very specific situations. This draws our attention to the fact that, if Fulgentius was able to strengthen and expand his ties with important people from various locations in the Mediterranean during exile, for other exiled clerics, the conditions for carrying out this work could be different. It may not be random, in this sense, that among the 60 or 200 bishops exiled by Thrasamund in Sardinia, we have access to the words and actions of only one of them.

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