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Living among the Graves: The Cult of the Dead from Rome to Donatist Africa

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Living Among The Graves:
The Cult of the Dead from Rome to Donatist Africa

Research Master Thesis

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Introduction

The Donatist Problem and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Much has been written on the character and the identity of the Donatists. Traditionally, the testimonials found in textual sources, all stemming from the Donatist's opposition, were read at *prima facie*, creating the impression that the Donatists and their schism were fuelled by the uncivilized nature of local Africans, having been imperfectly Romanised as well as only superficially Christianised.[1] This portrayal of the Donatists, completely reliant on the polemic treatise of Optatus of Milevis (fl. 366/7)[2] and the writings of Augustine, who became the bane of the Donatists, has endured for far too long.[3] But starting with William H. C. Frend, efforts have been made to rehabilitate the Donatists.[4] Rather than labelling the Donatists as savage and obtuse due to their origins, scholars have begun to recognize their perseverance as indicative of specific social or political movements.[5]

In a way, this suspicion towards what was at the time the established interpretation of the Donatists could be said to have anticipated the changing attitude towards textual sources ushered in by the works of scholars such as Elizabeth Clarke and Eric Rebillard.[6] In her 1998 article on early Christian Women, Clarke deconstructed ancient sources searching for evidence of a female voice. Having approached these texts with "hermeneutics of suspicion", she concluded that "we cannot with certainty claim to hear the voices of "real" women in early Christian texts, so appropriated have they been by male authors." Her assessment concerning literary evidence became a warning for the historian: "The leap from "representation" to the extratextual world crosses a wide and ugly ditch whose expanse we historians should take care not to underestimate."[7] Nearly twenty years after Clarke's groundbreaking paper, Rebillard noted that despite scholars acknowledging Clarke's caveat, the outcomes were disappointing. Rebillard's description of the current state of early Christian scholarship is bleak: "The field is at the stage when most scholars either deliberately do not use texts as evidence of an "extra-textual social reality" or, if they do, they ignore that this is not a straightforward process."[8]

Clarke's claim regarding Christian women could be equally applied to the image of the Donatists as they appear in the Catholic sources. Any attempt to jump blindly over the "wide and ugly ditch" separating the Catholic texts from the Donatists extratextual existence seems unlikely to succeed.

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[1] Gibbon's statement encapsulates this 'hostile' interpretation of the Donatists: Gibbon 1994: 821: "The peasants who inhabited the villages of Numidia and Mauretania were a ferocious race, who had been imperfectly reduced under the authority of the Roman laws; who were imperfectly converted to the Christian faith; but who were activated by blind and furious enthusiasm for their Donatist teachers."

[2] Bass 2018.

[3] Miles 2016, 35 remarks that Geoffrey Willis for instance still advocated such views in the 1950's.

[4] Miles 2016, 36.

[5] Frend 1952, 336: "Donatism was not merely a schism, it was part of a revolution."

[6] See for instance Clarke 2004 and Rebillard 2012.

[7] Clarke 1998, 430.

[8] Rebillard 2012, 1.

The Nomenclature of the Schism

One issue arising from the Catholic propaganda is how to refer to the competing Churches in Roman North Africa. Both sides understood that a significant part of their conflict revolved around their names and the right to call themselves the one true Christian Church in Africa.[9] During the great Carthaginian conference of 411, when the imperial notary announced the opposing parties as the *episcopi ecclesiae Catholicae* and the *episcopi partis Donati*, Petilianus, the leading Donatist bishop at the conference, protested bitterly:

Episcopus nos veritatis Christi domini nostri et dicimus et saepe actis publicis dictum est.[10]

The eventual victory of Augustine's party implied that the title of Catholics was won while their rivals would be called Donatists. These names encapsulate the narrative constructed by the Catholics and categorize Donatism as another schism that received its name from its schismatic founder (such as Arianism, after Arius or Pelagianism after Pelagius).[11]

As historians strive to uncover the untainted history of the Donatist Church, efforts have been made to revise this traditional terminology. Ramsay MacMullen's decision to call the opposing Churches Donatist and Caecilianist,[12] seems to me to be the fairest solution as it removes any bias by reducing both Churches to factions that originated with the disputed election of 307/312. However, using these names, which were vehemently rejected by the respective Churches, attributes a schismatic quality to both, despite each viewing themselves as the continuation of the Christian Church of Africa, the Church of Cyprian, Perpetua, and Felicitas. Only a few scholars have adopted MacMullen's solution (e.g. Alden Bass), while others have proposed their own alternatives. Brent Shaw, in his book *Sacred Violence*, admits that "bad names are at the very heart of my problem," and therefore rejects the use of the name 'Donatist', which he considers "a pejorative label foisted on them by the Catholics."[13] While he does concede the term Catholic to define the Church of Augustine, he is compelled to find an alternative name for the Donatists. After rejecting the term "African" Christians which he had used previously for the Donatists, he proposes to call them the "dissident or dissenting party," due to them being a minority persecuted by the majority.[14] This argument is unsatisfying because, as Shaw himself states, it holds true only from a global perspective, given that in Africa the Donatists outnumbered the Catholics.[15]

I believe that much of the difficulty in coming up with a suitable name with which to label the opposing Churches stems from the fact that the identity of both these parties is still misunderstood. The straightforward solution of using the names they identified with is not feasible, as both identified themselves with the labels 'Catholic' or simply 'Christian Church.' However, when an attempt is made to distinguish both parties with labels that characterize them appropriately, the results are unsatisfactory. Shaw's proposal to call the Donatist Church either the African Christians or the dissenting party has been

[9] *Gesta Collationis Carthaginensis* 3.93: *Petilianus: Etiam de ipso nomine erit disputatio nobis atque contention.*
[10] *Gesta Collationis Carthaginensis* 2.10; Shaw 2011, 563.
[11] Miles 2016, 14.
[12] MacMullen 2009, 50.
[13] Shaw 2011, 5.
[14] Shaw 2011, 6.
[15] Shaw 2011, 6; Miles 2016, 15.

considered to mischaracterize the Donatists, and faced with these imperfect solutions most scholars have opted to stick with the traditional nomenclature.[16]

For this thesis, in order to avoid unnecessary confusion and since all the solutions proposed so far appear inadequate, I will also adhere to the traditional nomenclature. Since the present work aims to uncover aspects of Donatist identity, I hope its results will offer new insights which may suggest new labels for the rival Churches in North Africa.

Rehabilitating the Donatists: an Issue of Sources

While textual sources have increasingly been scrutinized with 'hermeneutics of suspicion,' the heavy reliance on textual sources remains evident due to the lack of alternative sources. Even the portrayal of the Donatists by Frend, whose attempt to break old preconceptions was lauded, remained entirely dependent on the testimonials of Augustine and Optatus. To counter this antagonistic portrayal, scholars have sought endemic Donatist narratives.[17] Maureen Tilley pioneered this approach by identifying Donatist martyr stories in North Africa's hagiographic literature, using these sources to present an unbiased portrayal of the Donatists.[18]

Tilley's work was beyond any doubt a welcome step in the right direction, but her method is not without weaknesses. Only martyr stories with explicit Donatist characteristics, like polemical references to the schism, could be deemed 'Donatist.' But what proves these stories represent the Donatists broadly, or that stories without schism references are Catholic? Tilley's method risks linking Donatist identity to the schism, echoing the Catholic view from 1600 years ago. It's crucial to remember that the Donatists saw themselves as the true Church of Christ. For them, the schism marked the beginning of the Caecilianist faction, not of the "Donatist Church." Linking Donatist identity to Caecilian's election characterizes them as schismatics, reinforcing the Catholic narrative.

Thus, we reach a conundrum: On the one hand, any attempt to extrapolate the Donatist character from the Catholic texts falls prey to Catholic propaganda. On the other, if one attempts to identify a voice as "Donatist", that is, to find authentic Donatist texts, what other criteria can we use than those provided by the Catholics? Could there be an alternative approach to this problem, one that perhaps is not entirely dependent on texts?

The study of early Christianity has predominantly been a study of textual sources and most scholars seem reluctant to leave the comfort zone of 'tried and tested' methods. Writing in 1992, Ian Morris, gave a sobering account of the field of ancient studies as he saw it: "Classicists who rely mainly on texts and those who rely mainly on archaeological evidence often act as if they were two sides in a competition, and one day an impartial observer will judge whose evidence is best and who wins the game." Morris though offers a solution: "We have to take our evidence where we can find it; and my argument here has been that we need to combine as many genres as possible."[19]

[16] Miles 2016, 15.
[17] Miles 2016, 2.
[18] Tilley 1996; Tilley 1997; Miles 2016, 42.
[19] Morris 1992, 200.

Donatist Identity and the Cult of the Dead

This situation led me to explore Donatist identity from a different angle, focusing on the cult of the dead. This term encompasses all funerary and post-funerary rites. Inspired by scholars who embraced the material turn, I hypothesize that the cult of the dead and its associated structures, like tombs and monuments, can reveal aspects of personal identities, especially those marginalized or oversimplified in texts.

Studying the cult of the dead offers a significant advantage in exploring the identity of the non-elite in Roman North Africa. It liberates historians from sole reliance on textual sources, enabling the integration of diverse sources like funerary inscriptions and material remains. Direct study of inscriptions and structures erected by ordinary individuals allows them to speak for themselves, rather than being represented by intellectual elites. This extratextual evidence can corroborate and contextualize narratives from elite writings, particularly those of Catholic bishops aiming to discredit the Donatists, potentially revealing insights into the Donatist identity.

Collective Memory and Mythmaking

To clarify my hypothesis, I will elaborate on two key concepts that provide a conceptual link between the cult of the dead and the emergence of local identity: collective memory and mythmaking or mythopoesis. While collective memory is a concept that has only recently gained traction in various academic fields, it was first worked out by Maurice Halbwachs almost a century ago. A disciple of Émile Durkheim, Halbwachs was interested in how humans render their past meaningful.[20] His theory was criticized and largely neglected until it was recovered by German cultural historian Jan Assmann in the late 80's.[21] Assmann refines and further develops Halbwachs' concept (into „Kommunikatives Gedächtnis" and „kulturelles Gedächtnis"), but, for this dissertation, Halbwachs' collective memory as revised by Assman will prove sufficient as a helpful analytical tool.

Assman writes that memory, for Halbwachs, was a social construct conditioned by social frameworks (*cadres sociaux*). Outside these social frameworks, which stabilize and constitute memory, no act of memory is possible.[22] Collective memory is therefore not to be understood as the memory of a given group but rather how the memory of an individual is shaped by the social frameworks of his group.[23] This dependency of the act of memory on the dynamics of the group leads Assmann to assert that memory lives through communication.[24]

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[20] Castelli 2004, 11.

[21] Assmann 1999, 45.

[22] Assmann 1999, 35-36 citing Halbwachs 1985, 121: „Es gibt kein mögliches Gedächtnis außerhalb derjenigen Bezugsrahmen, deren sich die Gesellschaft lebende Menschen bedienen, um ihre Erinnerungen zu fixieren und wiederzufinden."

[23] Assmann 1999, 36: "Zwar haben Kollektive kein Gedächtnis, aber sie bestimmen das Gedächtnis ihrer Glieder … Subjekt von Gedächtnis und Erinnerung bleibt immer der einzelne Mensch, aber in Abhängigkeit von den ‚Rahmen', die seine Erinnerung organisieren"

[24] Assmann 1999, 37: „Das Gedächtnis lebt und erhält sich in der Kommunikation." Also Russell 2006, 796: "According to Halbwachs, groups reconstruct their past experiences collectively … [an individual] does not have an independent memory of the past."

An important aspect of Halbwachsian collective memory is its spatial nature. To guarantee the longevity of a given memory, certain spaces, which Assmann calls *Kristallisationspunkte* and Pierre Nora later calls *lieux de mémoire*, need to be consecrated to collective memory.[25] A specific memory is not only anchored in such a space, but it is also strengthened and renewed by periodic acts of commemoration which take place there. Assmann therefore concludes that "jede Gruppe, die sich als solche konsolidieren will, ist bestrebt, sich Orte zu schaffen und zu sichern, die nicht nur Schauplätze ihrer Interaktionsformen abgeben, sondern Symbole ihrer Identität und Anhaltspunkte ihrer Erinnerung. Das Gedächtnis braucht Orte, tendiert zur Verräumlichung."[26]

As highlighted by the quote above, collective memory and group identity are intricately linked.[27] According to Halbwachs, remembering involves interpreting the past, thereby imbuing it with significance. The incorporation of the past into collective memory not only assigns meaning to it but also shapes the group's understanding of their reality and their place within it, essentially defining their identity.[28]

This emergence of a group identity from a meaningful past aligns significantly with the process of mythmaking.[29] Both these concepts are complementary and in certain instances interact with one another. This is the case, in Pierre Nora's definition of collective memory, where events of the past, as they are incorporated into collective memory, become mythicized.[30] This process is especially conspicuous when studying the formation of religious identities. Elizabeth Castelli, in her 2004 book *Martyrdom and Memory*, uses mythmaking as an interpretive tool to explain the processes that led to the formation of the identity of early Christian groups. Fully aware that introducing the idea of myth to the discussion of early Christian identity might be considered polemical, she defines the concept carefully: "'Myth,' in this context, refers to narratives that promote a coherent portrait of the past and forge links within a community and among its members and between the community and its claimed past."[31] This corresponds partially to the process of meaning-making through collective memory and the emergence of group identity as described by Assmann. Castelli then sketches out her objective: "By using the language of mythmaking concerning the early Christian martyr traditions, I seek to draw attention to the ways that the memory of suffering became a resource for culture making and identity formation in other settings and contexts."[32]

[25] Assmann 1999, 38.
[26] Assmann 1999, 39.
[27] Assmann 1999, 46: „An verschiedenen Beispielen vermag er [Halbwachs] zu illustrieren, wie Gruppenerinnerung und Gruppenidenitität unauflöslich in gegenseitiger Bedingung verknüpft sind." Russell 2006: 797: "According to Halbwachs, a group becomes conscious of its identity through an awareness of its own past."
[28] Assmann 1999, 38: Citing Halbwachs 1985, 389: „Eine Persönlichkeit und jedes historisches Faktum wird schon bei seinem Eintritt in dieses Gedächtnis in eine Lehre, einen Begriff, ein Symbol transponiert; es erhält einen Sinn, es wird zu einem Element des Ideensystems der Gesellschaft." Also Halbwachs 1985 209: „In ihnen [d.h. den Erinnerungen] druckt sich die allgemeine Haltung der Gruppe aus; sie reproduzieren nicht nur ihre Vergangenheit, sondern sie definieren Ihre Wesensart, Ihre Eigenschaften und Ihre Schwächen."
[29] Hatina & Lukes 2022, 15,
[30] Nora 1978, 398: "En première approximation, la mémoire collective est le souvenir, ou l'ensemble des souvenirs, conscients ou non, d'une expérience vécue et/ou mythifiée par une collectivité vivante de l'identité de laquelle le sentiment du passé fait partie intégrante."
[31] Castelli 2004, 30.
[32] Castelli 2004, 32.

I will explore to some extent similar themes as Castelli's, albeit with a crucial difference. Castelli draws her evidence to the martyr cult from textual sources, and this in turn results in a focus on the "memory work," and consequently mythmaking, done by the authorities, be it the state, the Church, or simply intellectual elites.[33] In my project, I aim to shift the focus to the non-ruling, non-elite classes, specifically, the popular classes. This shift is essential in studies of ancient Christianity, as most converts belonged to the urban middle and lower classes. [34]

This highlights why I chose the cult of the dead to clarify unresolved questions in Christian history, especially Donatist identity. It offers abundant extratextual evidence to corroborate textual sources and provides insights into the lives of common people through their surviving tombs.

Approaches and Proposed Plan of Investigation

Using the cult of the dead as a lens to investigate the Donatist identity appears as a reasonable endeavour, yet various obstacles arise from this task. Despite the vast amount of funerary material unearthed in North Africa, dating these objects, especially the earliest ones, with a confident degree of certainty remains extremely difficult. Another challenge resides in distinguishing Christian from pagan funerary evidence, particularly in the period before Constantine, when distinctive Christian marks were rare. While after Constantine, Christian structures became more easily identifiable, distinguishing Donatist from Catholic structures has proven to be an almost impossible task.

Given these challenges, it becomes essential to outline a broad evolution of the cult of the dead and its local and period-specific trends. This outline will be established by combining a variety of sources, both textual and material, and will provide the context against which specific findings can be examined and conclusions about the conduct of the people can be drawn. This involves exploring the pagan roots of the cult of the dead and its evolution from Rome to Christian North Africa, highlighting its role in establishing collective memory and shaping identity.

Studying pagan habits to glean insights into Christian attitudes, when approached with careful analysis, aligns with current trends in early Christian studies. Many scholars in the past few decades have sought to expose the clear-cut distinction which is traditionally made between Christians and non-Christians in the late Roman world. In 1995, Peter Brown had to remind his readership that the early Christians "were set in an ancient, pre-Christian spiritual landscape", a perspective to which, he confessed, "our modern eyes take some time to adjust."[35] In her 1998 paper on the forging of Christian identity, Judith Lieu noted how a preconceived binary opposition between Christians and Non-Christians deformed our views: "[many attempts to understand Christian identity] operate with an oppositional model, leading to a tendency to see early Christian formation exclusively in opposition to Graeco-Roman society: where Christianity adopted contemporary social patterns it is frequently said to have reversed or inverted them."

This applies equally to the cult of the dead as celebrated by the Christians. For a long time, it has been assumed that Christians, like Jews, were buried separately in their own cemeteries, bolstering the idea of

[33] Castelli 2004: 23
[34] Jones 1963: 16-17
[35] Brown 1995: 4

a distinct Christian cult of the dead from the outset. [36] and has lent force to the supposition of a distinctive Christian cult of the dead from the beginning. However, scholars such as Eric Rebillard argue that despite the rhetoric of Christian apologists and bishops, in late antiquity, Christian burials were often familial and followed pre-Christian traditions, with little interference from the Church.[37] In this atmosphere of revision and openness to challenging traditional historical theories, I aim to approach early Christians not as separate from their pagan neighbours, but as emerging within and deeply embedded in their cultural attitudes, some of which they may have rejected, while others they adopted. In this hypothesis of relative continuity, studying pagan habits and rites may reveal characteristics of modest Christians (if corroborated by material evidence) that extend beyond what the texts of the elites intend to show us.

Thus, the research question at the heart of this thesis is: Can the cult of the dead inform on popular identities, such as in the case of the Donatist Church? To reach an answer, we must proceed slowly and carefully, dividing the issue into three sub-questions, each of which will be dealt with in its respective chapter.

Firstly, what is the relationship between funerary rituals, structures, and identity? Answering this requires a deep understanding of the psychology behind different behaviours and decisions, which can often only be studied through literary texts. Due to the abundance of such sources relative to Rome, I have decided to start this investigation by examining behaviours from about 100 BC to 200 AD in Rome. I am especially interested in exploring whether Romans were consciously aware of the connection between the cult of the dead and one's identity, and whether they exploited this connection.

Secondly, how did the processes of identity formation inherent to the cult of the dead adapt in Roman North Africa? Turning to North Africa, I aim to examine how the region's incorporation into the Roman Empire influenced practices related to the cult of the dead. It is crucial to establish the relationship between Rome and Africa and explore how these two cultures interacted, particularly regarding their impact on the cult of the dead. I am particularly interested in determining whether funerary material evidence excavated in Roman North Africa can attest to the same psychological tendencies that motivated the behaviours regarding the funerary cult and identity in Rome. Once this is established, I will need to consider whether such ego-driven desires, such as self-aggrandizement through funeral rites, manifested similarly or differently compared to Rome. To this end, rituals of post-funerary commemoration will be explored in both Rome and North Africa, utilizing material evidence such as inscriptions and excavations of African necropolises.

Lastly, how did Christians in North Africa adapt and integrate the processes of identity formation and preservation within the cult of the dead, and how did this adaptation impact their identity? I will assess whether African Christians developed distinct cultural practices concerning the dead or if they inherited the same practices and underlying beliefs from Roman African culture. I will utilize the testimonials of Tertullian and Cyprian not as documentary evidence, but with the necessary hermeneutics of suspicion, juxtaposing their testimonials against material evidence and the framework of the cult described in previous chapters. The unique aspects of the Christian cult of the dead, especially that of the martyrs, will be studied, always within a broader context that seeks to provide a comprehensive portrayal of the situation, integrating both material and literary evidence.

[36] E.g. Barnes 1985, 89: "Both communities [Jews and Christians in Carthage] were buried in separate cemeteries."
[37] Rebillard 2003.

Having explored the cult's significance among Christians and its impact on their identity, I will then delve into contentious issues of the Donatist controversy. By understanding the structures that stabilize and define Christian identity, I can contextualize the roles of different Churches within the broader framework of African Christian identity. This approach aims to shed light on the identities of both rival Churches.

Hopefully, this work will exemplify how historians, especially Church historians, can move beyond total reliance on textual evidence and integrate various types of sources. By exploring aspects of continuity from pagan to Christian practices and conducting careful analysis, historians can combine different sources in their discussions, leading to a richer, deeper, and more complex understanding of historical realities.

Chapter One: *Dis Manibus*: The Dead Romans

quoniam vita ipsa qua fruimur brevis est,
memoriam nostri quam maxume longam efficere.

Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 1

"Kaum werden wir geboren", wrote the Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard, "fliehen wir den Tod".[38] And while death befalls everyone indiscriminately, we humans have sought to mitigate its annihilating effect by preserving the memory of the deceased. In Roman times, as Seneca the Elder remarked, memory was the "undying guardian of human works", which gave everlasting life to great men.[39] But was it only great men in Antiquity who wished for eternal life beyond the grave?

By examining the volumes of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL) it quickly becomes evident that this urge to preserve one's memory affected people from all the different layers of Roman society. This need to safeguard the memory, which according to Varro is the function of any monument,[40] led to the raising of innumerable funerary structures along the roads of Rome and other cities. The monument became the embodiment of the memory of the deceased, and consequently the deceased himself.[41]

The present chapter will aim to reveal the intricacies of the process of memory formation for posteriority. I will be concerned with the rites and behaviours contiguous to the moment of death. Since any sort of commemoration served to fight off "jealous oblivion",[42] it was partaking in the process of posthumous memory formation. Therefore all stages of the funerary practices are relevant for this study. I will begin by describing the funerary rites which accompanied a death in the family and will attempt to elucidate on the functionality of the cult, notably its social, as opposed to religious, character.

I will begin by presenting the general proceeding of a Roman funeral, as described in the ancient sources. Both the funerals of the ruling elites and the non-elites will be addressed, and their relationship explored. In the second part of the chapter I will consider particular behaviours of the individual participants of the cult.

I wish to focus on the different roles assumed by the participants of these rites. Were these roles passive, simply following the expected sets of behaviours, or did they allow the participants to manipulate the situation for their own gain?

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[38] Bernhard, *Elisabeth II* ("As soon as we are born we flee death", my translation).

[39] Seneca, *Suasoriae* 6,5: *Immortalis humanorum operum custos memoria, qua magnis viris vita perpetua est, in omnia te saecula sacratum dabit;* Cf. also Cicero, *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 2,18: *Mors terribilis iis, quorum cum vita omnia extinguuntur, non iis, quorum laus emori non potest.* Sanders 1960, 11 calls this "een grondtrek van de antieke Romeinse mentaliteit".

[40] Varro. *De Lingua Latina* 6.49: *cetera quae scripta ac facta memoriae causa monumenta*.

[41] Häusle 1980, 72 n.150 mentions a Greek epitaph found in Smyrna and dated to the 2nd century BC, the deceased states the while once he was alive, now he has become "stele, tomb, stone and image."

[42] Horace, *Odes* 4.9.30-34: *non ego te meis chartis inornatum silebo, totve tuos patiar labores impune, Lolli, carpere lividas oblivions.*

Any such act of manipulation would play an essential role within the process of posthumous memory formation. To what extent did these manipulations occur? Were they purposely done or unconsciously? Which were the circumstances which led to the construction of memory? What was the mindset, the intentions of those partaking in such acts? And what were the reactions of those observing from the outside, such as moralists and satirists like Plutarch, Martial and others? By engaging with such sources, I hope to be able to reveal the psychology behind the behaviours of those participating in the process of memory formation.

* * *

1.1 The *Funus*

nec mea consueto languescent corpora lecto,
depositum nec me qui fleat, ullus erit ;
nec dominae lacrimis in nostra cadentibus ora
accedent animae tempora parua meae ;
nec mandata dabo, nec cum clamore supremo
labentes oculos condet amica manus ;
sed sine funeribus caput hoc, sine honore sepulcri
indeploratum barbara terra teget.

Ovid, *Tristia* 3.3.39-46

As the exiled poet foreshadows his death amidst the confines of the empire, he laments all that he shall be deprived of and which would guarantee that which Romans considered a 'good death'.[43] He imagines his death were he at home, with friends and family assembling around his familiar bed as his body would slowly languish away. As he lied there dying those around him would weep and lament his demise,[44] with the poet adding that even a teardrop of his wife would be able to extend slightly further his last moments. Traditionally, a last kiss would be given by the nearest relative, another would close his eyes and then those present would call out the name of the deceased.[45] Death is a moment of union and farewell to the familiar, emphasizing the significance of it occurring at home.[46]

[43] Noy 2011, 1.
[44] Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 3.894ff provides an example of how these lamentations sounded like. Also Lucian, *On Funerals* 13.
[45] Toynbee 1971, 43-44.
[46] Servius 5, 64 notes an ancient custom where, regardless of where one died, they were brought back to their home: *si nona diem mortalibus almum … et sciendum quia apud maiores ubiubi quis fuisset extinctus, ad domum suam referebatur: unde est "sedibus hunc refer ante suis" : et illic septem erat diebus, octauo incendebatur, nono sepeliebatur.*

The body was exposed in the *atrium* of the house following the tradition of the lying-in-state. The *atrium* served as the centre of the house, yet scholars of ancient Rome have also regarded it as a public space.[47] A well-known representation of the lying-in-state is found amongst the exquisite first century AD reliefs of the Haterii Tomb (fig 1.), found along the *Via Labicana*. Therein we see a deceased woman lying on a bier in the *atrium* of her house, surrounded by her family and household slaves, but also by professional mourners (*praeficae*)[48] and musicians. The house is decorated with garlands and a large acanthus leaf is seen on the left edge of the relief which has been interpreted as representing the foliage traditionally hung up in front of the house-door meant to signify a death in the house.[49] Burning torches surround the bier on which deceased is seen laying, while the mourners, including the *praeficae*, are wailing and lamenting her death. All the figures express grief either by their appearance (notably the loose hair) or by their actions (beating their breast or clasping one knee in a crestfallen stance) while the deceased lady lies with a serene expression on her face, creating a palpable contrast. Her elegant attire and the perfumes with which she has been anointed create an aura of "beauté incorruptible," setting her apart from the dishevelled mourners.[50] It is her who takes centre stage of this domestic representation, she appears as the uniting factor of the household, and even dead she still impacts domestic life.[51]

Figure 1 Haterii Tomb Relief (Vatican Museum)

[47] Flaig 2004, 75: "A Rome, l'atrium n'était pas une pièce privée, mais publique ; tous les matins, il était ouvert à la clientèle."

[48] Toynbee 1971: 45

[49] Servius 3, 64, writes of a cypress branch which would be hung at the house-door: *Moris autem Romani fuerat ramum cupressi ante domum funestam poni, ne quisquam pontifex per ignorantiam pollueretur ingressus*.

[50] Scheid 1982, 120; Lucretius, On Funerals 11: "Then they bathe them (as if the lake down below were not big enough for the people there to bathe in); and after anointing with the finest of perfume that body which is already hasting to corruption, and crowning it with pretty flowers, they lay them in state, clothed in splendid raiment" (trans. A. M. Harmon)

[51] On the bottom right corner three figures are seen clasping the knee and wearing a *pileus* meaning they are household slaves who were manumitted by the deceased's will, a common practice. This practice of freeing slaves through the will had become so common that Augustus imposed a limit through his *Lex Fufia Caninia*. (Bodel 1999, 262.) The agency of the deceased is furthermore supported by an inset which hovers over the lying-in-state scene: there we see the lady writing her will which goes to show that her actions are alive in spite of her death.

While the lying-in-state ritual is as noted a domestic and therefore private commemoration of the dead, it does leak nonetheless into the public sphere. As mentioned above, foliage would be hung on the house-door to announce to the outside world the death within. Additionally, Varro tells us that the *praeficae* would chant a *laudes* in front of the dead person's house.[52] The music played within the *domus* would also easily be heard outside.[53] Therefore, although the lying-in-state was mostly a private affair, there was still a deliberate display of the rite aimed at the public sphere.

The aristocratic funeral was a proper public spectacle. Polybius, who would have witnessed such funerals in the mid-second century BC, describes how illustrious man had their body carried to the Rostra where it would be exhibited to the public while the son or another relative would address the people present with a *laudatio,* a speech celebrating the life's achievements of the deceased.[54] Masks called *imagines* and capturing the likeness of these illustrious men and women would be worn by individuals at the funerary procession to reincarnate the family ancestors. As Flaig and Dumézil keenly noted, the aristocratic funerary ritual as described by Polybius was to elevate the value of the whole family rather than just the deceased.[55] Polybius himself hints that the funerary procession was meant to inspire the surviving offspring of the family,[56] especially the one performing the *laudatio*.[57] But the memory of the ancestors would also be cherished by those beyond the family. After the funeral, the *imagines* of the ancestors would be kept in a wooden cabinet in the family house, but we also know of instances when others, most likely political associates or just admirers of the deceased, would keep such masks in their houses.[58]

For non-elite funerary processions in Rome, insights come from reliefs like that of Armiternum, dated to either the late Republic or the Augustan period. In this representation of the funerary cortege, we see a dead man in a large bier being transported by eight men and led by a ninth man referred to as the *dissignator*. [59] They are preceded by several musicians, flute and trumpet players, and followed by several mourners which probably represent close relatives or friends. All along the path to the grave, the mourners join in the practice of *conclamatio*, that is of crying out the name of the deceased. One can

[52] Varro, *De Lingua Latina* 7, 70: *praefica dicta, ut Aurelius scribit, mulier de lucro quae conduceretur quae ante domum mortui laudes eius caneret.*

[53] During Petronius' mock funeral, discussed in detail below, the funerary music played by his servants was so loud that the whole neighborhood panics thinking it to be a fire alarm.

[54] Of the few *laudatio* that have survived to our days, the *Laudatio Turiae* (ILS 8393), given by a grieving husband to his late wife during Augustan's principate, is in my opinion the most touching.

[55] Flaig 2004, 77; Dumézil 1966, 358: "L'impressionnante cérémonie de la *pompa funebris*, dans laquelle figuraient les morts de la *gens* avec les insignes de leurs fonctions, ne relève pas du culte des morts, mais a pour objet de rendre sensible aux yeux , en ce monde, la gloire de la famille."

[56] Polybius 6.53.10: "There could not easily be a more ennobling spectacle for a young man who aspires to fame and virtue. For who would not be inspired by the sight of the images of men renowned for their excellence, all together and as if alive and breathing? What spectacle could be more glorious than this?" (trans. W. R. Paton)

[57] Plutarch, *Caesar* 5.2 narrates how a young Julius Cesar won over the admiration of the people by pronouncing a splendid *laudatio* at his aunt's funeral in 69 BC.

[58] Cicero, *Pro Rabirio Perduelliones* 9.24, writes how Sextus Tititus was punished for having *imagines* of the condemned revolutionary Saturninus in his house, and following that no one (probably referring to admirers of Saturninus' policies) dared to keep such mask of Saturninus at home; This practice carried on into the imperial period, as Pliny in *Letters* 1.17, observes that Titinus Capito had *imagines* of the conspirators: *Mirum est qua religione quo studio imagines Brutorum Cassiorum Catonum domi ubi potest habeat.*

[59] Toynbee 1971, 47.

easily imagine the loud commotion that such a procession would evoke, as the cries of the mourners mingled with the sounds of the horns, trumpets and flutes. Such a cortege would not pass by unnoticed; it sought the attention of those passing by and in this regard, it was very much a spectacle.

Figure 2 Armiternum Relief (Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo)

The most desired burial locations were along the main roads leading to Rome, ideally near the city gates. Once the procession arrived at the tomb, the body would be either cremated or inhumated on location.[60] In the case of cremation, the body would be burned together with the bier along with offerings meant to accompany the dead in their afterlife. Also thrown into the blazing flames would be parts of the pig sacrificed to Ceres which ratified the tomb as such.[61] The spoils of this sacrifice, known as *porca praesentanea*,[62] were divided amongst the living, the deceased, and Ceres, a goddess who, though not chthonic herself, remained in communication with the Hades. After the flames extinguished, attendees would gather the remains in an urn for placement inside the tomb.

The mourners would finally celebrate a funerary banquet at the graveside, known as the *Silicernium*,[63] and then head back home, but not before pronouncing a farewell word: *ilicet*, contraction of *ire licet*. It has been suggested that this permission to leave worked both ways, for the living who would return to city, and for the dead who would finalize his voyage into the underworld.[64] *Ilicet* therefore signifies the separation between the deceased and his *familia funesta*, which up to then had remained together in an ambiguous state between the city of the living and that of the dead.

[60] The common way to dispose a body in the late Republican and early Imperial period was through cremation. However in the second century AD a shift occurs and it becomes more common to dispose a body through inhumation. Voisin 2014, 89-90.
[61] Toynbee 1971, 50, Cicero, *De Legibus* 2.22.57.
[62] Voisin 2014, 91.
[63] Servius 5.92.1 claims that the word comes from this dinner being place on a stone (*silex*), that is, the tomb. Note also Apuleius, *Florida* 19.6: *Confestim exclamavit vivere hominem: procul igitur faces abicerent, procul ignes amolirentur, rogum demolirentur, cenam feralem [sc. Silicernium] a tumulo ad mensam referrent.*
[64] Voisin 2014: 93. This has been theorized by Lucienne Deschamps.

1.2 The Spectacle and its Audience

"All the world's a stage,
and all the men and women merely players."

Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

In the next section, I will closely examine the theatrical dimension of the Roman funeral, as it allowed participants to influence the posthumous memory through their own actions. Cicero denounced the many exaggerations and lies which would often creep into funerary *laudationes*,[65] but lying was not the only way to engineer one's legitimacy, other subtle techniques could be employed.[66] This aspect of the funeral, designed as a spectacle to convey a specific narrative to its audience, is crucial for understanding the role of the funerary cult in shaping memory and fostering identity.

The theatricality of the Roman funeral was originally only significant for the ruling class in their struggle to assert themselves in the highly ritualized and formulaic social memory of Rome.[67] As the political stage during the Roman Republic gradually became the battleground for "aggressive memory wars",[68] the importance of the Roman funeral could not be underestimated by the elites. In fact, before the rise of the principate, aristocrats controlled the monopoly on public memory,[69] which was tailored carefully to suit and back their political ambitions, leading Harriet Flower to declare that "Roman memory was political memory."[70] She also remarked that the status of the elite was defined by its public reputation, as reflected in the etymology of the word *nobilitas*.[71] Political memory in Rome was the memory channelled, often through spectacles, by the elites into the heart of the Roman people.[72]

The aristocratic funeral was the perfect occasion for the leading families of Rome to win over the *favor populi*.[73] In 328 BC M. Flavius gave a generous distribution of meat (*visceratio*) to the people at his mother's funeral, which according to Livy won him the election to tribune of the plebs.[74] In a later example, Pliny wrote a letter to Maximus in Verona regarding the gladiatorial games organized after his

[65] Cicero, *Brutus* 62: *Quamquam his laudationibus historia rerum nostrarum est facta mendosior. Multa enim scripta sunt in eis quae facta non sunt: falsi triumphi, plures consulatus, genera etiam falsa et ad plebem transitiones, cum homines humiliores in alienum eiusdem nominis infunderentur genus; ut si ego me a M'. Tullio esse dicerem, qui patricius cum Servio Sulpicio consul anno x post exactos reges fuit.*

[66] Note for instance in Tacitus, *Annales* 3.76 how the sister of Brutus and wife of Cassius, Junia Tertulla, communicated a clear enough message by excluding the *imagines* of her famous relatives from her funeral in 22 AD.

[67] Lewis 2015, 266 : "Memory in ancient Rome did not consist in sentimental, Proustian musings on the past. Rather, it was deliberately constructed following formal principles, canons and techniques."

[68] Flower 2006, 67.

[69] Flower 2006, 51-55.

[70] Flower 2006, 53.

[71] The term *nobilis* originally having meant "notable" or "well-known."

[72] Flower 2006, 53: "The Roman political elite defined themselves semantically in terms of publicity, rather than public service or wealth or birth. Status was defined by public face."

[73] Flower 1996, 122-126.

[74] Livy 8.22 : *populo visceratio data a M Flavio in funere matris. … Data visceratio in praeteritam iudicii gratiam honoris etiam ei causa fuit tribunatuque plebei proximis comitiis absens petentibus praefertur.*

wife's death. Pliny's letter clarifies that Maximus held these games under public pressure.[75] Having complied with the whims of the masses, Pliny applauds his friend, noting that that is how one *magnus animus ostenditur.*[76] Q. Tubero on the contrary gave such a frugal feast on the occasion of Sc. Aemilianus' funeral that Valerius Maximus speculates it led to his loss in the elections to become praetor.[77] The practice of winning over favour through lavish funerary feasts became so common that John Bodel wrote that "by the end of the republic, the people had grown accustomed to be fed – either a formal banquet or by a distribution of meat or both – at the obsequies of a prominent man or woman."[78]

The elites using funerary rites to celebrate and often exaggerate their family's value had a long tradition. In response to this, legislation designed to curtail funerary expenditure became common in the ancient world.[79] But with the massive landslide which Augustan's principate represented for the Roman political landscape, the "battlefield of memory" was vacated by the ruling class and gave way to wealthy individuals of lower birth eager to affirm their social standing with a grand funeral. The undying fame which brought immortality beyond the grave to the elites,[80] was gradually being chased by the commoners. Several imperial laws were issued to restrict common practices aimed at inflating public attendance at funerals.[81] According to the Digesta, anyone who accepted payment to participate in a funeral and failed to do so could be prosecuted.[82] It becomes clear that a lot of money and effort was being put into assuring that one's funeral would be well-attended,[83] and this enthusiasm permeated all classes of Roman society.

A precious piece of evidence comes from Petronius' Neronian novel *Satyricon*. In the unforgettable *Cena Trimalchionis*, the affluent freedman Trimalchio, "a man obsessed with death",[84] reflects on his inevitable funeral. While Petronius caricatures rather than accurately portrays his contemporaries, he unmistakably satirizes the bourgeois attitudes prevalent among the nouveau riche of the early empire, like Trimalchio.[85] The wealthy freedman, who theatrically strives to appear erudite and pious throughout the gathering,[86]

[75] Pliny, *Epistulae* 6.34: *Praeterea tanto consensu rogabaris, ut negare non constans, sed durum videretur.*
[76] Pliny, *Epistulae* 6.34.
[77] Valerius Maximus 7.5.1.
[78] Bodel 1999, 260.
[79] The first to restrict funerary extravagances had been the famed Athenian lawmaker Solon. (Fergueson 1989, 128). Cicero, *De Legibus* 2.59 believed that it had been due to Solon's influence that the old law of the Twelve Tables equally sought to impose limits on funeral celebrations.
[80] Cicero, *Pro Rabirio Perduelliones* 10.28: *tantis in laboribus C. Marius periculisque vixisset, si nihil longius quam vitae termini postulabant spe atque animo de se et gloria sua cogitasset?*
[81] For instance, the inclusion of unnamed individuals in the will, with the only condition of them having been present in the funeral, was forbidden (Gaius 2.238).
[82] *Digesta* 11.7.14.2.
[83] To have a well-attended funeral appears to have been the main reasons why one would join a *collegium*, Bendlin 2011; Rebillard 2003, 54: "grâce au collège, les membres de la *plebs media* peuvent prétendre à des cortèges dont la pompe approche celle des cortèges des membres d'élite."
[84] Arrowsmith 1966, 306.
[85] Veyne 1961, 214: "La vie de Trimalcion est caractéristique de cette réalité, même quand Pétrone pousse le réalisme typique jusqu'à la caricature ; Trimalcion résume ou reflète son temps."
[86] Even though Trimalchio boasts to have never listened to a philosopher (71.12). He is not only a self-made man financially but also intellectually.

proudly announces his plans for a grand funerary monument with the following poetic flourish: *valde enim falsum est vivo quidem domos cultas esse, non curari eas, ubi diutius nobis habitandum est.*[87]

The funerary monument is Trimalchio's expression of how he wants to be remembered: depicted on it should be the sailing merchant ships, his *Berufsdarstellung*,[88] with Trimalchio sitting on the dais wearing the *toga praetexta*,[89] flashing five gold rings on his fingers and distributing coins to the people. As if to further emphasize his success, Trimalchio orders that his epitaph should prominently display his wealth, totalling 500 million HS, for posterity to see.[90] The intention seems to be there in Trimalchio to construct his tomb as what Denzey Lewis calls a "memory theatre": a "space deliberately constructed in order to provoke, organize, broadcast, and sow memories in the minds of the visitors."[91]

Late in the feast a visibly intoxicated Trimalchio plays dead and orders his servants and guests to act as though present to his lying-in-state: *fingite me, inquit, mortuum esse. Dicite aliquid belli.*[92] In this mock funeral, as in his funerary monument, Trimalchio becomes the main protagonist in a staged semi-autobiographical fiction with his guests as an audience. It is not only an occasion for Trimalchio to shape his posthumous memory but also to enjoy the perks of being dead. He wants to be lamented, praised, remembered. His adventurous life, which he's so proud of, will only belong to the collective memory once he is dead. Death for Trimalchio becomes a social *apotheosis*, as a fresco reveals. Upon entering his host's house, Encolpius observed frescoes on the walls depicting Trimalchio's ascent from slavery, culminating in Mercury carrying him skyward: *In deficiente vero iam porticu levatum mento in tribunal excelsum Mercurius rapiebat.*[93] This scene represents the economic triumph of Trimalchio but Mercury was not only the patron god of merchants but also, as a messenger of Persephone, guide to the spirits of the dead, the psychopomp.[94] The curious decision of elevating Trimalchio by the chin is significant since touching one's chin was a common gesture of grief amongst Romans (fig. 3).[95] Moreover, Mercury is elevating Trimalchio to a dais (*in tribunal*) which is where we later find Trimalchio when depicted on his funerary monument (*in tribunal sedentem*). Death is not something which Trimalchio wishes for, but the act of dying becomes precious, since, through the funerary rites and cult, it is the purification of one's memory, making it incorruptible and unchanging. Trimalchio eagerly seeks this death as a social apotheosis, so much so that I would dare to characterize him as a kind of Roman martyr.[96]

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[87] Petronius, *Satyricon* 71.7; An echo of Cicero's similar statement? *Epistulae Ad Atticum* 12.18: *Longum illud tempus cum non ero magis me mouet quam hoc exiguum.*

[88] Petrovic 2005, 88.

[89] Note that the deceased would be dressed during the *pompa* in the official attire of the highest post he achieved (Corbeill 2004, 92).

[90] Petronius, *Satyricon* 71.12. All the features Trimalchio wishes on his monument have been attested in contemporary graves: Petrovic 2005, 88.

[91] Lewis 2016, 267.

[92] Petronius, *Satyricon* 78.5.

[93] Petronius, *Satyricon* 29.5.

[94] Bodel 1994, 248. Note also the use of the verb *rapio*, which was commonly used to denote a sudden death.

[95] Corbeill 2004, 77.

[96] The theme of death as an apotheosis was commonplace in the Roman world. Cicero, *De Legibus* 2.22: *nec vero tam denicales, quae a nece appellatae sunt, quia residentur mortuis, quam ceterorum caelestium quieti dies feriae nominarentur, nisi maiores eos, qui ex hac vita migrassent, in deorum numero esse voluissent*. Buecheler 975: *corpore consumpt[o] uiua anima deus sum.* De Marchi 1975, 185 argues that this was an archaic Roman belief and that through the cult of the domestic Lares the dead relatives were being worshipped as divinities.

But unlike a martyr, Trimalchio's fear of death and love for life kept him bound to the ambiguous state of the twilight of his home. This prompts him to stage mock funerals, yet he is not alone among Romans in flirting with death while clinging to life. Seneca, for instance, writes about how Pacuvius, the governor of Syria, would frequently celebrate funerary feasts in his honour and had himself carried on a bier from the triclinia to his room accompanied by funerary music and a choir of eunuchs singing: βεβίωται, βεβίωται, he has lived, he has lived![97] Both Pacuvius and Trimalchio use the mock funeral to celebrate their existence, using it as a stage for themselves.

At least one example from the imaginary funerals that frequently occur in the works of elegiac poets should also be analysed here.[98] Propertius gives, in a similar manner to Trimalchio, instructions for his nearing funeral, however these are characterized by their negative aspect, since the poet rejects all the 'spectacular' elements characteristic of the aristocratic and Trimalchian funerals.[99] The elegiac poet wishes for no elaborate pomp, in fact only his books should form his procession: *sat mea sat magna est, si tres sint pompa libelli*. Elsewhere, he belittles two elements which are usually highlights of the Roman funeral, *nobilitas* and the *imagines*, since love is indifferent to them.[100] The dramatic effect is achieved by Propertius dismissing all the self-aggrandizing elements of the funeral as superfluous.[101] Propertius, like Horace, considered his poetry to be his *monumentum aere perennius*.[102]

Propertius' triumph is his indifference to the self-promoting aspects of the funeral, setting him apart from the *vulgus*.[103] For the majority, being deprived of the funerary rituals prescribed by social convention was seen as a denial of one's self and existence. Ovid, as noted earlier, was deprived of his funeral due to exile, causing him great despair. Similarly, Pompey the Great's death was considered more tragic due to the denied funerary rites. In Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the poignant scene of Cordus lamenting Pompey's unfitting end echoes Propertius' own modest funeral instructions.[104] Both Pompey and Propertius have their

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[97] Seneca, *Epistulae* 12.8.

[98] For an informed study on these imagined funerals of the elegists, see Houghton 2011.

[99] Propertius 2.13b.3-8:
nec mea tunc longa spatietur imagine pompa
nec tuba sit fati vana querela mei;
nec mihi tunc fulcro sternatur lectus eburno,
nec sit in Attalico mors mea nixa toro.
Desit odoriferis ordo mihi lancibus, adsint
plebei parvae funeris exsequiae.

[100] Propertius, 1.5.23-24.

[101] The poet and his pauper's funeral is a common subject for tragic poets. E.g. Baudelaire, *Spleen et Idéale,* 73:
"Je hais les testaments et je hais les tombeaux ;
Plutôt que d'implorer une larme du monde,
Vivant, j'aimerais mieux inviter les corbeaux
À saigner tous les bouts de ma carcasse immonde."

[102] Horace, *Odes* 3.30

[103] In another poem, Propertius reiterates this same idea of desiring funerary rites that separate him from the masses (3.16.25-6): *di faciant, mea ne terra locet ossa frequenti qua facit assiduo tramite vulgus iter!*

[104] Lucan, *Pharsalia* 7.729-737:
non pretiosa petit cumulato ture sepulchra
Pompeius, Fortuna, tuus, non pinguis ad astra
ut ferat e membris Eoos fumus odores,
ut Romana suum gestent pia colla parentem,
praeferat ut ueteres feralis pompa triumphos,

funeral stripped down to a modest plebeian ritual. A close reading of Lucan's text reveals that the tragic absence is that of the people: of the Romans carrying the bier, the funerary procession with its crowd, the Forum filled with people and the grieving army marching around the pyre. Instead of being followed and lamented by thousands in the heart of Rome, the body of Pompey lay headless in the distant beaches of Egypt with only Cordus to care for it. It is therefore curious that Pompey had found solace in the moment of death from being *watched*. He uttered it himself with his dying breath:

> *Saecula Romanos numquam tacitura labores*
> *Attendunt, aevumque sequens speculatur ab omni*
> *Orbe ratem Phariamque fidem: nunc consule famae.* (VIII 622-624)

With the whole wide world watching, Pompey suffers death with dignity: He covers his face and does not utter any cry nor manifests any terror, spurred on by those powerful words: *nunc consule famae*. For Pompey dying became a performance.[105]

To some extent, all Roman public life was an act, and the funeral was no exception. When possible, "a sumptuous display" for the funeral was put on to inspire the community with sympathy for the *familia funesta*.[106] The line separating the genuine expression of emotion and melodramatic acting became often blurred, but with his keen eye, the satirist Lucian claimed to discern beyond the fog of deception, and he criticized those put on an exaggerated show of grief. When reflecting on the mourner's lamentations, the pulling of hair, and the beating on breasts as the deceased was lying in state, Lucian asks: to whose benefit is all this concoction? It cannot be for the deceased, as they cannot hear, nor for the mourner, who does not need to vocalize lamentations. Therefore, according to Lucian, the display of grief is solely intended to impress the audience. [107]

Martial similarly criticizes the public manifestations of grief in one of his biting epigrams:

> *Amissum non flet cum sola est Gellia patrem,*
> *Si quis adest, iussae prosiliunt lacrimae.*
> *Non luget quisquis laudari, Gellia, quaerit,*
> *Ille dolet vere, qui sine teste dolet.* (I. 33)

Martial then asserts that true mourners are those who grieve without witnesses, not those who seek praise through their mourning. According to Martial, and likely Lucian as well, all public displays of grief

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ut resonent tristi cantu fora, totus ut ignes
proiectis maerens exercitus ambiat armis.
Da uilem Magno plebei funeris arcam
*quae lacerum corpus siccos effundat in igne*s; Remarkable how the construction *non petit Pompeius* followed by the enumeration *ut… ut…* etc. mimics the *nec … nec …* enumeration of Propertius and Ovid.

[105] The thought expressed by Voisin appear also to weigh heavily in Pompey's mind. Voisin 2014, 75: "pour les romains, la mort est comme le reflet de la vie."

[106] When Plutarch learns about the death and funeral of his daughter, he praises his wife for setting up a humble funeral unlike the multitude: Consolation to his Wife 4: "… there was no sumptuous display, like that of a festival, at the burial, but that everything was done with decorum and in silence, in the company of our nearest kin. But this was no surprise to me, that you, who have never decked yourself out at theatre or procession, but have regarded extravagance as useless even for amusements, should have preserved in the hour of sadness the blameless simplicity of your ways." (trans. Phillip H. De Lacy).

[107] Lucian, *On Funerals* 15 ; Who exactly constituted this audience Lucian leaves unfortunately unanswered.

were intended to garner sympathy from others. However, despite their diatribes, one cannot deny that mourning was traditionally a physical expression of pain clearly conspicuous to fellow Romans,[108] which were always privy to their neighbours' life.[109] Seneca in one passage appears to suggest that no one mourned alone: *Nemo tristis sibi est. O infelicem stultitiam ! Est aliqua et doloris ambitio.*[110] Mourning was typically directed outward to an audience rather than internalized. As Anthony Corbeill notes, the predominant Latin words for mourning emphasize physical expressions of pain.[111]

But in the late Republic and early imperial period such displays of grief, specifically amongst the men, were frowned upon, and the attitude admonished by moralists was to stand unfazed before the inequities of fate. So, Seneca would remind his readership of those who had suffered the death of a child without shedding a tear: *innumerabilia sunt exempla eorum, qui liberos iuvenes sine lacrimis extulerint.*[112] But the opposite was rather true as Plutarch noted: "Most people grumble about everything, and have a feeling that everything which happens to them contrary to their expectations ... Therefore, they wail at everything, and groan, and curse their luck." He goes on complaining that these people mourn excessively regardless of the circumstances, concluding that "any pretext is sufficient to arouse grief and lamentations."[113]

The evidence collected here demonstrates the performative nature of death in the Roman mindset, whether among mourners or those planning funerals. This is not meant to diminish the complexity of human responses to loss: indeed, what some considered genuine expressions of grief could be viewed as extravagance by others. For instance, in 45 BC, Cicero's beloved daughter Tullia passed away, deeply distressing the renowned senator. Writing to his friend Atticus, the mourning Cicero confessed that he only found in solitude some solace[114] and that *omnem consolationem vincit dolor*.[115] Seeking to mourn alone, Cicero appears to pass Martial's criteria that he is really hurting. Nonetheless, his grief was not immune to criticism. Plutarch, for instance, in his life of Cicero, notes that the grief of the orator for his deceased daughter was excessive.[116] When his friend Atticus suggested that he should care to conceal his grief, he replied bitterly, *simulatio certe facio satis.*[117] Thus what for some might come off as theatrical

[108] This physical and conspicuous manifestation of grief was also the norm in classic Greece, where men were expected to show their grief in a visible manner. Fergueson 1989, 127-8: "The women of the family gathered around the bier … the men processed in with ritual gestures. The most commonly represented gesture is beating the head or tearing the hair with both arms raised."

[109] Treggiari 1998, 13: "People's conduct of their family affairs often provoked curiosity and comment … the Roman people took an interest in observable behaviour, inside or outside of the house, at any crisis."

[110] Seneca, *Epistulae* 63.2.

[111] Corbeill 2004, 68: "*Luctus, planctus, squalor* – words all synonymous in Roman texts with the mourning process in general – describe, respectively, the sound of wailing, of the mourner's body struck by self-inflicted blows, and the disheveled and dirty appearance of the living mourner."

[112] Seneca, *Epistulae*. 99.6. Note that also Pompey in the moment of his death made sure to hold his tears back lest it might "mar his immortal glory by tears" (Lucan, *Pharsalia* 8.617).

[113] Plutarch, *Consolatio ad Apollonium* 30 (trans. Frank Cole Babbitt).

[114] Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 12.18 : *nunc omnia respuo nec quicquam habeo tolerabilius quam solitudinem*.

[115] Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 12.13.

[116] Plutarch, *Cicero* 41.8; The moralist from Chaeronea was in general critical of lamentations, Consolation to his Wife 4: "the never-sated passion for lamentation, a passion which incites us to transports of wailing and of beating the breast, is no less shameful than incontinence in pleasures."

[117] Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 12.20.

may be genuine manifestations of pain. The line separating emotion from performance was blurred, but the social impact a funeral could achieve was no secret in Rome.

Figure 3 Mourning Women (detail from sarcophagus in the British Museum)

* * *

In the first part of this chapter, I examined the different stages of the *funus*. While the non-aristocratic funeral was a private celebration, it is interesting to note how many of its elements are directed to an external public. I suggest that this coats the Roman funeral with an ambiguous character midway between public and private ceremony since it is privately managed but directed towards a wider audience. The aristocratic funeral however was a public event, which presented the deceased and his role within a wider narrative of the family and of Rome.

In the second part, I explored how the memory of the dead could be manipulated. I have argued that it was the theatrical character of the funeral that allowed for an artificial construction of one's memory. In the case of the aristocratic funeral, this was easily achieved by offering lavish feasts or games to the public. Their status, but also their set of values, notably *nobilitas*, compelled the elites to fashion grandiose funerals in return for the *favor populi*. Additionally, Cicero writes that many lies would creep into the *laudatio* speeches, which shows how easily the ruling elites could forge their own narratives on the occasion of such funerals.

By studying the imperial legislation regarding funerals, it appears that also some non-elites intended to emulate the grandiose aristocratic funeral. The case of Trimalchio is remarkable, as the freedman, "obsessed with death", wants to exercise complete control over his funeral, his tomb and, ultimately, his legacy. His preoccupation with death and legacy is mollified by eternalizing his identity through the funeral and tomb following the tradition of the Roman elites. Trimalchio's tomb, carefully designed, becomes his "memory theatre" and the *Kristallistionspunkt* of his legacy. For Trimalchio, death becomes a social apotheosis, establishing his narrative and social status in the public space of his tomb for posterity.

The relationship between identity and funerary rites and structures was something many Romans were keenly aware of and sought to exploit whenever possible. In this chapter, I have presented various acts of manipulation that could be described as spanning a wide spectrum. On one end of the spectrum, I would place the lies of the *laudatio* in aristocratic funerals, while on the other I would place Trimalchio's plans for his funeral since he perceives it as adequate, but the others as disproportionate. What unites all these behaviours is the presence of an audience, preferentially large. The Romans were conscious that an audience led to exaggerated and theatrical demeanour, in which one could weave a pseudo-autobiographical narrative to suit his ego and ambitions, leading Martial to claim that only when deprived of an audience did one show his true self. In the following chapter, I will examine whether such behaviours and tactics used to establish one's identity before the public, along with the concern for one's posthumous legacy, are also reflected in the cult of the dead in Roman North Africa.

Chapter Two: Home to the Dead, Meeting Place to the Living

Having started in Rome, I intend in this chapter to guide this study towards the situation in Roman North Africa. Therefore, processes of continuity or change with the annexation of North Africa by Rome, especially concerning the cult of the dead, need to be examined.

For the first part of this chapter, I propose to study the remarkable funerary monument of the Flavii in Cillium, in the Carthaginian hinterland. I chose this monument because, being a tower mausoleum, it incorporates both elements of Roman and native tradition. Additionally, an extensive poem inscribed on the mausoleum has been preserved which expresses the meaning behind the monument. By studying this monument, it is hoped that it may reveal the influence which the cultural interactions between North Africa and Rome had on the mentality of the Africans towards death and the funerary rites.

For the second part, I will investigate the tomb as a meeting place between the living and the dead in a post-funerary context. To grasp the meaning that commemorations of the dead held to the people, I will study the Parentalia festival, which was the most important Roman festival in honour of the dead. Using Ovid's Fasti, as well as Valerius Maximus and Martial, I will attempt to show which rites the Parentalia entailed and their social relevance.

In the third part, I will survey the archaeological funerary evidence in Roman North Africa for traces of acts of post-funerary commemoration. Using this body of evidence, I wish to tackle some pertinent questions: Is there material evidence in Africa that attests to identity formation processes equivalent to those of Rome described in the first chapter? What are the characteristics of these processes in African necropolises? How do these vary across regions and among different socio-economic classes, and what common trends do they share? Are there any distinctly African characteristics in this process?

This will enable us to address the central question of this chapter: how processes of memory preservation and identity fixation, as observed in the cult of the dead in Rome, adapted and manifested in Roman North Africa.

2.1 The *Domus Aeterna*: the Funerary Monument in Roman North Africa

ad lapides cana veni memores

Propertius 2.13.40

In the second century BC, Rome's mortuary landscape underwent a significant transformation. Previously, tombs were erected in Hellenistic-inspired walled necropolises in the countryside. However, Romans then began placing their tombs along the roads, directing artistic and epigraphic expressions outward to the constant flow of passing strangers. Zanker and von Hesberg describe how a traveller arriving in a Roman city in the late first century BC would be able to read from the funerary landscape the history, the leading families and the social dynamics of the city he is about to enter.[118] In this new space of narrative-weaving and self-promotion, the land was in reach of everyone. Those of modest means could acquire leftover space between two large grave sites, or they could buy it from speculators who acquired large plots and then resold it divided into narrow strips of lands at affordable prices.[119]

During the turmoil of the late Republic and early Empire, an overhaul of the social and power dynamics took place in Rome, which led to constant excesses regarding self-promotion.[120] Two monumental graves which still stand today in Rome, the pyramid of Cestius and the tomb of Eurysaces, illustrate well this phenomenon. Zanker and von Hesberg are critical of such monumental tombs, since these were built upon one's financial fortune and therefore became disproportional representations of the deceased,[121] leading them to conclude that political honours no longer found place in the monumental language of the tombs.[122] Indeed, even some Roman intellectuals, such as Seneca the Elder, were observing these changes in the Roman society with dismay. The rhetorician, in his attempt to explain why the art of oratory was

[118] Zanker & von Hesberg 1987, 10; The same phenomenon, tombs along the roads entering in the cities, is observed equally in Roman North Africa, as for example in Cherchel, Algeria: Leveau 1978.

[119] Zanker & von Hesberg 1987, 11 ; Hope 2009 :156 Death was after all the great equalizer, everyone, from rich to poor, had to share Charon's ferryboat: Propertius 3.5.13-18:

victor cum victo pariter miscetur in umbris:
consule cum Mario, capte Iugurtha, sedes.
Lydus Dulichio non distat Croesus ab Iro:
optima mors, carpta quae venit ante die.

[120] Zanker & von Hesberg 1987, 25: "Es scheint symptomatisch für den gesellschaftlichen Auflösungsprozess, dass individuelles Geltungsbedürfnis und allgemeine Konkurrenz am Ende der Republik überall zu exzessiven Formen der Selbstdarstellung führten, selbst bei Leuten, die damit gar nichts erreichen konnten und wollten. Das ursprüngliche agonistische Leistungsideal der Adels verkam dabei allenthalben zur hektischen Demonstration von Reichtum und Erfolg."

[121] Zanker & von Hesberg 1987, 26-27 compare for instance the monumental tomb of Caecilia Metella, whose sole accomplishment was to be the daughter of a former consul and wife of Crassus' son, with the tomb erected by the senate to Hirtius, who as consul had been killed in the battle of Mutina. Their disappointment is palpable when they declare that the size of the tomb for the consul who fell fighting for the *Res Publica* was only a fraction that of Caecilia Metella.

[122] Zanker & von Hesberg 1987, 27: "Verdienst und Rang im Rahmen der traditionellen Beamtenkarriere fanden also in der Sprache der Monumente längst keinen Ausdruck mehr."

declining in his day and age, considered this a consequence of the debasement of the Roman youths who were becoming increasingly attracted by the "sordid businesses that bring great prestige and profit."[123]

In North Africa, the funerary landscape also underwent significant changes during the early imperial period, marked by a boom in monumental tombs, particularly tower mausolea. Just in the territory of present-day Tunisia more than 340 of these monuments have been located. This led Jennifer Moore, who traces the development of these tombs in Africa Proconsularis, to recognize a regional "Mausoleum Culture".[124] Moore identifies three distinct phases of the African Mausoleum development: Pre-Roman, Early Roman, and Late Roman. Of the period preceding the Roman conquest, the tower-mausoleum, of which the mausoleum of Dougga is the best-preserved example (fig 4.1), is the most characteristic type of mausoleum in the region.[125] Three mausolea have been dated with some certainty to the early Roman period, spanning roughly the Julio-Claudian period. The owner of one of these Mausoleums (at Zanfour) remains anonymous, but the other two have been recognized as belonging to T. Helvacius Papia and Q. Annaeus Balbus Faventinus. Both have been identified as Roman expatriates who settled in Africa during the first century AD.[126] While they decided to follow the local tradition by erecting tower-mausolea, they did not hesitate when introducing certain changes complicit of their Roman values. Moore emphasizes innovations in these early mausoleums, with particular importance placed on the inclusion of free-standing sculptures depicting the deceased. This is apparent in the Balbus Mausoleum of Thuburnica (fig 4.2) in which the second story was opened to display such free-standing statues. Although most no longer harbour the statue of the deceased, the effect can still be felt, as the gaping opening attracts the eye of the viewer to seek the figure of the deceased.

Figure 4 Evolution of the tower mausolea in North Africa (left: tower-mausoleum of Dougga; centre: Balbus Mausoleum of Thuburnica; right: Flavii Mausoleum in Cillium; source: Wikimedia Commons)

[123] Seneca, *Controversiae* 1.pref.7 : *sive, cum pretium pulcherrimae rei cecidisset, translatum est omne certamen ad turpia multo honore quaestuque vigentia.* (tr. Winterbottom, Loeb ed.)
[124] Moore 2007, 75-109.
[125] Moore 2007, 78: "these [tower-mausolea] were familiar structures across much of North Africa, from at least Siga in Algeria to Sabratha in Libya."
[126] Moore 2007, 82 reckons the possibility that these two men were involved in the reorganization of the African provinces during the early Roman Empire and then settled in the new province.

From this period onwards, "the visual focal point" of the mausolea remained the statue portraying the deceased and this new variety became relatively popular.[127] The construction of tower mausolea and the similarly looking temple-mausolea[128] peaked during the late second and third centuries.[129] As far as the epigraphic evidence can enlighten us, these were erected by a varied group including retired militaries, municipal leaders, priests and even a businesswomen.[130] Additionally, an onomastics study of the funerary inscriptions revealed that the names of the owners reflect the typical nomenclature of Roman Africa. This evidence indicates that, unlike the mausoleums erected in the early Roman period by wealthy outsiders seeking integration, these structures were adopted by the affluent members of the local mixed population in Roman North Africa.

Dating from the mid second century and therefore belonging to this last phase is the Flavii Mausoleum at Cillium (fig 3.3). Located in the interior of Proconsularis, some 200 km south of Carthage, Cillium grew rapidly during the Roman period and was granted the status of *municipium* sometime during the second century. During this period T. Flavius Secundus, an African local who had joined the Roman army as a Musunian auxiliary,[131] settled in the town after his military duties and successfully invested in the local cultivation of vines. Lassère, in his study on the Flavii of Cillium, considers the family's story as one typical of social ascension, with the descendants of the veteran becoming local priests and municipal magistrates.[132] The mausoleum, erected by the veteran's son, also T. Flavius Secundus, is exceptional for the extensive funerary poem inscribed on its façade, which is the longest of its kind.[133]

The poem starts by acknowledging that although life is fleeting (*Sint licet exiguae fugientia tempora vitae*), consolation is found in the monument and its inscriptions, since these stay much longer (*titulos mansuris fortius annis*). It then proudly describes the monumental tomb, which is both traditional (*more patrio*) and innovative (*exemplo novo*).[134] The poem also emphasizes investing in a magnificent tomb as the best use of money, contrasting it with the ephemeral nature of luxury items like foreign fabrics and gems. Faced by the shortness of life, the most valuable things are those that can withstand time the longest.

As the Elder Secundus rests in the silent shades of the Acheron, he is comforted by knowing that his tomb shall endure with "eternal newness" (*perpetua novitate*). In fact, he is not only cheered by the magnificent mausoleum but also compelled to forsake the underworld and reside in the familiar grove within the monument instead:

[127] Moore 2007, 90-91.
[128] The temple-mausoleum is characterized by its second storey being built as a temple cella preceded by columns (Moore 2007, 76).
[129] Moore 2007, 102 connects this peak with the growing prosperity of the region during this period: "The economic prosperity of the Antonine and Severan ages resulted in growing numbers of people who could afford commemorations and, in lesser numbers, large tombs."
[130] Moore 2007, 95; Note the epitaph in the tower mausoleum erected for Urbanilla by her husband Lucius: CIL VIII. 152.2-3: *Romae comes negotiorum socia parsimonio fulta bene gestis omnibus cum in patria mecum redirect.*
[131] Lassère et al. 1993, 220-1; The Musunii were a local African tribe.
[132] Lassère et al. 1993, 226-227.
[133] CIL VIII 212-213. The text and translation used are from Thomas 2007, 260-262.
[134] The form of the tomb as tower mausoleum is the tradition, the long funerary poem its innovation. Lassère 1991, 67 n. 50.

sic immortalis haberi
iam debet pater ecce tuus Ditisq(ue) relicti
tristem deseruisse domum, dum tempore toto
mavolt haec monum[e]nta sequi scriptisq(ue) per aevom
[v]ivere nominibus, solitis insistere lucis,
[ads]idue patrias hinc cernere dulciter arces
quosq(ue) dedit natis prope semper habere penates.

The poem counters a common saying that erecting tombs prematurely invites an early death. The anonymous poet dismisses this superstition and advocates, much like Trimalchio, for the early planning of one's tomb:[135]

set puto securos fieri quicumque parare
aeternam voluere domum certoq(ue) rigore
numquam lapsuros vitae defigere muros

It is striking how much the discourse of the anonymous poet follows that of Trimalchio a century earlier. Indeed, one could argue that T. Secundus Flavius the Elder and Trimalchio share a similar social backstory, in which they rose from relative insignificance to a position of remarkable social standing. It was this raising strata of the local community, which induced the boom of mausolea with long epigraphic poems.[136] These upstarts turned to the Roman socio-cultural language to express their importance, just as Trimalchio did. However, as Hitchner cautions, we should not see the actions of the Flavii against the backdrop of some polarized world of Roman culture versus local African culture: In fact, what was taking place in 2nd century North Africa was an "erosion of distinction between Roman and local culture."[137] This coming together of both cultures was mediated by the likes of Secundus Flavius, who first were integrated in the Roman world and then returned to their remote communities as elites and "were expected [by their local communities] to appropriate and confirm Roman customs and rituals [and] define appropriate ways of acting".[138]

Just as Trimalchio's interpretation of the funerary cult revealed a corruption of Roman tradition, [139] the African adoption of Roman customs similarly involved a transformation of those traditions. I would however argue that this local African elite did not seek to simply imitate the Romans, but instead wished to remain African in a way that could rival the Romans. Therefore, they had to advertise their standing using the newly acquired syntax of the Roman language of rites and monuments, which, by the end of the second century AD, was the universal language of power in the western Mediterranean. The result is what

[135] And so did Pliny, *Epistulae* 6.10: *Tam rara in amicitiis fides, tam parata oblivio mortuorum, ut ipsi nobis debeamus etiam conditoria exstruere omniaque heredum official praesumere.*
[136] Lassère et al. 1993, 151: "Les Flavii sont d'ailleurs représentatifs de cette riche bourgeoisie locale des villes moyennes qui à partir du IIe mais surtout du IIIe siècles ont voulu construire « un mausolée a *carmina* » : ce ne sont pas des chevaliers, ni des sénateurs, mais des vétérans et des officiers, des magistrats municipaux, des avocats et de gros commerçants, qui ont tenu à étaler ainsi leur aisance et leurs aspirations culturelles."
[137] Hitchner 1995, 497.
[138] Hitchner 1995, 495.
[139] As we have seen Zanker and v. Hesberg criticizing. Besides, the participation of freedmen in the symbolic language of power was necessarily perceived as an abuse, if at least by the upper Roman class. Woolf 1996, 26: "Pallas [freedman of Claudius and later Nero] … cannot avoid presenting a travesty of these symbols and values, because of who and what he is."

Hitchner calls a "'popular' manifestation of 'Roman' culture"[140] as symbolized by these tower mausolea adorned with long funerary poems. Like the ghost of Secundus with one foot in the Stygian shades and the other in the familiar grove's mausoleum, this new cultural expression of the local elites stood with one foot in Rome and the other in Africa.

* * *

2.2 *Misce bibe da mi*: Sharing with the Dead

Morrendo estou na vida, e em morte vivo;
Vejo sem olhos, e sem lingua fallo;
E juntamente passo gloria e pena.

Luís de Camões, Sextina I[141]

The poem on the Flavii Mausoleum offers fascinating insights into the significance of the tomb and concerns about preserving one's identity for posterity, but it reveals little about subsequent visits to the tomb by the living. Tombs in the Roman world were not only the homes of the deceased, but also the meeting places between the living and the dead. Various occasions prompted the relatives to visit the graves of their ancestors. In one inscription found in Rome, the deceased instructs his surviving relatives to perform at the tomb a sacrifice four times yearly: During the festivals of the *Rosalia, Violae* and *Parentalia* and at his birthday.[142] Most tombs might not have received as much attention throughout the year, but on these festivals, it was tradition to head out to the graves and commemorate the dead. The most important of these was the *Parentalia*, which was celebrated yearly in honour of the dead relatives between the 13th and 21st of February.[143] Ovid in his *Fasti* provided a code of conduct for the *Parentalia*:

Est honor et tumulis, animas placare paternas,
parvaque in exstructas munera ferre pyras.
parva petunt manes: pietas pro divite grata est
munere; non avidos Styx habet ima deos.
tegula porrectis satis est velata coronis
et sparsae fruges parcaque mica salis,
inque mero mollita Ceres violaeque solutae:
haec habeat media testa relicta via.

[140] Hitchner 1995, 496.
[141] "I live dying, and in death I live; / I see with no eyes and speak without a tongue / And I evoke both glory and pity" (my translation).
[142] ILS 8366. Note also that often this task of commemoration was bequeathed to a *collegium:* in the mid fourth century for instance a Hos. Flaminius had bequeathed an important sum to a *collegium* in order that on the anniversary of his death and on Rosalia *at memoriam eius refrigerare devebunt.* (Delehaye 1927, 136). See also Rebillard, 2003, 34, for evidence of Jews celebrating the Rosalia through a *collegium*.
[143] Toynbee 1971, 63.

nec maiora veto, sed et his placabilis umbra est. (2.533-541)

Ovid stresses that the gifts to the dead need not be extravagant but acknowledges that some may celebrate the festival more lavishly. Some would allocate money in their wills to ensure the dignity of these celebrations. In one inscription from Ostia a lady named Iunia Libertas specified that no less than 100 sestertii should be spent annually on tomb decorations (*ornationem sepulchri*) and sacrifices for the *Parentalia*.[144] Another, a certain Manius Megonius, specified that 50 denarii should be spent for his funerary dinner (*cena parentalicia*).[145] As it was the case with the funeral, in these dinners the spectacular elements and the size of the audience were perceived as reflective of the reputation of the deceased.[146]

For the dead, interaction with the living was crucial; only then did they truly live again, so to speak. To this end some epitaphs call out for those walking on the roads along the graves to stop and read their inscription.[147] It was also customary during the imperial period for the funerary stone to request the reader to pronounce a goodwill formula in honour of the deceased before parting.[148] The effect created is that of a dialogue between dead and living, in which the deceased, through the funerary inscription, tells about himself, to which the reader is prompted to respond with a formula. Carroll Maureen, who collected a total of 554 funerary inscriptions that "speak out" to the passer-by, remarked how "they all depict the deceased as desperate to be remembered and to communicate with someone."[149]

This interaction or "dialogue" between the dead and the living was at the centre of the cult of the dead. But while the dead regain their voice and live on as memories, how did this interaction benefit the living? One prevalent notion in Rome was that the interactions with the dead shaped and strengthened the community of the living. This can be deferred from the sister feasts of *Feralia* and *Cara cognatio.*

The last day of the *Parentalia* was known as the *Feralia*, which according to Varro earned its name because of the food brought (*ferre*) to the flower-decorated tombs.[150] If we should imagine these offerings as the pinch of salt and the few grains of corn mentioned by Ovid remains uncertain. However, the word which Varro uses here for food offering, *epula*, carries often the meaning of banquet.[151] Moreover Festus, in his attempt to determine the etymological origin of the name *Feralia*, suggests that it derives from the animals stricken (*feriendis*) for the occasion.[152] While the evidence does not allow us to determine any further the nature of the offerings given to the dead at the *Feralia*, I would not exclude the possibility that some brought offerings that could not only feed the dead (as the salt and corn grains), but the living as

[144] Dolansky 2011, 134.
[145] ILS 6468; Dolansky 2011, 134.
[146] Dolansky 2011, 135: "commemorative dinners such as these provided opportunities for self-promotion and display, whether in the amount made viable for dining expenses or in the provision for the number of participants."
[147] ILS 1932 : *Rogat et resistas hospes te hic tacitus lapis dum ostendit quod mandauit quoius umbram te[git].*
[148] As, for example, *sit tibi terra levis.*
[149] Carroll 2008, 51, who also quotes Lattimore who sensed their "almost frantic reaching out for some connection with the living."
[150] Varro, *De Lingua Latina* 6.13: *Feralia ab inferis et ferendo, quod ferunt tum epulas ad sepulcrum quibus ius ibi parentare.*
[151] The word exists in the female and male form, the latter being exclusively used for banquet while the former keeps both meanings of food or banquet. However, even when used in the sense of food, it often is associated with abundant food. As for example in the use made by Horace (Sat. 2.3.119) in which an old man becomes a "feast" for insects to feed upon (*blattarum ac tinearum epulae*).
[152] Festus P84: *Feralia: dis minibus sacrata festa, a ferendis epulis, vel a feriendis pecudibus appellate.*

well.[153] Regardless, banquets at the graveside were a common occurrence. On the day of the burial, a funerary feast, the *Silicernium*, would be celebrated, and another, known as *cena novendialis*, nine days later.[154] This latter marked the end of the *feriae denicales*, the nine-day period of mourning.[155] On this occasion, drinks and food were shared between the dead and the living,[156] allowing the living to commune with the dead. The *Feralia* probably offered a similar occasion to share food and drinks between the living and the dead.

On the following day, the 22nd of February, the *Cara cognatio*, also known as *Caristia*, was celebrated.[157] After the nine days dedicated to the dead, this one was dedicated to the living relatives, hence its name.[158] Ovid describes this feast as joyful relief following the *Parentalia*:[159] having seen those that were lost to death, one returns to the shore of the living with joy.[160] On *Caristia*, edible delicacies were given to living relatives (*propinqui*), just as food gifts had been offered to the deceased in the preceding days. According to Martial, a thrush, an expensive and beloved delicacy among the Romans, was the most coveted gift.[161] The parallel between the *Caristia* and the *Parentalia* has been noted, with Raccanelli considering that these two feasts were involved in the same function: "un'annuale revisione e riaffermazione dei vincoli di sangue e di culto – dapprima nei confronti degli antenati e poi anche dei parenti ancore in vita."[162]

Besides the gift sharing, Valerius Maximus mentions a banquet (*convivium*) which would take place only for blood and in-law relatives (*cognatos et adfines*).[163] Ovid adds that only the innocent were welcome, that the *mater acerba* and the *socrus iniqua* should stay away.[164] Everyone should be in good spirits and do away with bad blood, as the feast was meant to promote *Concordia.*[165]

Based on the evidence from Valerius Maximus and the Fasti, it appears that *Caristia* was a celebration reserved exclusively for blood relatives. However, Raccanelli raised an important caveat about both these

[153] Rebillard 2015, 271 goes further by stating that: "Two elements are clearly attested on the *Feralia*: a sacrifice to the Manes of the dead and a banquet at the grave."
[154] Toynbee 1971, 50-51.
[155] Cicero. *De Legibus* 2.22; Toynbee 1971: 50-51.
[156] When one of the guests of Trimalchio's own feast arrived anointed, crowned by garlands and quite inebriated, and the freedman asked where he was coming from, he responded: *Scissa lautum novendialem servo suo misello faciebat, quem mortuum manu miserat … Sed tamen suaviter fuit, etiam si coacti sumus dimidias potiones super ossucula eius effundere.* (Petronius, *Satyricon* 65)
[157] Raccanelli 1996, 28-29,
[158] Raccanelli 1996, 34-35 (*Cara cognatio* / dear kinsmen).
[159] Ovid *Fasti* 2.619-622: *scilicet a tumulis et, qui periere, propinquis*
protinus ad vivos ora referre iuvat
postque tot amissos, quicquid de sanguine restat,
aspicere et generis dinumerare gradus.
[160] In spite of the concern of the Romans towards their dead, it was important to always returning to the living. An ancient proverb warned people to not dwell too long on the dead and instead remember the living: *vivorum memini* (Davis 1958).
[161] Martial 9.54.
[162] Raccanelli 1996, 29.
[163] Valerius Maximus 2.1.8.
[164] Ovid, *Fasti* 2.623-626.
[165] Valerius Maximus 2.1.8; Ovid, *Fasti* 2.631-632 instructs that incense should be offered to the family gods, while adding that *Concordia fertur ilia praecipue mitis adesse die*.

sources, noting that they reflected an archaic and traditional portrayal of Roman culture.[166] This explains the disparity when comparing these sources to the evidence of the feast provided by Martial. When Martial complained about having to send out too many gifts on *Caristia*, the recipients of these gifts were rather friends or even business partners (in the case of Martial, benefactors) than relatives.[167] Having excused himself for not being able to give the coveted thrushes, Martial asked them to accept a chicken instead with the assurance that by accepting this gift they would often be a relative (*saepe propinquus eris*).[168] If they were deemed a *propinquus*, would they be then welcomed in the feast mentioned by Valerius and Ovid? It remains uncertain, but the overall impression given by the evidence is that during *Caristia*, individuals would reaffirm and, if necessary, reshape their social circle, ensuring harmony among all those with whom they had significant relationships. In the early Roman period the feast was probably limited to the family, but by the time of Martial, in the late first century CE, friends, patrons, and other acquaintances could be deemed *propinqui*. The "family" became a construct beyond mere blood ties.

The proximity of the *Caristia* to the *Parentalia* festival was no coincidence. The encounter with deceased relatives evoked feelings of origin, belonging, and identity among the living, who then shaped their social networks and alliances. *Caristia* provided closure to a cycle of loss and rebuilding, suggesting its association with the cult of the dead. Both feasts were so closely connected conceptually, that a later Byzantine source included the *Caristia* day in the *Parentalia*.[169]

Figure 6 Funerary Banquet Relief, 1st c. BC (Museo Nazionale d'Ancona)

[166] Raccanelli 1996, 30 : "sembrano offrirne un'immagine molto ligia alla tradizione e segnata da tratti arcaizzanti."
[167] Henriksen 2012, 236.
[168] Martial 9.54. In his commentary Henriksen 2012, 232-237 argues that this epitaph, which excuses the poet for not having the land nor the means to gather thrushes and having to resort to gifting chickens instead, was joined to every chicken he sent as a gift (Henriksen remarks that no explicit addressee is mentioned in the poem, making it possible to send it to several people). Only Flaccus and Stella, the recipients of 9.55 and good friends of Martial, did he honor with a personalized epigram, in which he blames the *onerosa turba* who all think they are his best friend, making it too costly to send expensive gifts to everyone. And even though he really wants to give nice thrushes to both Stella and Flaccus, he fears he would enrage all those he sent chickens with the apologetic note. Martial's solution? No thrushes to either Stella and Flaccus, who most probably received chickens as well. These two epigrams provide a wonderful insight in the careful balancing act which Roman social life could be, and how a brilliant man like Martial would waltz around it.
[169] Lydus, *de Mensibus* 4.29.

2.3 *Mensae* and Libation Tubes: Remembering the Dead in Roman North Africa

In Africa, while evidence of post-funerary offerings for tower mausoleums is slim,[170] numerous structures unearthed at more modest burial sites attest to the frequent visits and offerings made at these tombs. The practice of regularly visiting the deceased was a novelty for Africans. Before the Roman period, commoners were buried in deep pits without visible superstructures, as observed in the necropolis of Sitifis.[171]

The excellent report on the recently excavated East Cemetery of Leptiminus provides examples of such structures, demonstrating a post-funerary tradition of visiting the tomb. Leptiminus, known today as Lamta, sits on the eastern coast of Tunisia, about 160 km south of Carthage. Originating in the Punic period, Leptiminus saw its greatest expansion during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, which aligns with the peak activity of its East Cemetery. The cemetery has been carefully excavated in the past few decades and a report concerning its findings was recently published.[172] The excavators have divided the cemetery in two sectors, a "Roman/pagan" sector and a Christian one. The former, which is the focus of the 2021 report, is constituted by ground-level tombs and three hypogea. The team found evidence of a total of 103 burials in the "pagan" sector, while in the Christian sector six graves were excavated and other 14 could be identified by mosaic grave markers but were left unexcavated.[173]

As opposed to the mausolea which were erected by local elites, the tombs of the East Cemetery likely belonged to middle-class townsfolk.[174] In the case of incinerations, the deceased would be cremated *in situ*, a practice known as *bustum*, and his remains would have been collected in an receptacle and stored within the grave. In the East Cemetery, all containers found were repurposed ceramic vessels, with nearly half of them connected to the surface by large ceramic libation tubes for offering food and drinks directly to the deceased's remains (fig. 7, left).[175] In one amphora fitted with libation tube eggshells, fragmented pits, burned bread, and even the bones of a nearly complete chicken were found.[176] Additionally, tubes were found with residues of cadaverine, a compound produced by decaying flesh.[177] In Leptiminus the dead were being well fed.

[170] Moore 2007, 93: "offerings were made [at tower mausolea] on neither a large-scale nor a frequent basis."
[171] Guéry 1985, 40.
[172] Bates 2021.
[173] Bates 2021, 17.
[174] Bates 2021, 93.
[175] Bates 2021, 105: Six of the 13 preserved cremation burials had a libation tube connected to it. However the excavators note that the proportion might have been higher, as grave-robbers probably destroyed many of these fragile ceramic tubes. The diameters of the tubes are between 16-19 cm.
[176] Bates 2021, 64 (Referring to grave G-071).
[177] Bates 2021, 137.

Figure 7 Left: Libation tube attached to amphora containing the remains in grave G-020, East Cemetery, Leptiminus (Bates 2021: 106); Right: drawing of libation tube connected to urn within cippus *in the 'cimetière des* officiales*' (Delattre 1888)*

Besides the libation tubes, ten low altars or *mensae* were also identified in the East Cemetery.[178] These large stone slabs, placed adjacent to or in front of tombs and always touching them, being more resilient than fragile ceramic tubes permeate the excavated necropolis of Roman North Africa.[179] The use of these *mensae* as offering tables during funerary commemorations has been variously attested. A precious piece of evidence comes from Mauretania Caesariensis, where in 299 the descendants of Aelia Secundula erected next to her tomb a *mensa* accompanied by an inscription elaborating on its purpose:

> *Lapideam placuit nobis atponere mensam,*
> *In qua magna eius memorantes plurima facta,*
> *dum cibi ponuntur calicesq(ue) et copertae,*
> *vulnus et sanetur nos rod(ens) pectore saevum,*
> *libenter fabul(as) dum sera red(d)imus hora*
> *castae matri bonae laudesq(ue), vetula dormit;* (CIL VIII 20277)

Mensae have either a flat or concave surface which often features carved and hollowed-out bowls on their surfaces for holding offerings such as food, as seen in examples from Sitifis, present-day Algeria (fig. 8). Furthermore, the iconographic themes represented on *mensae* are indicative of the association of this structure with funerary feasts. Depictions of foodstuffs, most commonly fish, birds and eggs, have been often found chiselled on the surface of these *mensae*.[180] In a famous example from Timgad, a *mensa* was decorated with bread, fish, and necessary eating utensils (fig. 9). The surface of the *mensae* has been often found charred, indicating that food was cooked or at least reheated on the spot. Cook-wares and patera are also usually found in the vicinity of these *mensae* which were ritually broken after use. [181]

[178] Bates 2021, 137.
[179] de Larminat & Lepetz 2022.
[180] de Larminat & Lepetz 2022; Gsell 1901 II, 47 : "Au-dessus de la tombe et en avant de la stèle , on plaçait souvent une table rectangulaire, sur laquelle des images de plats, de patères, d'aiguières, de cuillers étaient figurées en creux ou en relief : symboles des aliments offerts aux morts."
[181] Moore & Stirling 2021.

In light of this evidence, the presence of libation tubes and *mensae* is a strong indication that *convivia* were celebrated at such *cippi* and *cupula* tombs which catered all "people below of the wealthiest classes of society".[182] The *cupula*, a long and low half-domed funerary monument (fig. 8), the most popular type of tomb for Roman North Africa, has long been associated with structures to serve commemorative rituals, such as the libation tubes and *mensae*.[183]

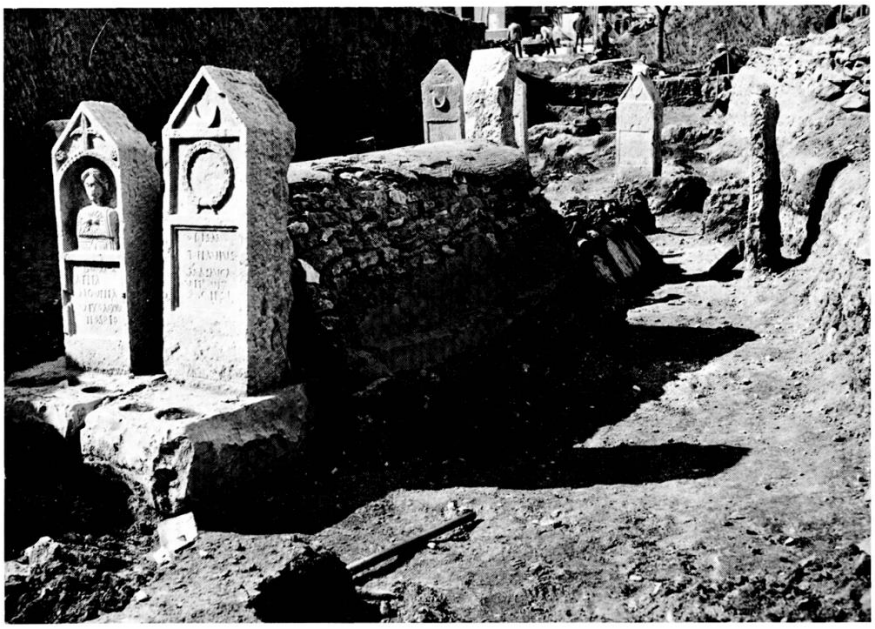

Figure 8 Cupula tombs with stelae *on* mensae *carved with two large bowls, from Sitifis (Guéry 1985: 44)*

Cippi, squared, altar-like monuments, had often a libation tube which connected the urn within with the world of the living. The Carthaginian "cimetière des *officiales*", graveyard of the imperial slaves and freedmen, provides many such examples (fig. 7, right).[184] This graveyard, as opposed to most in Africa, was dominated by *cippi* instead of *cupulae*, probably due to overcrowding which resulted in a shortage of space.[185] The most elaborated *cippi* had a niche on top and within the niche an orifice leading to the libation tube. Alfred-Louis Delattre notes that these libation channels were used not only to pour liquids but also occasionally to introduce the incinerated remains into the urn, as he reported finding evidence of cremains in the tubes.[186] Additionally, Delattre reports having found thin sheets of inscribed lead,

[182] Stirling 2007, 123: "To summarize, then, cupulae generally belong to people below of the wealthiest classes of society."

[183] Stirling 2007, 116; Charles-Picard 1959, 252: "la forme de plus populaire, sans être propre à l'Afrique, ce sont les coffres rectangulaires, recouverts d'un demi cylindre et ayant un conduit aménagé dans la maçonnerie."

[184] Delattre 1888; Carlsen 2020, 10-11 : "Libations were poured through terracotta pipes running internally to urns placed in the niches of altars." The graveyard itself has been dated based on epigraphic evidence to between the 1st and 3rd century.

[185] Since the *cippi*, usually .5m x .5m, occupy a much smaller area than the 1.5m x .5m cupula. Morris & Stirling 2021 argue that overcrowding might have led to the absence of cupula in the "cimetière des *officiales*".

[186] Delattre 1898, 218. These may either be the remains of the tomb owner who had his tomb built while living and had to be introduced by the tube afterwards into the tomb (Delattre also found tombs with empty cinerary urns, which gives this conjecture some weight.) Additionally, these might have been relatives or even intruders who joined another's tomb later on (Delattre also gives evidence of *cippi* where additional epitaphs were added with time.)

commonly known as *defixiones* or curse tablets, in these tubes, which led him to call these tombs "boîtes à lettres" to the chthonic divinities.[187] To put a stop to the intrusion of *defixiones* and of the mortal remains of unknown individuals, some tube openings were closed off with either a marble plaque or a lead sheet in which tiny holes were drilled allowing only for the pouring of liquids.[188]

The widespread use of *cippi* and *cupulae* during the early Roman period has been interpreted as a growing emphasis on commemorating the dead through rituals predetermined by their structure (tubes and *mensae*). As Moore and Stirling write, "the *cippus* graves demanded commemorative rites in ways that earlier graves had not."[189] Such developments were not exclusive to the *familia Caesaris*; in another Carthaginian cemetery, the Yasmina necropolis, the same phenomenon is observed.[190] There the *cippi* with tubes for libations also became the norm during the Antonine period.[191]

While in the cemeteries just mentioned more libation tubes were excavated than *mensae*, in other cemeteries the opposite is observed.[192] In the large cemetery of Pupput, which covers seven hectares and contains some 2000 graves,[193] 156 *mensae* have been excavated, but only five libation tubes were found. This led the excavators of the Pupput necropolis to conclude that two distinct methods of commemorating the dead were being observed.[194] Indeed, libation tubes and *mensae* often appear in different contexts.[195] Libation tubes are mostly associated with incineration burials and are rarely found in inhumation graves.[196] This can be observed for instance in the aforementioned East Cemetery of Leptiminus, where all libation tubes found belonged to incineration graves. *Mensae* on the contrary were identified at both inhumation and incineration graves. In Pupput as well, *mensae* were located at both burials of inhumation and incineration, but in other necropoleis, such as in Tipasa, *mensae* accompanied only inhumation burials.[197]

[187] Delattre 1898, 218.
[188] Delattre 1898, 218; Gauckler 1897, 89.
[189] Moore & Stirling 2021.
[190] Moore & Stirling 2021 note that the monuments uncovered at the Yasmina cemetery "suggest a diversity of socio-economic representation."
[191] Norman & Haeckl 1993, 244.
[192] Besides these cemeteries, also in Thaenae libation tubes and not *mensae* were the norm (Moore & Stirling 2021).
[193] Arbia Hilali 2007, 270.
[194] Ben Abed Aicha & Griesheimer, 2001, 585: "la rareté des conduits à libation ne peut s'expliquer que par une pratique rituelle locale qui privilégie la libation sur la *mensa*, ou à sa proximité immédiate, et se satisfait ainsi d'un geste symbolique sans rechercher l'efficacité d'une libation parvenant au contact effectif des ossements."
[195] The existence of graves with both libation tube and *mensae* is rare but recorded. Two graves for instance in the East Cemetery of Leptiminus (G-020; G-102) have a tube and an offering table. Bates 2021, 101 Table 3.6.
[196] Moore & Stirling 2021. Although it can be rarely found as for instance in Hadrumentum where some graves have tubes for inhumed individuals.
[197] Arbia Hilali 2007, 272.

Figure 9 Mensa found in Timgad (romanartlover.it)

The material evidence here collected suggests that the rituals performed before these African graves were reminiscent of the Roman rituals celebrated in honour of the dead, such as during the *Parentalia*. I believe that, as with the mausoleum tower, we are witnessing the creation of something original, shaped by inherited Roman concerns and approaches to the funerary cult, with a constant emphasis on preserving one's memory alive.

* * *

In this chapter, I have begun by showing the different dynamics of continuity and change regarding the funerary monument in Roman North Africa. The innovative tower mausolea built by early Roman settlers in Africa, emphasizing the physical presence of the deceased through statues, were swiftly embraced by the local elite. Studying the epigraphic poem of the Flavii Mausoleum reveals that these local elites adopted a Trimalchian attitude towards death, reflected in a profound preoccupation with death and legacy. This new funerary culture among the elites is key to understanding the development of the cult of the dead in Roman North Africa, since they acted as cultural mediators for the African population.

In the second part of this chapter, I focused on the activities of commemoration at graveside. For this, I have investigated the most important festival of the Roman world in honour of the dead, namely the *Parentalia*. In the first chapter I have shown that funerary rites presented several opportunities for self-promotion and display, and the funerary banquets were no exception. Additionally, a close examination of the sources reveals that the festival and its communion with the dead also became an opportunity to nurture the well-being of one's community. This connection becomes particularly evident when viewed alongside the Caristia festival. I believe that Raccanelli's statement is excellent in describing

what is at the heart of the *Parentalia* and the *Caristia*: an annual revision and reaffirmation of one's kinsmen. The identity-forging process discussed in the first chapter focused on shaping and solidifying the deceased individual's identity. But now it becomes apparent how post-funerary commemorations not only shaped individuals' perceptions of their history through the deceased's identity, but also influenced their close-knit community, including family and friends.

In the third section of the chapter, I have sought to reveal how commemorations by the grave played out in Roman North Africa. It is notable that in graves of less affluent individuals, structures for post-funerary offerings were commonly found, while mausolea of the elites showed little evidence of such practices. I would therefore argue that the same attitude, which I refer to as the Trimalchian attitude, can be observed among both elites and commoners, albeit manifested differently. The wealthy provide a richly decorated tomb for the deceased, which they believe suffices for the spirit to enjoy a carefree existence after death. Conversely, for those unable to afford luxurious graves, the concern for periodically caring for the deceased became exceptionally important. The concern for the dead became so significant that structures facilitating interactions between the living and the dead were widely adopted by African communities.

Such interactions between the living and the dead were crucial for connecting individuals to their kin, both deceased and living. Commemorating the dead not only honoured them but also integrated individuals into their community. While the cult of the dead initially seemed to revolve around nuclear families, Martial's accounts reveal fluid groups that extended beyond blood ties.

Those who cared for a deceased person, offering libations and feasting at the graveside, became guardians of the deceased's memory. They fashioned these memories, and over time, through occasional commemorations, the narratives evolved, influenced by the social contexts of those commemorating them. Remembering and interpreting these stories was essential for the identity of these small groups, linking the past to their present. The commemorators and their tales, though obscured by history, formed the foundation of well-known family identities.

An important characteristic of these identity and community processes embedded within the cult of the dead and its rites, typical across all African regions, is the significant role played by the tomb: In the epigraphic poem of the Flavii the tomb appears as a place a spirit could reach from underworld. Inversely, the oblations poured into libation tubes were considered to reach supernatural realms, with Delattre calling such tombs post-boxes to the chthonic deities. The tomb not only serves as Assmann's *Kristallisationspunkt*, but also functions as a supernatural portal, bridging the physical and spiritual worlds. The libation tube, penetrating the tomb, establishes a connection with the supernatural realm. Even when replaced by *mensae*, the proximity to the tomb remains crucial for effective commemorations. Without the presence of the grave, the supernatural efficacy of post-funerary rituals to communicate and intercede for the dead would not be possible.

Chapter Three: *Semen est Sanguis Christianorum*: The Dead Christians

Plus asseruerunt Christum mortui, quam vivi.

Augustine, *Sermones* 286.4

After examining how non-Christians in Roman North Africa commemorated their dead and its impact on their identity, I will now investigate Christian practices towards their dead, focusing first on the period before Constantine's peace. Key sources for third-century North African Christian communities are the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian. However, their claims must be critically evaluated against the material evidence related to the Christian cult of the dead.

Dating early Christian material presents many challenges, such as the lack of identifying symbols and the rustic nature of inscriptions. Following the continuity hypothesis outlined in the introduction, the necessary step is to examine the Christian cult of the dead alongside pagan practices. This means looking for evidence of Christians adopting or rejecting the rites performed by non-Christians in honour of their dead. By examining early Christian funerary evidence alongside its broader non-Christian context, as detailed in the second chapter, I aim to uncover the nature of the Christian cult of the dead. Amongst the Christian dead, the martyrs received special care. The significance of the martyr cult and its relationship with the wider Christian cult of the dead will be explored through martyrological texts and material evidence.

This will lead us to the fourth century and the Donatist schism. After outlining key aspects of the Christian cult of the dead, I will examine disputed issues related to the cult of the dead during the Donatist controversy. Primary sources will include Augustine's letters and sermons, essential for any study of Donatism, as well as Donatist martyr texts and records from ecclesiastical councils. These texts often reveal the intentions of ecclesiastics, albeit in convoluted rhetoric. By placing these debates in the context of the evidence already examined, this approach aims to clarify each rival Church's stance on the cult of the dead, potentially shedding light on the *Kristallisationspunkte* of their identity—whether it be tombs, the Church, Holy Scriptures, or elsewhere.

3.1 The Christian Cult of the Dead

The earliest evidence of Christian presence in the African provinces is the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, which record the hearing of a group of Christians from Scillium before the Roman proconsul Saturninus on July 17, 180.[198] While scholars have been unable to identify the exact location of Scillium, this document nonetheless confirms that by 180 Christianity had reached at least the Carthaginian hinterland, leading Burns and Jensen to write that by this time "there was a well-established spread" of Christianity in Roman North Africa.[199] The Christian apologist Tertullian, writing a couple of decades later in Carthage, referred to Christians living in Numidia, Mauritania, as well as in the towns of Thysdrus, Hadrumetum and Uthina.[200] Tertullian, whose propensity for rhetorical hyperbole makes the interpretation of his writings quite challenging, also claimed that Christians were almost the majority in all cities.[201]

While many doubts remain about the advent of Christianity in Roman North Africa, some of its aspects can be known with some degree of certainty. As elsewhere in the empire, Christianity was at this early stage an essentially urban phenomenon.[202] It spread along the Roman roads and upon reaching a town, it attracted mostly members of the urban lower and middle classes, "the manual workers and clerks, the shopkeepers and merchants."[203] Converts such as Tertullian, brought up in the literary circles of Carthage,[204] or the martyr Perpetua, offspring of an aristocratic Roman family, were quite exceptional.[205] Much more common were those Christians who had a social standing similar to the baker's wife in Apuleius' novel.[206]

How did this early Christian generation in Roman North Africa treat and care for their dead? Did they continue the same practices, which I have outlined in the previous chapter, and which connected the living to the dead? Or did they reject these practices? Was the cult of the dead perceived as being at odds with Christian faith? Did early Christians need to find new ways to care for their dead?

To answer these questions, one must start with the works of Tertullian. Because of the complexity of his treatises and arguments, his personal opinions towards the cult of the dead must first be assessed, as this clouds all his statements.

Tertullian, who composed his works between 196 and 212 in Carthage,[207] was a fierce Christian convert for whom anti-idolatry was "une partie intégrante de l'engagement chrétien."[208] But it was his adherence to a euhemeristic theory that justified his utter rejection of the pagan cult of the dead.[209] This theory was

[198] Musurillo 1972, xxii.
[199] Burns & Jensen 2014, 4.
[200] Burns & Jensen 2014, 4.
[201] Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 2.10: *Cum tanta hominum multitude, pars paene maior civitatis cuiusque.*
[202] Jones 1963, 18.
[203] Jones 1963, 21.
[204] Barnes 1985, 195-6.
[205] Burns & Jensen 2014, 5: "[Perpetua's description] seems to carry a studied emphasis on her exceptional status."
[206] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 9,14. This passage is generally regarded as an early caricature of Christians. Eg. Barnes 1985: 272: "The Metamorphoses contain a hostile and unmistakable allusion to Christianity (IX. 14)."
[207] Barnes 1985, 59.
[208] Saxer 1980, 39.
[209] In the 3rd century BC the Hellenistic philosopher Euhemerus had theorized that the ancient gods had been historical individuals who after their death were worshipped as gods.

adopted by many Christian apologists to expose the falsity of the pagan gods,[210] and Tertullian was no exception. In his *Apologia* Tertullian argued that the Christians did not worship the pagan gods because they knew these did not exist.[211] Tertullian claims that Saturn for instance was just a man, and that only after death he became mythicized in the collective memory of the people. Since his parents were not known, Tertullian writes, it became habitual to name heaven and earth as his parents (*quis enim non caelum ac terram matrem ac patrem venerationis et honoris gratia appellet?*).[212] Tertullian concludes that there is no denying that he died a man and was afterwards made god.[213]

The cult of the dead was to blame for this confusion. Just like Lucian and Plutarch before him, Tertullian condemned the excessive zeal shown towards the dead. In his eyes, this tradition of treating the dead as gods was an insult to the heavens.[214] The attitude of the pagans towards their dead was the same as that towards their gods and thus both were idolatry and renounced by the Christians: *una condicio partis utriusque est, una idololatria, una renuntiatio nostra adversus idololatrian.*[215] As Tertullian clearly stated, Christians did not participate in the cult of the dead: *non parentamus*.[216]

It is interesting to note that much of Tertullian's attacks against the cult of the dead, which go beyond mere accusations of idolatry, are often recycled from pagan moralists. Akin to Lucian, Tertullian would question the pagans on their attitudes towards the dead considering that these had no sensations: *Misellos uocas mortuos, cum de tuo loqueris, cum ab eis longe es. (…) Misellum ergo uocas qui nihil sentit?*[217]

Tertullian viewed death not as a cause for lamentation but as akin to a peaceful sleep, an ancient analogy he borrowed from Paul.[218] Christ had "slept in death" before rising on the third day,[219] and similarly, the Christian faithful awaited the end of days for his own body to reawake. During this last sleep, the body was separated from the soul and was devoid of sensation, although this was not always the case. Tertullian tells for instance the story of the funeral young Christian's funeral in which the deceased, before being laid in the grave and as the priest made his prayer, brought her arms together in the praying pose.[220]

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[210] Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 21.
[211] Tertullian, *Apologia* 10.2: *Deos vestros colere desinimus, ex quo illos non esse cognoscimus.*
[212] Tertullian, *Apologia* 10.9.
[213] Tertullian, *Apologia* 11.1: *sicut illos homines fuisse non audetis negare, ita post mortem deos factos instituistis adseverare.*
[214] Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 1.10.26-29: *Quid enim omnino ad honorandos eos facitis, quod non etiam mortuis uestris ex aequo praebeatis? Exstruitis deis templa: aeque mortuis templa; exstruitis aras dei : aeque mortuis aras; easdem titulis superscribitis litteras, easdem statuis inducitis formas, ut cuique ars aut negotium aut aetas fuit : senex de Saturno, imberbis de Apolline, uirgo de Diana figuratur, et miles in Marte et in Vulcano faber ferri consecratur. Nihil itaque mirum, si hostias easdem mortuis, quas et deis, caeditis eosdemque odores excrematis. Quis istam contumeliam excuset, quae utut mortuos cum deis deputet?*
[215] Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 6.4.
[216] Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 13.4
[217] Tertullian, *De Testimonio Animae* 4.5; Tertullian, *De Resurrectione Carn*is 1: *Sed vulgus inridet, existimans nihil superesse post mortem: et tamen defunctis parentat, et quidem impensissimo officio pro moribus eorum, pro temporibus esculentorum, ut quos negant sentire quidquam etiam desiderare praesumant.*
[218] Saxer 1980, 62-63.
[219] Tertullian, *De Testimonio Animae* 43, 10: *Christi dormituri in mortem.*
[220] Tertullian, *De Anima* 51.

Thus even Tertullian, despite his beliefs and his intellectual acumen, entertained the idea that some vestige of a person's soul could remain in the body after death. That this was believed by some Christians he admits it.[221] Moreover, despite his laconic declaration (*non parentamus*), he does concede that the Christians did participate in some rites done in honor of the dead. In his *De Corona* he states that o*blationes pro defunctis, pro nataliciis, annua die facimus.*[222] Despite his aversion for the cult of the dead, which he saw as just another form of idolatry, and his belief that there was no sensation in death, Tertullian still considered that the living had to care for their dead. In his treatise *De Exhortatione Castitatis*, he discourages Christian widowers from seeking remarriage, equating it to having two wives:

> *Duplex enim rubor est, quia in secundo matrimonio duae uxores eundem circumstant maritum, una spiritu, alia in carne. Neque enim pristinam poteris odisse, cui etiam religiosiorem reseruas affectionem, ut iam receptae apud dominum, pro cuius spiritu postulas, pro qua oblationes annuas reddis.* (11.1)

Another passage of the same treatise confirms that these *oblationes* should bring comfort to the deceased. Still addressing the widower, Tertullian notes to him that *postremo secures morietur, relictis filii forsitan*, *qui illi parentent*.[223] It becomes therefore clear that we cannot take his statement in *De Spectaculis* too literally, not only were Christians performing rites in honour of the dead, they were expected to do so and perceived this as a comfort to the deceased.

Scholars such as Victor Saxer have attempted to solve this aporia within Tertullian's thought by distinguishing the Christian *parentatio* from its pagan counterpart.[224] Indeed, when Tertullian mentions Christian rites commemorating the dead, these appear as solemn and solitary acts of devotion.[225] Quite differently does he describe the rites performed by the pagans, which he calls both lavish (*impensissimo*) and delicious (*esculentus*).[226] In one passage he exposes the absurdity of the pagans' behaviours: *Vocas porro securos, si quando extra portam cum obsoniis et matteis tibi potius parentans ad busta recedis aut a bustis dilutior redis.*[227]

This leads Saxer to affirm that when Tertullian refers the *oblationes* which a widower is expected to do yearly, he can only mean the eucharist, since "[l]es offrandes funéraires sont toujours présentées par Tertullien comme païennes et interdites aux chrétiens."[228] However, assuming Tertullian's works form a coherent whole overlooks the contradictions evident in his writings, as demonstrated here.[229] It has been

[221] Tertullian, *De Anima* 51: *Nec ignoro aliquod esse uestigium opinionis istius. De meo didici.*
[222] Tertullian, *De Corona* 3.3.
[223] Tertullian, *De Exhortatione Castitatis* 12. 3.
[224] Saxer 1980, 72.
[225] This argument, that the Christians' peaceful character assured that the rites to the dead were performed without excessive behaviours, is found also in Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 38.4: *At enim nos exsequias adornamus eadem tranquillitate qua vivimus.*
[226] Tertullian, *De Resurrectione Carn*is 1.
[227] Tertullian, *De Testimonio Animae* 4.4.
[228] Saxer 1980, 73.
[229] Dunn 2018: "It is obvious that Tertullian is not always consistent in his beliefs and opinions."

suggested more recently that when Tertullian mentions the *oblationes annuas* he could be referring to Christian funerary banquets.[230]

Deciphering Tertullian proves challenging due to his tendency to blend descriptions with exhortations, blurring the line between fact and opinion. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that in his world, the cult of the dead was popular, evidenced by frequent visits to tombs for commemorations involving libations and banquets. This supports findings from the previous chapter, highlighting the significant concern for the deceased and post-funerary rites. Despite asserting that Christians did not participate in the cult of the dead (*non parentamus*), Tertullian recognized the importance of caring for the dead. He instructed widowers to regularly commemorate their deceased partners and make necessary offerings. However, due to Tertullian's vague descriptions and preference for admonition over detailed accounts, the specific rites performed by Christians in honour of the dead remain unclear. Regardless, the widespread concern for caring for the dead among pagans in Africa appears to have been also present among Christians.

Cyprian appeared on the African Christian scene a generation after Tertullian. Equally a member of the Carthaginian upper class, he received a comprehensive education and considered himself a *persona insignis*.[231] Before converting to Christianity Cyprian was already a famed rhetor in Carthage[232] but he felt deeply dissatisfied with the world he lived in, which he saw as corrupt and foul. How could one, Cyprian asked himself, convert himself to Christianity when he was so used to these evils?[233] Cyprian managed to escape this life in sin by virtue of his conversion: *postquam coelitus spiritu hausto in novum me hominem nativitas secunda raparavit, mirum in modum protinus confirmare se dubia, patere clausa, lucere tenebrosa…*[234]

Christian faith had washed the darkness away with light. While before Cyprian had lived among *vinolentia, superbia, iracundia,* etc., he was now walking the way of justice and innocence with *castiate sobria, mente integra, voce pura, virtute sincera.*[235] This dichotomy of pagan misconduct against Christian virtue was pervasive in the writings of early Christian apologists, such as Tertullian and Cyprian.[236] Could such men have any tolerance towards postfunerary celebrations involving feasting and drinking?

Following his conversion, Cyprian was quickly elected as bishop of Carthage. During his tenure, the Christians in North Africa faced numerous hardships. Around 250 a plague ravaged North Africa, Carthage in particular. Pontius, his deacon and biographer, described how Cyprian, amidst widespread isolation and flight from contagion, emulated Tobias by organizing the burial of the dead.[237] This blight also prompted

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[230] Burns & Jensen 2014, 494 : "The anniversary "offerings" that Tertullian commended might have been gifts brought to the church, but the practice could have been a Christian adaptation of the traditional anniversary meal at the grave, not unlike the agape banquet."

[231] Clarke 1984: 14

[232] Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 53.

[233] Cyprian, *Ad Donatum* 3: "*Alta haec et profunda penitus radice sederunt. Quando parcimoniam discit qui epularibus coenis et largis dapibus assuevit? (…) Hic stipatus clientium cuneis, frequentior comitatu officiosi agminis honestatus, poenam putat cum solus est. Tenacibus semper illecebris necesse est, ut solebat, vinolentia invitet, inflet superbia, iracundia inflammet, rapacitas inquietet, crudelitas stimulet, ambitio delectet, libido praecipitet.*"

[234] Cyprian, *Ad Donatum* 4.

[235] Cyprian, *Ad Donatum* 5.

[236] Jerome *De viris illustribus*, 53 tells us that Cyprian would read Tertullian every day, and when he wished for the servants to bring him Tertullian's books, he would simply say: "hand me the master."

[237] Pontius. *Vita Cypriani* 9-10

Cyprian to write the *De mortalitate*, which Monceaux called "une sorte de sermon sur la mort."[238] In this treatise, Cyprian teaches his coreligionists about Christian death and which, according to him, should not be lamented.[239] But should Christians care for them after death? Some rites were expected to be performed in honour of the dead, but where was the limit? In one letter, Cyprian mentions a sacrifice and *oblatio* typically made for the deceased.[240] Similarly to Tertullian, he leaves unspecified what exactly the offering and sacrifice entailed, leaving the question open to scholars to speculate on.[241]

Another interesting piece of evidence is his letter sent to the Christian congregation of Emerita Augusta in Hispania.[242] It condemned the actions of its former bishop, Felix Martialis, who had received during the Decian persecution the *nefando idololatriae libello* certifying that its holder had performed a sacrifice. But this was not his only transgression:

> *Martialis quoque praeter gentilium turpia et lutulenta convivia in collegio diu frequentata et filios in eodem collegio exterarum gentium more apud profana sepulchra depositos et alienigenis consepultos…*

Historians have inferred two important facts from the passage cited above, that Cyprian disapproved of funerary banquets and that Christians were buried separately from the pagans under Cyprian.[243] But both these aspects cannot be accepted lightly. Regarding funerary banquets, the *turpia et lutulenta convivia*, while this passage underscores Cyprian's distaste for such gatherings, it does not suggest a Christian prohibition against such feasts. Cyprian had already made clear in the narrative of his conversion, that he found such lascivious feasts as indecent and typical of bad pagan behavior. Nothing in his letters suggests however that he attempts to restrict postfunerary rites in honor of the dead, while in this case the issue was rather that these were banquets organized by a pagan collegium.

Traditionally, it has been assumed that Christians and pagans were buried separately from an early stage, with this passage of Cyprian seen as supporting evidence. But Eric Rebillard has recently called into question such a theory, objecting that the evidence has been misread. Concerning this passage, Rebillard writes that "we must take note of his insistence on describing pagan rites as foreign to Christians, but the key to understanding his indignation is found in the role played by the collegium."[244] According to Rebillard, the issue is that Martialis' son was buried in the collegium's premises, which had "religious implications," and concludes by stating that the letter "contains no general condemnation of the mixing of pagan and Christian tombs, but condemns specifically the recourse to a pagan association for funerals

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[238] Monceaux 1963, 2.306.

[239] Cyprian, *De mortalitate* 20: *…fratres nostros non esse lugendus accersitione Dominica de saeculo liberatos, cum sciamus non eos amitti sed praemitti, recedentes praecedere, ut profiscentes, ut navigantes solent, desiderari eos debere, non plangi, nec accipiendas esse hic atras vestes, quando illi ibi indumenta alba jata sumpserint, occasionem dandam non esse genitilibus ut nos merito ac jure reprehendant quod quos vivere apud Deum dicimus, ut extinctos et perditos lugeamus, et fidem quam sermone et voce depromimus cordis et pectoris testimonio non probemus.*

[240] Cyprian, *Epistulae* 1.2: *non offerretur pro eo , nec sacrificium pro dormitione eius celebrare* (these are the usual rites of death which Cyprian forbids to be applied to Geminius Victor since he had acted against the orders of the bishops.)

[241] Saxer 1969, 301-302.

[242] Cyprian, *Epistulae* 67.

[243] Saxer 1980, 93.

[244] Rebillard 2009, 28.

and burials of Christians."[245] The one conclusion that may be conjectured following a carefully reading Cyprian's letter is that Christians were expected to care for their own dead.

Tertullian and Cyprian shine a bright light on an otherwise silent world for the modern historian. Their extensive writings significantly shape our understanding of early Christian communities in Roman North Africa. However, it's crucial to recognize that they are just two voices among many Christians. Coming from the elite class, their perspectives may not fully represent the practices of the broader Christian population. Their aversion to the secular world and its indulgences echoed the discourse of classical intellectuals who criticized hubris and superstition, as illustrated in the examples from the first chapter. These intellectuals often spoke out against prevailing behaviours, positioning themselves as outsiders. Were Tertullian and Cyprian more effective than Lucian and Plutarch in persuading people of the flaws of the cult of the dead? Did Christians reject practices like *vinolentia* and *turpia convivia* due to moral qualms? Or was this aversion primarily due to the high social status of Tertullian and Cyprian, rather than being inherent to Christianity as practiced by the majority?

At this point, we have to turn to the material evidence to examine how the Christians cared for their dead. As has been already mentioned, the Christian funerary material evidence in North Africa dates predominately from the fourth to the sixth century, but a few findings having been linked to the third century.[246] The occidental necropolis excavated in Cherchel, the ancient Iol-Caesarea, provides important evidence for the burial practices of Christians during this early period. In this necropolis, which was in use since the early imperial period,[247] both pagan and Christian burials were excavated, which, particularly in the older part of the cemetery, confirmed the cohabitation of pagan and Christian tombs.[248] Another example is found in Tipasa, where the young St. Salsa was buried in a pagan cemetery.[249]

Ultimately, Christians' burial practices were predominantly a family matter, influenced by social status, wealth, and ideological beliefs.[250] Wealthy Christians would often erect ostentatious tombs despite the bishops' disapproval.[251] A luxurious Christian tomb complex was recently unearthed in the Leptiminus cemetery mentioned earlier. Adjacent to the previously discussed pagan necropolis, this discovery included a hypogeum containing several Christian tombs, 17 of which were adorned with intricate mosaics, some of exceptional quality.[252] The hypogeum with its rich mosaics, which have been dated to the fourth century,[253] was a familial complex that "only the wealthiest could afford."[254]

[245] Rebillard 2009, 29.
[246] Burns & Jensen 2014, 120.
[247] Leveau 1983, 87.
[248] Leveau 1983, 89.
[249] Duval 1982, 698-9.
[250] Rebillard 2003, 30; Rebillard 2003, 49 : "…il semble bien que les chrétiens, comme les autres groupes religieux, n'aient pas eu de raisons religieuses pour privilégier une forme de sépulture commune, aux dépens de la sépulture familiale."; Note also MacMullen 2009, 57.
[251] Burns & Jensen 2014, 121.
[252] Bates 2021, 511-554.
[253] Bates 2021, 553.
[254] Burns & Jensen 2014, 121.

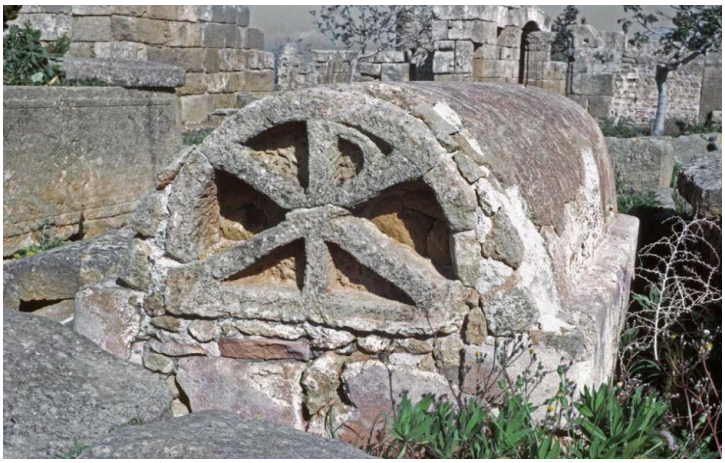

Figura 10 Fourth century Christian Cupula tomb in Tipasa (William L. MacDonald Collection, Artstor)

The type of burial a Christian was entitled to depended therefore greatly on the social background of his family.[255] In Cherchel, a variety of burials were found in Christian context, from finely carved sarcophagi, to simple graves covered by tiles (*tegulae*), a very common type of burial in Roman North Africa predating the advent of Christianity.[256] *Cupulae*, which, as we have seen, was the most prevalent of tombs in Roman North Africa, were also used by Christian, as the remarkable 4th-century grave in Tipasa attests (fig. 10). Graves lacking Christian symbols or inscriptions became indistinguishable from pagan graves. Even when symbols are present, ambiguity often remains because these symbols were often inherited and shared with pagans.[257] In North Africa, a notable example is the fish, which held symbolic significance for both Christians and pagans and is frequently found in funerary contexts.[258]

As far as the material evidence can inform us, Christians were burying their dead in the same type of tombs as pagans. Were they also caring for the dead the same way? Indeed, both *mensae* and libation tubes have been uncovered in Christian funerary context.[259] *Mensae* were often accompanied by a cistern and a water system, the purpose of which is debated.[260] The Christian mensae, similar to their pagan counterparts, featured a rimmed border and a central cavity encircled by a high-relief circle. As Yvette Duval writes, these *mensae* "représentent symboliquement des tables de repas, susceptibles de recevoir

[255] Kötting 1965, 37: "Die Gräber ordnen sich nach der Zugehörigkeit der Verstorbenen zur Familie und zunächst nicht nach der Zugehörigkeit zu einem religiösen Bekenntnis."

[256] Christian Sarcophagi: Leveau 1983, 85-92; Christian tile graves: Leveau 1978, 94; Pagan tile graves: Guéry 1985, 43.

[257] Galletier 1922, 12: "il n'y a pas de transition brusque entre l'épigraphie funéraire païenne et la poésie chrétienne ; cette dernière hérite des images , des procèdes de sa devancière et ses poètes se servent parfois inconsidérément d'expressions païennes sont on ne saurait tirer des conclusions bien sévères pour leur foi." Note also that the same artisans worked for a pagan and a Christian clientele (Salomonson 1979, 26).

[258] It was the staple food in pagan funerary banquets and it is often depicted on funerary *mensae* as seen in the second chapter. Jastrzebowska 1979; Dölger 1910;

[259] Prévot 1984: VII; Duval 1982, 525; Marrou 1979, 268 : "Qu'on trouve parfois, dans un milieu chrétien, un dispositif de la tombe analogue à celui que connaissaient les païens et permettant de « nourrir les morts » en versant un liquide à travers le couvercle par un orifice disposé à cet effet, la chose n'est pas douteuse : on l'a retrouvée à Timgad comme à Tebessa."

[260] MacMullen 2009, 55 argues it is to mix the wine; Rebillard 2015, 276 argues it is to clean the room and *mensa* following the funerary banquet.

de mets et libations, mais aussi des convives."[261] The central cavity was eventually replaced by the Chi Rho monogram.[262] However, some *mensae*, like some found in Mactar, retained the cavity alongside the Chrismon, though no longer at the centre (fig. 11).[263]

Figure 31 Two Christian mensae of the necropolis of Mactar dated to around IV-V c. (Prévot 1984)

Pagan authorities viewed cemeteries as vital gathering places for Christians, often forbidding their access during persecution.[264] Ramsay MacMullen argued that Christians commemorated their dead there with funerary banquets and libations, remembering the deeds of the deceased as described in the *mensa* of Aelia Secundula mentioned earlier.[265] The scant material evidence suggests nevertheless continuity rather than discontinuity from pagan to Christian practices in the cult of the dead. Reflecting on funerary evidence in North Africa, Paul-Albert Février concluded that African Christians "ont puisé à pleines mains dans les traditions profanes."[266]

[261] Duval 1982, 533.
[262] Duval 1982, 536.
[263] There is great difficulty in dating these *mensa* of Mactar since they have been repurposed. Prévot, who divides her catalogue of the Mactar necropolis in four periods, dates these to the first period, which she defines as anytime before 450. (II.5, p. 28; II.7, p. 30)
[264] Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 3.1; *Acta Cypriani* 1.7; Note also the edict of Valerian that forbade Christians from assembling in what are called *koimeteria*. (Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 7.13.3). Rebillard (2009: 3-6) argues that the word *koimeteria* refers only to the tombs of the martyrs. Kötting 1965: 13: "Durch dieses Edikt soll nicht die Sorge um die Ruhe der Toten angetastet werden, sondern die Kultübung, die sich bei den Christen als legitimes Pendant zu den Gemeindegottesdienst entwickelt hatte, verboten werden. Man muss also in der heidnische Verwaltung der Überzeugung gewesen sei, durch dieses Verbot eine gewohnte religiöse Übung der Christen stören und damit ihr Gemeinschaftsgefühl lähmen zu können."
[265] MacMullen 2009, 58 argues that Aelia Secundula was Christian, and although he does not specify why, I believe it is due to the use of the noun *memoria* and the verb *dormit* when referring to Secundula's death.
[266] Fevrier 1966, 183.

A precious testimony for the Christian meetings by graveside is found in the fascinating Christian *mensa* of Matares, in the vicinity of Tipasa.[267] This *mensa*, dated to the mid-fourth century,[268] is covered by a colorful and richly decorated mosaic, which bears the inscription *In Christo Deo Pax et Concordia sit convivio nostro* (fig. 12). This inscription is unusual: it omits mention of the deceased, and the reference to Pax, typically used for the deceased, applies instead to the living gathering at the grave for a banquet (*convivium*). Moreover, the mention of Concordia in Christian funerary practice is unprecedented. The exact interpretation of these words has been debated; Marrou suggested that the phrase Pax et Concordia originates from Cyprian's rhetoric.[269] It's important to note how the inscription invites Pax et Concordia to the banquet. I propose seeing this inscription, especially the phrase *Pax et Concordia*, as an expression of syncretism in North African Christian funerary practices. *Pax* represents the Christian element, while *Concordia* represents the pagan element, reflecting the influence of the Caristia banquet where *Concordia* held central importance.[270] I imagine then that the mensa of Mactares, as well as the other Christian mensae from this period, would support on the deceased's *natalicia* a banquet for both him and and the living, both *Parentalia* and *Caristia*, and in between Christian innovation and pagan tradition. Tertullian, just like Ovid a few centuries earlier, tried to convince the masses that the dead *parva petunt*,[271] but such declarations seemed to fall on deaf ears. The graves were the locations for joyful encounters, where both living and dead would revel in wine, food and memories.[272]

Figure 14 Fourth-century Mensa of Matares (Tipasa Museum)

[267] Marrou 1979, 261.
[268] Lancel 1997, 803.
[269] Marrou 1979, 267.
[270] As seen in chapter 2.
[271] Ovid, *Fasti* 2.535.
[272] Macmullen 2009, 57: "Their [Christians' rituals for the dead] party atmosphere should be acknowledged."

During the pre-Constantinian period, Tertullian and Cyprian needed to defend Christian values while critiquing pagan practices, portraying the world in stark contrast: Christianity represented light with its chastity and sober mind, while paganism symbolized darkness with its indulgence in wine, pride, and anger. However, archaeological evidence reveals that their world was more complex than this binary portrayal. Funerary rites of Christians and pagans overlapped significantly in aspects such as family roles, tomb types, burial locations, and iconography. Christian contexts have shown the same structures which had been used by pagans for grave commemorations, indicating similar rituals for the deceased. While Tertullian and Cyprian condemned indulgent practices like feasting and drinking, which they associated with pagans, archaeological evidence indicates that Christians also engaged in post-funerary rites at tombs, potentially including elements like food and drink, similar to pagan rituals previously described.

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3.2 Commemorating Martyrs in the Age of Persecutions

In the early writings of African Christians, it becomes evident that not all deceased were considered equal; martyrs occupied the highest status. The Christians were particularly concerned with ensuring that the memory of these heroic martyrs did not fade into oblivion, preserving it through songs or narratives.[273] The Passion of Perpetua, composed in the early third century and which Musurillo calls "the archetype of all later Acts of Christian martyrs,"[274] serves this purpose as the author of the prologue states. The author then adds that it is not only important to care for their memory, but also to share it with those who did not witness the martyrdom.[275]

To preserve the memory of the martyrs was more than just commemorating them, it also became a path to one's own salvation, since through the martyrs one could hope for heavenly intercession. While the average dead had to wait for the return of Christ to be accepted into heaven, the martyrs went directly to paradise after death.[276] The paradise was for the time being only accessible to the martyrs: *Quomodo Perpetua, fortissima martyr, sub die passionis in reuelatione paradisi solos illic martyras uidit, nisi quia nullis romphaea paradisi ianitrix cedit nisi qui in Christo decesserint, non in Adam?*[277]

The visions Perpetua received just before her martyrdom, which were allegedly recorded by the martyr herself,[278] are remarkable. In one vision Perpetua sees her brother Dinocrates, who had died when he was just seven *per infirmitatem facie cancerata*. Perpetua retells her vision as follows:

[273] Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 7.2.
[274] Musurillo 1972, xxv.
[275] *Passio Perpetuae* 1: *Et nos itaque quod audivimus et contrectavimus, annuntiamus et vobis, fratres et filioli, uti et vos qui interfuistis rememoremini gloriae domini et qui nunc cognoscitis per auditum communionem habeatis cum sanctis martyribus, et per illos cum dominos nostro Iesu Christo, cui est claritas et honor in saecula saeculorum.*
[276] Tertullian, *De Resurrectione Carnis* 43.4 : *nemo enim peregrinatus a corpore statim immoratur penes dominum nisi ex martyrii praerogativa, paradiso scilicet, non inferis, deversurus.*
[277] Tertullian, *De Anima* 55.4; Saxer 1980, 77.
[278] Musurillo 1972: xxv.

> *Video Dinocraten exeuntem de loco tenebroso ubi et conplures erant, aestuantem valde et sitientem, sordido cultu et colore pallido. (…) et inter me et illum grande erat diastema ita ita ut uterque ad invicem accedere non possemus. Erat deinde in illo loco ubi Dinocrates erat piscina plena aqua, altiorem marginem habens quam erat statura pueri, et extendebat se Dinocrates quasi bibiturus. Ego dolebam quod et piscina illa aquam habebat et tamen propter altitudinem marginis bibiturus non esset.* (7)

Perpetua then wakes up from her vision in disarray and realizing that her brother was suffering, proceeds to pray for him. One the next night she had another vision:

> *Video locum illum quem retro videram et Dinocraten mundo corpore bene vestitum refrigerantem (…) et piscina illam, quam retro videram, summisso margine usque ad umbilicum pueri; et aquam de ea trahebat sine cessatione. Et super marginem fiala aurea plena aqua. Et accessit Dinocrates et de ea bibere coepit; quae fiala non deficiebat. Et satiates accessit de aqua ludere more inafantium gaudens.* (8)

The visions of Perpetua seeing her brother suffering from thirst and then being refreshed by Perpetua's actions have troubled historians. Johannes Quasten noted that depicting the dead as subject to earthly needs like thirst was "entirely contrary to the Christian outlook." [279] However, this aligns with the evidence above showing a genuine concern among African Christians for the wellbeing of the deceased. Despite Quasten's assertion, African Christians believed that the welfare of the dead depended on how they were cared for by the living. It was through the actions of the living, such as Perpetua's, that Dinocrates was refreshed rather than left parched.

The word Perpetua uses to describe this new joyful state of Dinocrates is *refrigerantem*, which was an important notion in early Christianity especially regarding the care of the dead. For Tertullian the *interim refrigerium* was the state in which the souls of the righteous found themselves awaiting the "celestial promise."[280] It was a pleasant and soothing state which was wished upon the deceased. Cyprian uses the word in a slightly different sense: During the persecution of Valerian, Cyprian wrote a letter to Christian prisoners, including women and children, encouraging their steadfastness and extolling the virtues of martyrdom.[281] Noting the presence of children, Cyprian referenced the example of the Hebrew boys from the book of Daniel, who had refused to worship a Babylonian idol and were cast into a furnace, yet divine intervention stopped the flames and provided them with refreshment (*refrigerii locum flammae dederunt*).[282] The Hebrew boys in the furnace would become one of the most popular symbols for the African martyr and was prevalent in the early Christian Art of North Africa.[283]

[279] Quasten 1940, 257.
[280] Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 4.34.13.
[281] Cyprian, *Epistulae* 80.2: *Nemo mortem cogitet, sed immortalitatem, nec temporarium poenam, sed gloriam sempiternam.*
[282] Cyprian, *Epistulae* 80.3.
[283] Salomonson 1979, 51.

Figure 15 Early Christian lamps with the motif of the three Hebrew boys from the Bardo Museum, Tunisia (Ennabli 1976)

Refrigerium thus appeases pain or discomfort: in Cyprian's example, God transforms the agony of flames into refreshment. Cyprian uses this story to assure that the martyrs' pains would be sweet, suggesting that refrigerium was the joy given by God that martyrs experienced in facing death. In Perpetua's vision, however, the martyr herself, through her prayers, brings refreshment to Dinocrates. Martyrs had a privileged position to intercede for the suffering in the afterlife, though this power was not limited to them. Tertullian notes, for instance, that widows must pray for the souls of the deceased and seek their refreshment.[284]

How could one practice *refrigerium*, that is, "press for the refreshment" of the deceased? Some scholars have turned to the material evidence for clues on the practice of *refrigerium*. Philippe Leveau, who worked on the Christian necropolis of Cherchel, suggested that the various cisterns and water systems present next to the funerary *mensae* were used for the *refrigerium*.[285] Considering that Christian *mensae* had, as already mentioned, an elevated border rim, could it be filled with water like Dinocrates' *piscina*?[286]

It has been also suggested that the *refrigerium* was simply a Christian funerary banquet.[287] In pagan Rome epigraphy shows that the *refrigerium* referred almost certainly to a funerary banquet.[288] Various graffiti

[284] Tertullian, *De Monogamia* 10.4: *et pro anima eius orat et refrigerium interim adpostulat ei*.

[285] Leveau 1983, 97: "Il faut faire le rapprochement avec les installations hydrauliques trouvées dans la nécropole de Matarès a Tipasa ou le rapport entre l'eau et le culte funéraire sont indiscutables. Nous sommes certainement en présence d'un exemple archéologique du rite du refrigerium : le lien entre la citerne et les sarcophages maçonnés est architecturalement évident."

[286] One *mensa* from Manastirine, Salona has an inscription in which the dedicator, Aurelius Secundus, refers to the *mensa* as *piscina*. MacMullen 2009, 45.

[287] MacMullen 2009, 29.

[288] Delehaye 1927, 136: "[*Refrigerium*] devient le synonyme du latin *epulum* ou *convivium*. Dans quelques inscriptions de l'époque impériale, *refrigerare* est employé comme équivalent de *vesci*, *epulari*, surtout lorsqu'il

discovered on the third milestone of the *Via Appia* attest that this practice of *refrigerium* was performed by Christians in honour of the martyrs and specially Peter and Paul.[289] As the graffiti indicate, the *refrigerium* was often performed to "discharge a vow" (*votum solvit*). According to Delehaye, to perform the *refrigerium* "on prenait quelque nourriture et l'on vidait une coupe en l'honneur des SS. Pierre et Paul."[290]

A few of these graffiti on the *Via Appia* were etched by Africans.[291] Did they perform similar rites at the tombs of African martyrs? The archaeological evidence compiled by Yvette Duval in her *Loca sanctorum Africae* provides important evidence to answer this. Duval's work covers martyr cult practices in Roman North Africa from the third to the sixth century. Unlike literary accounts, which focus on spreading martyr stories, archaeological findings suggest martyr cult activities were centred around the tomb. According to Duval, these tombs served as the earliest places of worship, hosting familial ceremonies that involved the entire Christian community.[292]

Perhaps the biggest surprise in Duval's catalogue is the quantity of *mensa* found associated with martyrs. These seem to be an African innovation, since they appear inscribed with the formula *mensa marturum* which is found nowhere else in the Latin west.[293] Concerning their functionality, Duval does not doubt that these were used as "tables d'oblations."[294] These tables, if it were not for the explicit reference to the martyrs, are identical to the Christian *mensae* of non-martyrs discussed above. Février, upon examining the evidence in Tipasa, concluded that architecturally, there was no distinction between the two cults.[295] Furthermore, bishops like Cyprian used the same vocabulary to describe the rites given to both martyrs and non-martyrs. I have already mentioned a letter by Cyprian in which he confirms that it was expected to honour a deceased Christian with both *sacrificium et oblatio.*[296] In another letter, sent

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s'agit de repas de corporation en souvenir d'un défunt. Aurelius Vitalio, qui a fait construire pour lui et les siens MEMORIAM CVM SOLARIO ET CVVICVLO, invite les survivants: UT SENE BILE REFRIGERETIS, c'est-à-dire à faire paisiblement entre eux un repas funèbre (CIL XIV 3323)"

[289] Fevrier 1984, 166: Inscription on the tomb of Januaria: *Januaria bene refrigera et roga pro nos.*; Delehaye 1927, 135 : "Les graffiti désormais fameux récemment découverts au troisième mille de la voie Appienne ont à nouveau attiré l'attention sur la pratique du refrigerium auprés de la tombe des martyrs. Ces inscriptions sont considérées par tout le monde comme des monuments d'un culte trés intense rendu, *ad Catacumbas*, aux princes des apôtres |. .En voici quelques échantillons.

- PETRO ET PAVLO TOMIVS COELIVS REFRIGERIVM FECI
XIII KAL. APRILES REFRIGERAVI PARTHENIVS IN DEO ET NOS IN DEO OMNES
AT PAVLVM ET PETRVM REFRIGERAVI
DALMATIVS VOTVM IS PROMISIT REFRIGERIVM"

[290] Delehaye 1927, 137; See also Pietri 1991, 26: "Le mot [*refrigerium*], spécialisé par les chrétiens pour qualifier l'état promis au défunt dans l'attente de la résurrection désigne, en ce cas, l'intervention ici-bas d'un rite, emprunté aux païens, un repas funéraire ou plus sûrement l'offrande symbolique de nourriture."

[291] Saxer 1980, 148.

[292] Duval 1982, 750: "Le premier lieu du culte des martyrs fut lie a la présence des corps saints : très tôt les fidèles ont célébré les saints défunts sur leurs sépultures, dans des cérémonies de type familial, mais étendues à l'ensemble de la communauté locale."

[293] Duval 1982, 753 : "la formule qui les définit, *mensa marturum*, gravée sur la plupart d'entre elles ne se retrouve pas ailleurs en Occident."

[294] Duval 1982, 753.

[295] Février 1996, 52: "Rien ne différencie donc – architecturalement – le culte rendu aux mortes et le culte rendu aux martyres dans Tipasa."

[296] Cyprian, *Epistulae* 1.2.

from the exile imposed by the persecutors, Cyprian praises a certain Tertullus who has been recording the names of the martyrs, *ut celebrantur hic a nobis oblationes et sacrificia ob commemorationes eorum*.[297]

Figure 16 Mensa Marturum (Duval 1982: no. 123)

Considering the similarity between both cults at this early stage, it has been justifiably advocated that the cult of the martyrs originated from private commemorative rites related to the cult of the dead.[298] The familial aspects of the martyr cults at this early stage are clear in the evidence collected by Duval. At this point, bishops were not involved in creating spaces dedicated to martyr worship.[299] Instead, it was the Christians of modest means who fostered these early cults. The oldest epitaphs of martyrs catalogued by Duval show clear signs of the humble origins of these cults.[300] Not only the epitaphs but also the *mensae marturum* were set up by these modest Christians. Could these have been put in place by the family members of the martyr honoured, as had been the case with the *mensa* of Secundula? It would be only natural and indeed one *mensa* found in Castellum Tingitanum had been dedicated to four martyred siblings by their parents.[301] But the vast majority of the *mensae marturum* catalogued by Duval was offered as an ex-voto by the families of modest Christians.[302] These offerings were made in the hope that

[297] Cyprian, *Epistulae* 12.2.

[298] MacMullen 2009, 60; Kotila 1992, 36-7: "The development of the Christian cult of the dead was closely linked to the rise of the cult of martyrs … in fact, for the first two centuries, it is not possible to distinguish between commemoration of martyrs and other faithful departed."

[299] MacMullen 2009, 57.

[300] Duval 1982, 751 : "Les [épitaphes] plus anciennes ont un formulaire proche de celles de simples fidèles, humble et dépouillé hormis la mention explicite de la sainteté du défunt."

[301] Duval 1982, 377-80; See also Duval 1982, 403.

[302] Duval 1982, 531-2: "ces types particuliers d'ex-voto en forme de tables (…) les dédicants sont des familles de simples fidèles."

the martyrs would, from heaven, intervene for the dedicators below on earth.[303] This appears to be the meaning of a late fourth-century inscription found in Dougga:[304]

> *Sancti ac baeatissimi martyres,*
> *Petimus in mente habeatis, ut donentur vobis XXXX Simposium,*
> *Mammari(um), Graniu(m), Elpidefo-*
> *rum, qui haec cub(icula) IIII ad CPM*
> *suis sum(p)tibus et suis operibus*
> *perfecerunt.*

While it has been difficult to decipher the exact meaning of the inscription,[305] it appears evident the dedicants were hoping to remain in the goodwill of the martyrs in exchange for their gift, the *cubicula.*[306] In return for providing the necessary structures for the commemoration of the martyrs through feats, the dedicators hoped that the martyrs would intercede for them from their heavenly abode.

In this early period the martyrs commemorated by the African Christians were strictly local. By studying the epigraphic evidence, Duval notes that even the cults of the most popular martyrs, such as Salsa of Tipasa,[307] stayed local and "étroitement lie à la sépulture."[308] This caused every Christian community to venerate their own martyrs, which became innumerable in the vast African landscape.[309] No wonder that Augustine would later ask, *numquid non et Africa sanctorum martyrum corporibus plena est*?[310] The local communities of Christians, mostly modest laypeople whose beliefs and behaviours became overshadowed by the prolific intellectuals like Tertullian and Cyprian, were the ones responsible for founding and nurturing these cults.[311] The bishops, as mentioned, were not involved in this process, nor were they attempting to control these martyr cults. During the third century, enthusiasm for the martyrs spread among Christians of all ranks, including bishops, making any form of veneration by the people acceptable.[312]

The evidence here collected indicates that the earliest commemorations of the dead martyrs did not differ significantly from those in honour of the common dead. The early martyr cult was centred around the

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[303] Duval 1982, 750: "les fidèles honorent et invoquet les martyrs pour que, du Ciel, ils intercedent pour eux ici bas et pour leur salut éternel."

[304] Duval 1982, 36: dates it to the early fifth century or late fourth. A mosaic with a very similar inscription from Sefutula has been also dated to the late fourth century (Duval 1982: 79)

[305] Duval 1982, 34-39; Monceaux 1908, 94: tentatively translates: "Saints et bienheureux martyrs, nous vous demandons de vous souvenir, pour qu'on vous offre des banquets : souvenez-vous de Mammarius, de Granius, d'Elpideforus qui ont construit entièrement ces quatre *cubicula* pour les banquets des martyres, a leurs frais et avec le trésor de leurs bonnes œuvres."

[306] Duval 1982, 38 interprets the *cubicula* as meaning a dining couches and considers that the gift consisted of "quatres banquettes destinées à recevoir les convives des repas rituels."

[307] Duval 1982, 757.

[308] Duval 1982, 700.

[309] Shaw 2011, 610: "Most Christian martyrs were particularly identified with a small village or rural region, and they were often unknown beyond it." Duval 1982: 757: "La piété des Africains s'est essentiellement portée vers les martyrs africains, innombrables, pour la plupart inconnus, étroitement locaux."

[310] Augustine, *Epistulae* 78.3.

[311] Duval 1982, 758: "L'Afrique fut la terre de martyrs, et les communautés les plus humbles en ont fait vivre le souvenir."

[312] Brisson 1958, 294-6; Markus 1991, 99: "In the age before Constantine, to honour the martyr had been a duty."

tomb, which was often adorned with a *mensa marturum* to receive libations and also meals.[313] The decision to install a *mensa* was made by the local Christian "family."[314] Once installed, these structures called the Christians to celebrate a particular martyr. All this was shared with the rites of the cult of the dead.[315] The vocabulary of both cults appears to overlap in this early period, with *refrigerium* used in both martyr cults and general funerary practices. However, there remains uncertainty about the specific refrigerium rites practiced by Christians in North Africa. Duval describes these early cults as "family-type ceremonies," which were always prone to significant variability, as seen in previous chapters. This suggests that African Christian communities may have embraced diverse practices. Some regions may have engaged in water rituals as proposed by Leveau, while others may have preferred small libations and food offerings. It's conceivable that within the same community, different families chose distinct ways to honour their martyrs, some offering a *mica salis* while others delicious banquets. During this era, local Christian communities had autonomy, and, as previously noted, did not necessarily diverge from pagan practices in their commemoration of the deceased.

The cult of the martyrs introduced a significant innovation: it shifted from a focus solely on the living caring for the dead to a belief that the deceased martyrs could also intercede for the living. Up to this point, the cult of the dead had been about solidifying one's personal history, weaving a narrative that provided each participant with a sense of identity and continuity. Now, with the cult of the martyrs, their future was also at stake. Christians sought the favour of martyrs by dedicating ex-votos at their cultic sites, such as mensae or even cubiculae. These offerings, often unearthed by archaeologists, likely represent the more elaborate and expensive tokens. But what about those who couldn't afford such offerings? It is reasonable to assume they also made offerings, likely in perishable goods like food and drink, akin to the offerings made to Peter and Paul in Rome. The dedication of an ex-voto expressed the hope that the sense of belonging and continuity would endure in the afterlife. Moreover, the narrative expanded beyond familial ties to include heavenly and quasi-biblical elements, rooted in local traditions. These factors contributed to the rapid growth of the martyr cult, while always remaining accessible and supported by the populace.

This deepens our understanding of Christian identity in Roman North Africa, revealing that from the earliest days of Christianity in Africa, much of the Christian identity evolved locally, centred on the tombs of the martyrs. The narratives shared in these settings, despite being overshadowed by the writings of bishops in Christian historiography, were crucial in shaping an identity that surpassed familial bonds, forging a unified worldview for their religious community.

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[313] Saxer 1980, 133 declares that, concerning the funerary anniversary banquets "des morts, l'usage s'était étendu aux martyrs."

[314] I use here family in its wider sense, akin to the sense given to *suis*. Eg. Cyprian, *Epistulae* 10.4: *Late enim patet quando dicitur, « ille cum suis, » et possunt nobis viceni et triceni et amplius offerri qui propinqui et affines et liberti ac domestici esse asseverentur eius qui accipit libellum.*

[315] Delehaye 1912: 33: "On doit être certain, que les premiers honneurs rendues aux martyrs furent simplement ceux que les proches parents rendaient à leurs morts. Mais, au lieu du cercle restreint de la famille, c'est la communauté entière qui s'associe pour leur rendre ses devoirs."

3.3 The Donatist Schism and the Fight over the Dead

In the early fourth century, significant changes occurred for African Christians. Following the end of the Diocletianic persecution in Africa,[316] Constantine's Edict of Milan granted religious freedom to Christians, marking a monumental victory. However, in Carthage, this triumph was marred by a recent schism. Around 307 or 308, Caecilius, the archdeacon of Bishop Mensurius, was elected to succeed him as bishop of Carthage.[317] His initial election was contested, leading to the appointment of another bishop. This bishop passed away shortly thereafter, and in 313, Donatus the Great assumed the position.[318]

Caecilius was unpopular amongst the Christian masses, but he held on to the Carthaginian bishopric.[319] When in 313 Constantine decided to offer the Christian Church reparation payments, he sent the money to the care of Caecilius.[320] Ossius of Cordova likely convinced Constantine to support Caecilius as opposed to the more popular Donatus.[321] Shocked by this turn of events, Donatus and his supporters appealed for Constantine to reconsider, but the position of Caecilian as bishop of Carthage was confirmed in two subsequent councils.[322]

Constantine initially sought to reunite the Donatists through coercion, but realizing its futility, he reversed course and granted tolerance to them. Despite facing an uphill battle against the Caecilianists supported by the imperial authority, the Donatists maintained strong popular support, which they strategically preserved, notably through the cult of the martyrs.[323] We have seen above the prevalent concern amongst the Christians to care for their dead and especially their martyrs. From an early stage, the Donatists harnessed this enthusiasm by portraying themselves as the new martyrs, [324] as evidenced in a Donatist sermon from 319:

> *Si manifesta persecutionum gesta non otiose conscripta sint, nec inconsulte in honorem martyrum et aedificationem credentium anniversaria solemnitate leguntur: cur non magis subdolae fraudes et blandae deceptionis insidiae conscribantur pariter et leguntur, quae sub obtenu religionis animas fraudulenta circumventione subvertunt.* (*Passio Donati* 1)[325]

[316] Which lasted from 304-306.
[317] The chronology of the events between 307 and 313 is uncertain
[318] Bass 2018.
[319] The opposition against Caecilius is usually described as having popular support: note for example the proconsul's report to Constantine concerning the contention against Caecilius' nomination as bishop: *Verum post paucos dies exstiterunt quidam, adunata secum populi multitudine, qui Caeciliano contradicendum putarent…* (Maier 1987, 1.146)
[320] Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 10.6.
[321] Brisson 1958, 250; Clercq 1954.
[322] Brisson 1958: 309. Council of Rome, 313 and Arles, 314.
[323] Brisson 1958: 317: "un zèle authentique pour le martyre, nourri de l'héritage du siècle précèdent, fut utilisé par les chefs de la secte pour parvenir a des fins plus ou moins obscures."
[324] Moss 2016, 61: "Donatist clergy had no desire to quell the enthusiasm for the saints and harnessed the *auctoritas* of the holy dead with great success."
[325] Compare with the incipit of the *Passio Perpetua*: *Si vetera fidei exempla…in litteris sunt digesta ut lectionem eorum quasi repraesentatione rerum et Deus honoretur et homo confertetur, cur non et nova documenta aeque utrique causae convenientia et digerantur?*

The *subdolae fraudes* would only get worse. In 347, emperor Constans sent two imperial notaries, Macarius and Paulus, to Africa with the task of unifying the rival churches. This period was engraved in the Donatist memory as the persecution known as *Tempora Macariana.* What was supposed to be a peaceful mission turned before the perseverance of the Donatists into a bloodbath.[326] The Catholics attempted to minimize the actions of Macarius and Paul, noting that many stories had been exaggerated by the Donatists. One of these stories has survived in the form of a *passio* written down shortly after.[327] A Donatist bishop in a town of Numidia named Marculus had been sent to the imperial notaries together with an embassy of Donatist bishops to plea for mercy, but the meeting was a failure. The Donatist bishops were brutally beaten and Marculus was imprisoned. He was dragged around by the notaries for months until Macarius brought him to the castellum of Nova Petra, where, after waiting four days for the martyr crown, he was finally thrown by orders of Macarius from the Nova Petra precipice.[328] For the Donatists this story symbolized their struggle.[329] The Catholics however challenged the veracity of the story and accused Marculus of having jumped to his own death.[330]

By 348 the victory over the Donatists seemed complete. Most Donatist bishops, including Donatus, were exiled out of Africa and their basilicas were handed over to the Catholics.[331] In Carthage, the Catholic bishop Gratus convened a council to reorganize the Church in Africa after the *tempora Macariana.* The mood was one of victory and excitement, with Gratus opening the council by praising God for having put an end to the "schismatic evils."[332] Notwithstanding, some measures were still needed to smother the last vestiges of Donatism. The first issue in the agenda was concerning rebaptism, one of the main contention points of the schism. The second however regarded the cult of martyrs:

> *Martyrum dignitatem nemo profanus infamet, neque passiva corpora quae sepultura tantum propter misericordiam ecclesiasticam commendari mandatum est redigant, ut aut insania praecipitatos aut alia ratione peccati discretos, non ratione vel tempore competenti quo martyria celebrantur martyrum nomen appellent, aut si quis iniuriam martyrum claritati eorum adiungat insanos, placet eos, si laici sunt, ad paenitentiam redigi, si autem sunt clerici, post commonitionem et post cognitionem honore privari.* (Munier CCL 4)

There is no doubt that the mention of *insania praecipitatos* is a direct reference to Marculus.[333] Since it is used in the plural, it refers in all probability to the Donatist martyrs of which Marculus was the archetype. This shows that despite the exile of the Donatist bishops, the people continued to commemorate martyrs which the Catholics considered to be Donatist martyrs. These people might have had their bishop replaced, but not their martyrs. The council's goal was therefore not only to prohibit the commemorations

[326] Optatus 3.4.
[327] Monceaux 1963, 5.75.
[328] *Passio Marculi* 3-5.
[329] Many years later, in the *Collatio* of 411, the bishop of Nova Petra would proudly announce that he had no Catholic rival bishop in his locality since it was the place of *domnus Marculus, cuius sanguinem deus exiget in die iudicii.* (*Gesta Collationis* 1.187.63). Note also the dedicatory inscription (*memoria domni Marchuli*) in the Donatist basilica of Ksar-el-Kelb (Fevrier 1996: 929).
[330] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium* 3.49.54: *Nam de Marculo quod se ipse praecipitaverit audivi.*
[331] Bass 2018.
[332] Munier 1974, 3: *Gratias Deo omnipotenti et Christo Iesu, qui dedit malis schismatibus finem et respexit ecclesiam suam, ut in eius gremium erigeret universa membra dispersa.*
[333] Grig 2004, 57: "the scornful condemnation of the veneration of the *insania praecipitatos* is clearly aimed at Marculus' story."

of the Donatist martyrs but more importantly to remove their claim to martyrdom. To venerate these *insania praecipitatos* was to commit an affront to the true martyrs.

We do not know how effective these measures were, as we have no sources for the following couple decades. When Optatus of Milevis wrote his account of the schism, it was already in a period of Donatist resurgence:[334] Julian, upon becoming emperor in 361, repealed the legislation against the Donatists, enabling exiled bishops to return to Africa and reclaim their basilicas. As a result, when Optatus wrote his treatise, his Catholic Church was a minority in Africa.[335]

Optatus does not write about rites being commemorated around the tombs, but it is interesting to note that, like his Catholic predecessors, he understood that to defeat the church of the martyrs, one had first to defeat their martyrs, who he accuses of being suicidal fanatics.[336] The polemic concerning the false martyrs assumes a central role within Optatus' work. He links the beginning of the schism with a contention regarding a martyr between Caecilius, while he was still archdeacon, and a rich laywomen, Lucilla:

> *Hoc apud Carthaginem post ordinationem Caeciliani factum esse nemo qui nesciat, per Lucillam scilicet, nescio quam feminam factiosam ... cum correptionem archidiaconi Caeciliani ferre non posset, quae ante spiritalem cibum et potum os nescio cuius martyris, si tamen martyris, libare dicebatur, et cum praeponeret calici salutari os nescio cuius hominis mortui, et si martyris sed necdum vindicati, correpta cum confusione irata discessit (1.16)*

While this episode has been generally read at face value, its truthfulness has been recently questioned.[337] Robert Wisniewski has convincingly shown that the practice described by Optatus was anachronistic in the early fourth century and it rather echoes the concerns of Optatus' own time regarding the novelty which were the relics.[338] His emphasis on the doubtful nature of Lucilla's martyr, who had not been verified (*necdum vindicati*), was probably another reaction to the realities of his time when the veneration of martyrs required as we have seen episcopal approbation.[339] What this passage reveals is on one hand the attempt to undermine the Donatist cause by claiming that the schism was initiated by a *femina factiosa*,[340] and on the other that in his time the martyr cult was becoming regulated by the Church authorities.

No African influenced Christian grave cults as profoundly as Augustine. As soon as he donned his clerical garments in 391, Augustine started a campaign to reform the cult of the dead amongst the Christians,[341]

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[334] Written anytime between 364 and 367 Labrosse 1995 12-14

[335] Bass 2020, 189.

[336] Optatus 3.4: *ex ipso genere fuerunt, qui sibi percussores sub cupidate falsi martyria in suam perniciem conducebant*.

[337] Brown 1981, 34 accepts the story. Eyl 2015, questions its veracity.

[338] Wisniewski 2011; the relic cult started around the mid fourth century in the east, the first known relics translation, that of Babylas, took place in 354. Clark 2001.

[339] Referring to the canon of the council of Gratus quoted above. Note also Tilley s.v. Caecilianus (EECO)

[340] Eyl 2015, 159-162: "The problem with accepting Optatus' account at face value is the pervasive trope of "bad things begin with a woman." … the image of a vengeful, superstitious woman is strategically deployed by Optatus to undermine the larger issues that fuel the schism … female vengeance triggers the conflict, rendering Donatism simultaneously flawed and feminized. This trope is something scholars ought to take seriously…"

[341] Marrou 1978, 200 : "Ce fut un des premiers actes de la vie sacerdotale de saint Augustin, à peine entré comme prêtre dans le clergé de l'évêque Valère de Hippone, que de chercher à déraciner ces abus."

which was evidently pervasive in North Africa. In 393, while still a priest in Hippo, Augustine wrote a letter to Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, denouncing the behaviours of the Christians around the graves, which he called *carnales foeditates et aegritudines*,[342] and pressing for reform. He describes riotous and drunken feast that took place on the graves of the martyrs not only on the *natalis* but daily.[343] Augustine concedes to Aurelian that changing such behaviours would be a struggle and, since these "evils" were so pervasive in Africa, only the authority of a council could eliminate them.[344] He knew perfectly well that people would oppose any regulation to these rites before the graves since they believed that these *in coemeteriis ebrietates et luxuriosa convivia*, as Augustine words it, not only honoured the martyrs but also brought solace to the dead.[345] Therefore Augustine specifies that lavish private feasts could continue to be conducted, but that such behaviour could not be tolerated on the tombs of the saints.[346] While he does imply that drunken feasts were celebrated for both martyrs and non-martyrs,[347] he is solely concerned with regulating the cult of the martyrs.[348]

To understand why Augustine led this campaign, one must consider his past experiences, particularly in Milan. There, he was baptized by the renowned Bishop Ambrose, who was embroiled in a power struggle with the Arian imperial court. Amid this conflict, Ambrose constructed the famous *Basilica Ambrosiana* and when he was about to consecrate the newly-built basilica, Ambrose had a divine premonition, an *ardor praesagii*,[349] and found the remains of the obscure martyrs Protasius and Gervasius.[350] The martyr relics were deposited in the new basilica,[351] and their authenticity was confirmed by an ensuing miracle. The novelty of this event, as Peter Brown has remarked, was regarding "the speed and the certainty of touch with which Ambrose appropriated the relics."[352] By establishing this association between the bishop, the basilica and the martyr, Ambrose's *inventio* was "rewiring" the dynamics of the martyr cult.[353]

Another significant event in Milan that had a lasting impact on Augustine involved his mother, Monica. Accompanying him on the Italian trip, she went to the graves of local martyrs to offer food, bread and

[342] Augustine, *Epistulae* 22.1.2.

[343] Augustine, *Epistulae* 22.1.3 *Comessationes enim et ebrietates ita concessae et licitae putantur, ut in honorem etiam beatissimorum martyrum, non solum per dies solemnes (quod ipsum quis non lugendum videat, qui haec non carnis oculis inspicit), sed etiam quotidie celebrentur.*

[344] Augustine, *Epistulae* 22. 1.4: *Sed tanta pestilentia est huius mali, ut sanari prorsus, quantum mihi videtur, nisi concilii auctoritate non possit.*

[345] Augustine, *Epistulae* 22. 1.6: *Sed quoniam istae in coemeteriis ebrietates et luxuriosa convivia, non solum honores martyrum a carnali et imperita plebe credi solent, sed etiam solatia mortuorum. Ita nec deserere videbuntur memorias suorum, quod potest gignere non levem cordis dolorem*.

[346] Augustine, *Epistulae* 22. 1.3: *Sed feramus haec in luxu et labe domestica, et eorum conviviorum quae privatis parietibus continentur …; saltem de sanctorum corporum sepulcris…arceatur.*

[347] As he often mentions in different texts. For example in Augustine, *De moribus ecclesiae Catholicae* 1.34: *novi multos esse qui luxuriosissime super mortuos bibant…*

[348] Rebillard 2015, 271 : "Christian bishops at the end of the fourth century did not attempt to forbid funerary meals in general. Their reform was limited to martyr tombs and they left out of their sphere of control the private commemorative practices, especially as most of the dead who mattered for the people were not Christian."

[349] Ambrose, *Epistulae* 22.1.

[350] Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii* 14 writes that even their names were unknown before Ambrose's *inventio* : *…Protasii vero et Gervasii martyrum ut nomina, ita etiam sepulcra incognita erant.*

[351] The relics were first transfered to the basilica of Faustus, then to the new Ambrosian basilica (Clark 2001, 169).

[352] Brown 1981, 37.

[353] Brown 1981, 37: "Rather, he [Ambrose] was like an electrician who rewires an antiquated wiring system: more power could pass through stronger, better-insulated wires towards the bishop as leader of the community."

wine (*pultes et panem et merum*), as was the African custom (*sicut in Africa solebat*). However she was hindered from doing so since Ambrose forbade such offerings, considering the rite too similar to the pagan *Parentalia*.[354] This affair appears as a prelude to Augustine's campaign in assuring that every African Christian would honour the martyrs without *pultes et panem et merum*.[355]

Augustine, probably influenced by Ambrose, considered this practice of bringing food and drinks to the graves to be a pagan corruption of what had been once a pure and solemn Christian ritual.[356] He hoped to convince this to his fellow Christians, but he knew the task was arduous. As Augustine himself admitted, if it were not for the great admiration that Monica had for Ambrose, she would have persisted in her traditional acts of martyr commemoration.[357] And similarly the Christians in Africa challenged Augustine's attempt at reform: It had always been allowed, they protested, why forbid it now? *Non enim, antea qui haec non prohibuerunt, christiani non errant?*[358]

In a letter from 395 to his friend Alypius, Augustine writes triumphantly how he overcame and convinced the Christian masses that this pollution to the martyr cult had been allowed by the bishops due to the multitude of pagans who converted after the end of the persecutions.[359] Augustine preached to his fellow Christians to follow the example of the Churches overseas, where such practices had never been tolerated or they had been recently put down *per bonos rectores populo*,[360] that is someone like Ambrose or himself.

The feasts held at the martyrs' graves also provided Augustine with an opportunity to criticize the Donatists. In their polemics, Catholics like Augustine frequently attacked their opponents' character,

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[354] Augustine, *Confessiones* 6.2: "*Itaque cum ad memorias sanctorum, sicut in Africa solebat, pultes et panem et merum attulisset atque ab ostiario prohiberetur, ubi hoc episcopum vetuisse cognovit, tam pie atque oboedienter amplexa est, ut ipse mirarer, quam facile accusatrix potius consuetudinis suae quam disceptatrix illius prohibitionis effecta sit. (...) Itaque ubi comperit a praeclaro praedicatore atque antistite pietatis praeceptum esse ista non fieri nec ab eis qui sobrie facerent, ne ulla occasio se ingurgitandi daretur ebriosis, et quia illa quasi parentalia superstitioni gentilium essent simillima, abstinuit se libentissime et pro canistro pleno terrenis fructibus plenum purgatioribus votis pectus ad memorias martyrum afferre didicerat, ut et quod posset daret egentibus,et si communicatio Dominici corporis illic celebraretur, cuius passionis imitatione immolati et coronati sunt martyres."* MacMullen 2009: 58.

[355] The influence of Ambrose on Augustine regarding the issue of how Christians commemorated the dead. Kotila 1992: 73: "Ambrose's prohibition of the *Laetitia* [i.e. funerary banquets] in Milan was an obvious example to Augustine and its significance cannot be ignored in one of the first major pastoral projects undertaken by the presbyter Augustine."

[356] Augustine, *Sermones* 361.6 : *…et manifestum est hoc ad mortuos non pertinere, et consuetudinem hanc esse Paganorum...*

[357] Augustine, *Confessiones* 6.2. : *Sed tamen videtur mihi Domine Deus meus (et ita est in conspectu tuo de hac re cor meum) non facile fortasse de hac amputanda consuetudine matrem meam fuisse cessuram, si ab alio prohiberetur, quem non sicut Ambrosium diligebat.*

[358] Augustine, *Epistulae* 29.8.

[359] Augustine, *Epistulae* 29.9 : *scilicet post persecutiones tam multas, tamque vehementes, cum facta pace, turbae Gentilium in christianum nomen venire cupientes hoc impedirentur, quod dies festos cum idolis suis solerent in abundantia epularum et ebrietate consumere, nec facile ab his perniciosissimis et tam vetustissimis voluptatibus se possent abstinere, visum fuisse maioribus nostris, ut huic infirmitatis parti interim parceretur, diesque festos, post eos quos relinquebant, alios in honorem sanctorum martyrum vel non simili sacrilegio, quamvis simili luxu celebrarent.*

[360] Augustine, *Epistulae* 29.10.

portraying them as violent troublemakers prone to excesses.[361] It was therefore only natural that they would partake in drunken feasts on the graves of the martyrs.[362] In one sermon delivered by Augustine on St. Laurence's day, he requested his congregation to observe those who run *ad memorias martyrum* and cause turmoil, dissensions, dancing and all sorts of extravagances hated by God. He then asks his audience, who are these people, whose children are they, the children of the martyrs or the children of the persecutors? For Augustine the answer is obvious: *Filii [martyrum] laudant, persecutores saltant; filii hymnos dicunt, illi convivia producunt.*[363]

Augustine had probably those pagans who converted after the persecutions in mind when refering to the children of the persecutors. But the language he uses is clearly evocative of the Donatist polemic. When the Donatist bishop Primian was challenged in 403 to a conference with the Catholics, he refused by saying: *Indignum est, ut in unum conveniat filii martyrum et progenies traditorum.*[364] This was the worldview propagated by the Donatist bishops: they were the children of the martyrs, while the Catholics were the children of the *traditores* and had inherited the guilt of their parents.[365]

Our bishop of Hippo continuously strove to disproof these claims of the Donatists. In a response to the Donatist bishop Petilian, Augustine would retort that the Donatist, as schismatics, were in fact *filii Diaboli.*[366] For the Donatists such a claim was preposterous: who were the actual sons of the devil, they asked, the persecuted or the persecutors?[367] But Augustine argued that the Donatists were the persecutors, since they had initiated a campaign of persecution against Caecilian.[368] To justify the current persecution of the Donatists, Augustine curiously appropriated the highly popular story of the Hebrew boys in the furnace, which, as has already been mentioned, was strongly associated with the African cult

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[361] Brisson 1958, 243 : "Les polémistes catholiques mêlaient très ordinairement à leur argumentation théologique des accusations d'un tout autre ordre : à les entendre, leurs adversaires étaient des gens sans foi ni loi, des brigands coupables des plus ordinaires délits de droit commun et ne reculant devant aucune violence pour arriver à leur fin."

[362] Augustine, *Sermones Guelf*. 28.5: *illi super eos inebriantur uino, illi inebriantur furore et errore pessimo.*

[363] Augustine, *Sermones* 305A.4: *Et nunc consideremus qui sint filii occisorum, et qui sint filii occidentium. Et videtis multos currere ad memorias martyrum, benedicere calices suos de memoriis martyrum, redire saturatos de memoriis martyrum; et tamen discute illos, et invenies inter persecutores martyrum. Per ipsos enim tumultus, seditiones, saltationes, omnes luxuriae, quas odit Deus; et modo, quia illos iam coronatos lapidibus non possunt, calicibus persequuntur. Qui erant, et quorum filii erant, quorum saltationes recenti et prope hesterna memoria de loco sancti martyris Cypriani prohibitae sunt? Certe saltabant ibi, et gaudebant ibi; et sollemnitatem ipsam, quasi gauderent, magnis votis expectabant, et ad eum diem semper venire cupiebant. Inter quos numerandi sunt? inter persecutores martyrum, an inter filios martyrum? Apparuerunt, quando prohibiti in seditionem tumuerunt. Filii laudant, persecutores saltant; filii hymnos dicunt, illi convivia producunt.*

[364] *Gesta Collationis* 3.116.8.

[365] Augustine, *Breviculus collationis cum Donatistis* 3.17: *…Donatistae in litteris suis posuerunt testimonia scripturarum quibus ostenderent ad peccata parentum etiam filios pertinere*. *Traditores* were those who during the persecutions had handed (*traditio*) to the Roman authorities the Christian books. Donatists accused Caecilian to have been consecrated by clergymen who were *traditores*, nullifying his election. Note also that the *Traditore*, by having betrayed their faith to save their own life, became an anti-martyr (since the martyr gave up his life to preserve his faith).

[366] Augustine, *Contra Litteras Petiliani* 2.13.30: *Diaboli ergo filii sunt, qui homines ab Ecclesia seducendo interficiunt.*

[367] Augustine, *Breviculus collationis cum Donatistis* 3.22: *hic Donatistae quaesiverunt utrum qui faciunt filii essent diaboli an qui patiuntur…* ; Note also the frequent saying of the Donatists: *Ecclesia vera ipsa est quae persecutionem patitur, non quae facit.* (Augustine, *Epistulae* 185.2.11)

[368] Augustine, *Epistulae* 185.2.6: *Quomodo ergo ipsi non sunt persecutores, qui cum accusando persecuti sint Caecilianum, et ab eo fuerint superati, falsam sibi gloriam impudentissimo mendacio arrogare voluerunt?*

of martyrs. Augustine recalls that Nebuchadnezzar converted after witnessing the miracle of the boys in the furnace, and following his conversion enacted "pious and commendable laws" which ensured that anyone who blasphemed against the God of the Hebrew boys would be put to death together with his household.[369] Augustine's meaning was twofold: First, that the Roman empire, like Nebuchadnezzar, had been a persecutor but now due to its miraculous conversion promulgated pious laws in defence of Christianity. And secondly, that the Donatists were not in the same position as the Hebrew boys in the furnace. They were in fact like the persecutors of Daniel, against whom the lions had turned after sparing Daniel.[370]

Therefore, when Augustine writes that *filii martyrum laudent, persecutores saltant*, I do believe he also meant to vilipend the Donatists. As we have seen, the Donatists did not try to quell the cults around the graves, so there is no reason to doubt that Donatists commemorated their martyrs effusively, with the *pultes et panem et merum* and a fair share of boisterous fun. Sometimes the Donatist became so loud in their feasting, that the noise would even reach the Catholics' church while Augustine was trying to preach.[371]

To further undermine the position of the Donatist martyrs as genuine, Augustine elaborated a theory of martyrdom based on the adage *non poena sed causa*, emphasizing the cause of one's death as the distinction between false and genuine martyrdom.[372] This goes beyond Optatus' accusation of the Donatist martyrs being *insania praecipitatos*,[373] because what Augustine argued for was that regardless of the circumstances of their death (the *poena*), the Donatist victims of persecution could never be martyrs because their cause was an *error*,[374] and the persecution led against the Donatist had been a just one.[375]

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[369] Augustine, *Epistulae* 185.2.8: *Et rex Nabuchodonosor, cum servus esset idolorum, constituit sacrilegam legem ut simulacrum adoraretur; sed eius impiae constitutioni qui obedire noluerunt, pie fideliterque fecerunt: idem tamen rex, divino correctus miraculo, piam et laudabilem legem pro veritate constituit, ut quicumque diceret blasphemiam in Deum verum Sidrac, Misac, et Abdenago, cum domo sua penitus interiret*.

[370] Augustine, *Epistulae* 185.2.7: *Hoc enim contigit Donatistis, quod accusatoribus sancti Danielis. Sicut enim in illos leones, sic in istos conversae sunt leges quibus innocentem opprimere voluerunt;* Here Augustine is making a parallel between Caecilian and the biblical Daniel, another central figure of the African martyr cult, cf. Salomonson 1979.

[371] Augustine, *Epistulae* 29.11: *Habui brevem sermonem, quo gratias agerem Deo. Et quoniam in haereticorum basilica audiebamus ab eis solita convivia celebrata…*

[372] Augustine, *Sermones* 285.2: *Illud ergo praecipue commonendi estis, quod assidue commoneri, et semper cogitare debetis, quod martyrem Dei non facit poena, sed causa.* This theory of martyrdom opposed the viewpoint of the majority of Christians: Shaw 2011, 613.

[373] An accusation also made in Augustine, *Sermones Guelf.* 28.5: *O Donatista, hoc dic diabolo, quando tibi suggerit praecipitium; qui etiam uos impleuit, ut praecipitati colamini. (…) Illi sunt homicidae ampliores, qui corpora praecipitatorum cum honore colligunt, qui praecipitatorum sanguinem excipiunt, qui eorum sepulchra honorant, qui ad eorum tumulos se inebriant. Illi enim uidentes huiusmodi honorem praeberi praecipitatis, inflammantur alii ad praecipitium.*

[374] In an epitaph composed for the catholic deacon Nabor, who had been allegedly killed by the Donatists, Augustine describes him as a true martyr since he had an *optima causa* as opposed to the *error* and *furor* of the Donatists: *Optima purpureo vestitutis sanguine causa, non errore perit, non se ipsa furore peremit. Vera martyrium vera est pietate probat(um).* (Duval 1982, 182)

[375] Augustine, *Epistulae* 185.2.11: *Deinde quaero, si boni et sancti nemini faciunt persecutionem, sed tantummodo patiuntur, cuius putant esse in Psalmo vocem, ubi legitur: Persequar inimicos meos, et comprehendam illos, et non convertar donec deficiant. Si ergo verum dicere vel agnoscere volumus, est persecutio iniusta, quam faciunt impii Ecclesiae Christi; et est iusta persecutio, quam faciunt impiis Ecclesiae Christi.*

What were the reasons that led Augustine in this campaign against the popular rites by the martyrs' graves? His distaste for the festive nature of the cult, its excesses and *vinolentia*, is evident and it is a bias typical of the Christian elites, as we have seen with Cyprian and Tertullian. To the Christians in Carthage he had to admonish that the *mensa Cypriani*, built on the location of the Carthaginian bishop's *passio*,[376] was not appropriate for banquets: *mensa dicitur Cypriani, non quia ibi est unquam Cyprianus epulatus, sed quia ibi est immolatus*.[377] In another sermon delivered in 396, Augustine, as though his patience had just snapped, clamored that all the drinking and eating before the tombs was detested by the martyrs: *Oderunt martyres lagenas vestras, oderunt martyres sartagines vestras, oderunt martyres ebrietates vestras.*[378]

Most Christians in North Africa, including Catholics, participated in feasts honouring the martyrs. Augustine disapproved of such conduct, attributing its origins either to the Donatists causing disturbances or, if Catholics were involved, to pagan influences. Augustine's account of the martyr cult in Africa, depicting bishops accommodating newly converted Christians with pagan-like feasting, has been embraced by sympathetic historians.[379] It portrays early Christian communities as devout and their practices as modest, free from ostentatious extravagance. But the remaining evidence does not corroborate Augustine's theory, which seems to have been "made on the spur of the moment."[380] As discussed above, already by Tertullian's time, a rite known as *refrigerium* was observed to commemorate the dead and martyrs. Though its exact details are unclear, it was performed near the deceased's tomb, often on their *mensa*, suggesting it likely involved funerary banquets with offerings of perishable goods.

If Augustine's theory were correct, we would expect to observe a change in the material evidence regarding the cult of the dead following the edict of Milan, but this does not seem to be the case. While there is a significant lack of evidence for the third century,[381] Yvette Duval nonetheless considers that the phenomenon of the *mensa marturum* predates the fourth century.[382] Several factors account for the lack of dedications dated confidently to the third century: Their humble beginnings and rustic nature preclude accurate palaeographic dating on one hand.[383] On the other, most of the *lieux du culte* centred around the tombs of the martyrs were rearranged and expanded from the fourth century onwards. In Tipasa, the young martyr Salsa was first buried in a pagan cemetery, but during the second quarter of the fourth century a small building, a *martyrium*, was built on her tomb.[384] Basilicas were frequently built on top of

[376] Ennabli 1997, 24.
[377] Augustine, *Sermones* 310.2.
[378] Augustine, *Sermones* 273.8 : *Oderunt martyres lagenas vestras, oderunt martyres sartagines vestras, oderunt martyres ebrietates vestras. Sine iniuria eorum dico, qui tales non sunt: illi ad se referant, qui talia faciunt: oderunt ista martyres, non amant talia facientes. Sed multo plus oderunt, si colantur.*
[379] As for instance Saxer.
[380] Brown 1982, 29: "Augustine's explicit reference to the increase of pagan practices within the Christian congregation as having been brought about by mass conversions, was apparently made on the spur of the moment. It was a plausible piece of clerical euhemerism." Brown 1982, 29 furthermore adds that there is in North Africa no evidence for "mass conversions" in the course of the fourth century.
[381] The earliest *mensa marturum* which can be dated with certainty are those of Mauretania with the *anno provinciae*. Of these the earliest are no. 174: 315/320 CE; no. 182: 322 CE; no. 143: 324/329 CE (Duval 1982).
[382] Duval 1982: 525.
[383] Eg. Duval 1982: 133 (no. 61).
[384] Duval 1982: 698-9.

the *area martyrium*, such as in Haidra or Timgad.[385] The older structures were often repurposed and their original context was lost.[386]

I have shown that the earliest Christian communities were neither living nor dying separately from the pagans.[387] There is in my opinion convincing evidence indicating that from a very early period Christians, especially those of modest means, commemorated their dead and martyrs similarly to how the pagans in Roman North Africa had commemorated their dead for over a century, with food and drinks, to be shared between the living and the dead.[388] To fully grasp what Augustine was trying to reform, emphasis needs to be laid on the popular roots of the martyr cult and the role of the local communities in the cult.

The efforts Augustine made to reform the cult of the martyrs indicate in my opinion that the issue went beyond mere discipline in proper Christian conduct or regarding the dangers of feasting.[389] Ultimately, Catholic authorities continued permitting funerary meals, albeit not in honour of the martyrs.[390] I will argue that Augustine saw the cult of the martyrs as essential for the Church's prosperity, and his actions were more than just reform, they amounted to an appropriation of the cult itself.

The canons of the Catholic councils provide important evidence for Catholics' battleplan. In 393, the council of Hippo Regio specified that banquets were forbidden for the Christians in places of worship,[391] and instead, it was deemed appropriate that the *passiones martyrum* be read in the church on their *anniversarii dies*.[392] This was a first for the Western Churches; in Rome for instance, the fifth century *Decretum Gelasianum* noted that it was forbidden to read the *gestae martyrum* in church.[393]

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[385] Haidra: Duval 1982, 112-6; Timgad: Monceaux 1912, 32.

[386] Ancient structures were repurposed in Northern Africa until well into the modern era. Leveau 1978: 90 remarks how French settlers had the habit of using the ancient sarcophagi of the Necropolis of Cherchel as water troughs ("abreuvoir").

[387] Février 1964, 135: "Tout se passe donc comme si, en Maurétanie — un autre problème serait d'établir s'il en est de même ailleurs, mis à part le cas de Rome — les chrétiens n'avaient pas éprouvé le besoin de distinguer leurs épitaphes de celles de leurs contemporains avant une certaine époque, en gros disons les premières décades du IVe siècle….. Ce n'est que durant le IVe siècle et surtout la seconde moitié que ce formulaire chrétien s'enrichit de locutions et mots nouveaux."

[388] Kötting 1965, 8: "Die einzelnen Elementen der antike Totenehrung, die Ausdrucksformen der natürlichen Pietät, die Feier der Gedächtnistage, das Mahl am Grabe mit Speisung des Verstorbenen, alles, was der Familienreligiosität zuzuordnen ist, sind als natürliche und kulturgebundene Riten bei den Christen entweder nie verschwunden, oder sie tauchen am Ende der Distanzierungsperiode wieder auf."

[389] As is often argued: Kotila 1992, 66:"…[the] basis of Augustine's critique was not the pagan or superstitious nature of the cult, but the improper behaviour connected to it." Brown 1981, 35: "…Augustine was more alert to [the banquets'] immediate social function. Ostentatious feasting could be social divisive…"

[390] Rebillard 2015 271 : "Christian bishops at the end of the fourth century did not attempt to forbid funerary meals in general. Their reform was limited to martyr tombs and they left out of their sphere of control the private commemorative practices."

[391] Canon 29 (Munier 1974, 41).

[392] Canon 36.d (Munier 1974, 43).

[393] Quoted from Gaiffier 1954, 139: "*Item gesta sanctorum martyrum, quae multiplicibus tormentorum cruciatibus et mirabilis confessionum triumphis inradiant. Quis catholicorum dubitet maiora eos in agonibus fuisse perpesso nec suis viribus sed Dei gratia et adiutorio universa tolerasse? Sed ideo secundum antiquam consuetudinem singulari cautela in sancta Romana ecclesia non leguntur, quia et eorum qui conscripsere nomina penitus ignorantur et ab infidelibus et idiotis superflua aut minus apta quam rei ordeo fuerit esse putantur.*"

It is striking that the council of Hippo dignified the *passiones* as the only text besides the canonical scriptures which could be read at church, but it reflects the intentions that the bishops had for the cult of the martyrs. As Yvette Duval writes, the aim of the bishops was to unify and instruct the Christian masses and this was made possible through the reading of the martyrological texts.[394] The resolutions of the council of Hippo, which were reissued by the council of Carthage four years later in 397,[395] laid the emphasis on the texts for the martyr cult and pushed the *convivia* aside. While martyrological texts had existed for generations, most martyrs' stories were passed on orally and had no written form.[396] The martyr cult had always been celebrated with rites by the tomb, commemorators would offer ex-voto like a *mensa marturum*, if they could afford it, or an *oblatio et sacrificium*, perhaps a *refrigerium*. On the *natalicia* the local Christian community would meet at the tomb of the martyr and commemorate the occasion with a *convivia* and living stories told and passed on by the commemorators. Augustine fought vigorously, and successfully, to have these oral stories replaced by established texts.[397]

These commemorations at the martyr's tomb held much greater significance for the Christian communities in Africa than Augustine's propaganda acknowledges. They were moments to remember the life and deeds of the deceased while the food and drinks were laid out on the *mensa*.[398] The post-funerary rites of remembrance of the dead and Concordia amongst the living were, as I have shown in the previous chapter, quite popular in Africa and instrumental for the processes of identity formation and preservation. Around the tomb, sitting by the *mensa*, the commemorators were unconsciously forging their own past and identity, as the stories there told "informed current values and behaviours."[399] In the Christian cult of the dead, these rites, while they changed superficially, never lost their capacity to foster social cohesion and identity. But while the stories told at the tombs of the common dead were strictly personal, those told at the *mensa marturum* affected the whole Christian community and informed their religious reality.[400] The violence and trauma suffered during the persecutions elevated the martyrs stories to the focal point of the Christians' collective memory.[401] But equally important is to consider, and I believe this is an often a neglected aspect, that the conversion to Christianity meant a rejection of a myriad of "myths" resulting in a personal mythological vacuum.[402] Naturally, it was expected that this vacuum was to be filled with Christian "myths," being the most important Christ's Passion. But for the humble populations of Africa, the idea of a universal Christian community centred around the Passion of Christ was a sudden,

[394] Duval 1982, 750: "surtout par la lecture des *Acta* … le clergé vise plus concrètement à l'édification de l'auditoire"
[395] Munier 1974, 185-186.
[396] Shaw 2011, 591; Aug. Serm. 315: *cum aliorum martyrum vix Gesta inveniamus…*
[397] Duval 1982, 751: "au cours du Ve siècle elle tend, avec la lecture des actes du martyr, à supplanter totalement les agapes aux anniversaires de la passion."
[398] Shaw 2011, 609. As described in the already mentioned inscription of the *mensa* of Aelia Secundula: *in qua magna eius memorantes plurima facta, dum cibi ponuntur calicesq(ue) e[t] copertae…*
[399] Shaw 2011, 594; Shaw 2011: 600: "These stories served, especially, to confirm identity and behaviour."
[400] For the discussion of the different parallel identities, such as personal and religious identity, an individual experiences, see Rebillard 2012: 1-5
[401] Shaw 2011, 594; Castelli 2004, 23: "It is striking to note that violence itself is the privileged object of memory when political stakes are most intense." Shaw 2011, 588 also argues that a long history of human blood sacrifices made Africa's connection with Christian martyrdom "unusual, indeed very special."
[402] I borrow the already referred to definition of myth from Castelli 2004, 30: " "Myth," in this context, refers to narratives that promote a coherent portrait of the past and forge links within a community and among its members and between the community and its claimed past. Myth is a product of collective imagination, a compelling answer to urgent questions about foundations and identities."

abstract concept for which they were unprepared.[403] As has been discussed before, all memory, particularly collective memory, was strongly linked to specific space, its *lieux de memoire.* The tomb in Roman North Africa was predominantly a memory space, the *Kristallisationspunkt*, as I have shown above. But the Passion of Christ had no space, at least none that the African Christians could visit and touch.[404] I think the absence of a local, spatial myth among the Christians of Roman North Africa was crucial in the rise of the martyr cult, which served as an accessible and localized substitute for the passion of Christ.[405]

These popular martyr cults centred on graves and the independence of their narratives posed a challenge to the universal Christian community envisioned by intellectuals like Augustine. As we have seen this was a behaviour of the Christian masses of both the Catholic and Donatist Church. But while the Catholic bishops, especially Augustine, attempted to curb the enthusiasm of the Christian people for their martyrs,[406] the Donatist bishops thrived on the martyr fervour.[407] For them, the Church of Caecilius was openly antagonistic towards the martyrs and towards those who simply wanted to feed them, a character trait which they endowed Caecilian himself.[408] Conversely, probably because of the focus which the Donatists placed upon their local African martyrs, Augustine often taunted his Donatist rivals as though they considered Africa to be the centre of the Christian world: *Africa meridies est, meridies mundi Africa est*.[409] For Augustine, only the Catholic Church could occupy the centre of Christianity.

In order to have a universal community centred around the Church it became necessary that only one coherent version of religious stories, particularly martyr stories, should exist. Replacing the *convivia* for the *passio* texts became the first step in combating this local religious phenomenon, since it removed the

[403] The abstract aspects of Christianity, as opposed to the pagan religion, was a theme which Augustine needed to explain often and carefully to his congregation: E.g. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. 41.6: *Ubi est Deus tuus? Quia paganus si hoc mihi dixerit, non illi et ego possum dicere: Ubi est Deus tuus? Deum quippe suum digito ostendit. Intendit enim digitum ad aliquem lapidem, et dicit: Ecce est Deus meus. Ubi est Deus tuus? Cum lapidem irrisero, et erubuerit qui demonstravit, tollit oculum a lapide, suspicit coelum, et forte in solem digitum intendens, iterum dicit: Ecce Deus meus. Ubi est Deus tuus? Invenit ille quod ostenderet oculis carnis: ego autem non quasi non habeam quem ostendam, sed non habet ille oculos quibus ostendam. Potuit enim ille oculis corporis mei ostendere Deum suum solem: quibus ego oculis ostendam solis creatorem?*

[404] One should remember Assmann's adage ("Gedächtnis braucht Orte"), which was particularly true for the Africa population according to the results of this investigation.

[405] Since quite early the martyr is seen in Africa as following on the footsteps of Christ. E.g. Tertullian, *De fuga* 12.10: *Fiat voluntas dei. Quae ista voluntas? utique ut pateretur pro nomine domini, non ut redimeretur. Oportet enim, quomodo Christus animam suam posuit pro nobis, ita fieri pro eo et a nobis nec tantum pro ipso, immo etiam pro fratribus propter ipsum.*

[406] Around the year 400 Augustine would celebrate the fact that his colleague Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, had successfully replaced the banquets of the martyrs for vigils. Saxer 1980, 142-3.

[407] Shaw 2011, 601.

[408] In the Donatist passion of the Abitinian Martyrs, Caecilian shows up as striking anyone who attempted to feed the martyrs. Considering that Maier dates this text to 411, I believe it is likely that this representation of Caecilian is a reference to the recent campaign of the Catholics against the banquets in honour of the martyrs. *Passio Abitinae* 20 (Maier 1987, 1.87): *Et caedebantur a Caeciliano passim ad alendos martyres veniebant; sitientibus intus in vinculis confessoribus pocula frangebantur…*

[409] Augustine, *Sermones* 147A.3: "*Solent Donatistae in his verbis dicere sensum suum, non sensum Scripturarum. Hoc enim solent dicere. Africa meridies est, meridies mundi Africa est; ideo Ecclesia interrogat Dominum: Ubi pascis? Ubi cubas? et respondet ille: In meridie; quasi, noli me quaerere nisi in Africa*." The reference is to Song of Songs 1:6

popular agency and autonomy from the act of remembrance or story-telling.[410] The reading of the martyrological texts in church became an occasion for the preacher to admonish with the authority of the martyr his congregation.[411] Additionally, the texts allowed for the martyr cult to escape its tomb. In a sermon preached on the Roman martyr Lawrence's day, Augustine vaunted that now everyone could celebrate the martyrs, not just those who stood beside the grave. This provoked some confusion among his parishioners, to commemorate a martyr who was so far away, so Augustine had to convince his audience: *Neque enim ubi sepulcrum corporis eius est, ibi tantum memoria meriti eius: devotio ubique debetur; caro uno loco ponitur, sed spiritus victor cum illo est qui ubique est.*[412]

For a culture that had commemorated their dead always adjacent to their graves, who visited and fed them, who treated their dead as though they were living on silently in their tombs,[413] Augustine's request to forget the body was for many too much to ask. The tomb in Africa held special significance as a link between worlds, crucial for the rites performed there. Moving commemorations away from martyr tombs was daunting, but relics offered a solution.

Augustine's attitude towards martyr relics was at times lukewarm,[414] but his admiration for Ambrose, "the best-known translator and distributor of relics,"[415] meant he at least understood their significance. Ambrose was particularly concerned with the location of the holy remains. It was fudamental to translate Gervasius and Prostasius' relics because they were in a *sepulcrum ignobilis*.[416] Regarding the relics of Vitalis and Agricola, which he discovered in Bologna, Ambrose remarked that they were in a cemetery of the jews, *quorum Dominum negaverunt.*[417] This alone justified the *translatio*: *Illic igitur martyris exuvias requirebamus, tamquam inter spinas rosam legentes.*[418] The appropriate place for the holy martyrs was in his opinion not amongst graves, but under the altar of the church: *Succedant victimae triumphales in locum ubi Christus hostia est. Sed ille super altare, qui pro omnibus passus est. Isti sub altari, qui illius redempti sunt passiones.*[419]

This change of location, from the cemeteries to the bishops' basilica, reflected an actual translation of power from the Christian laypeople to the clerical class. While before the location of the martyr was under the popular care of the humble local communities, the new *locus* of the martyrs was under the care of the bishops, as Ambrose triumphantly boasts, *hunc ego locum praedestinaveram mihi.*[420] The stories of

[410] The polemic Donatist passions for example make it evident how manipulative martyrological texts could be. *Acta Saturnini* 20: *Fugienda est ergo et execranda pollutorum omnium congregatio vitiosa, et appetenda omnibus beatissimorum martyrum succession gloriosa, quae est Ecclesia sancta, una et vera catholica, ex qua martyres sunt.*
[411] Shaw 2011, 604-5.
[412] Augustine, *Sermones* 305A.1.
[413] Brown 2000, 215: "[The African society] valued sheer physical continuity in life and death (Monica, after all, had once wished to 'rejoice in grandsons after the flesh', and had hoped to be buried in her home soil)" Kotila 1992: 89: "Augustine did not describe the beliefs of his people in detail, but his polemic gives grounds for supposing that the classical concept of the grave as the dwelling place of the soul was still alive."
[414] Clark 2001, 174: "Augustine, who never claimed to have received relics from Ambrose, was far more cautious about their powers than either Ambrose or Paulinus."
[415] Clark 2001, 168.
[416] Ambrose, *Epistulae* 22.12: *Ervuntur nobiles reliquiae e sepulcrum ignobili, ostenduntur coelo tropea.*
[417] Ambrose, *Exhortatio Virginitatis* 7.
[418] Ambrose, *Exhortatio Virginitatis* 7.
[419] Ambrose, *Epistulae* 22. 13.
[420] Ambrose, *Epistulae* 22. 13.

inventio and *depositio* forged a link between the post-Constantinian Catholic clerics and the martyrs of the distant era of persecutions.[421] In the post-Constantinian empire, where Catholics were the persecutors of heretics and schismatics, it was necessary to adapt the concept and meaning of martyrdom. Following the end of the Great Persecutions, the acts of *inventio, translatio* and *depositio* were framed as new mechanisms through which one could earn glory worthy of the martyrs', while those such as the Donatists who were claiming martyrdom were in fact being led astray by the Devil.[422]

Just like the deaths of the martyrs, both the *inventio* and *depositio* made, as Peter Brown writes, "plain the immensity of God's mercy… they brought a sense of deliverance and pardon into the present."[423] Augustine and his congregation celebrated the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius not on the day of their anniversary, but on the day of their *inventio*, a moment of *tantae gloriae martyrum*.[424] The arrival of the relics and their *depositio* became equally a moment that rivalled the *passio* of the martyr, with both exhibiting God's mercy though differently: *illas terras passus illustravit, istas mortuus visitavit*.[425]

While the martyr was "travelling" by these means to the basilicas, in the countryside tombs were being demolished. The council of Carthage 401 issued a directive for the *falsis memoriis martyrum*, that is tombs *in quibus nullum corpus aut reliquiae martyrum conditae probantur* to be removed.[426] This regulation was more than the suppression of dubious cenotaphs,[427] it was about giving the bishops authority upon these *lieux du culte,* since they became responsible of dismantling what they considered to be false martyr tombs.[428] The Council of Carthage foresaw potential resistance from the Christian *populares* to the destruction of these tombs. They advised bishops to refrain from demolishing them if met with significant opposition and to instead persuade the laypeople of their views.[429]

Beneath the Donatist schism, a struggle unfolded between bishops and the faithful over the bodies and authority of the martyrs. Catholic discourse framed all reforms of the martyr cult as efforts to restore original piety, which they claimed had been corrupted. I argue this misrepresents both the evolution of the martyr cult and the significance of rites at gravesides. The real issue was the transfer of power: the "memory work" of the cult of the martyrs, once conducted by humble Christian laypeople, was now being taken over by the bishops. Material evidence corroborates this; inscriptions related to the martyr cult

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[421] The protagonists of the stories of martyr *inventio* were usually clerics, especially bishops. Wisniewski 2019: 110: "The desire [of the martyr to be discovered] is fulfilled by an unsolicited vision, typically seen by a reliable witness, a monk or a cleric, preferably a bishop … If it is not the local bishop who has the vision, its content is duly reported to him. It is also the bishop who, after proper examination, orders digging to start and attends it with his clergy."

[422] Shaw 2011, 598.

[423] Brown 1981, 92.

[424] Augustine, *Sermones* 286.5.4: *Non eum diem quo hic posita est, sed eum diem hodie celebramus, quando inventa est pretiosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum eius per Ambrosium episcopum, hominem Dei: cuius tunc tantae gloriae martyrum etiam ego testis fui.*

[425] Augustine, *Sermones* 317.1.

[426] Council of Carthage 401; Canon 83 (Munier 1974, 204).

[427] Martyr cenotaphs in North Africa in fact persisted up to the byzantine period. Duval 1982, 751.

[428] Council of Carthage 401; Canon 83 (Munier 1974, 204): *Item placuit ut altaria quae passim per agros et per vias tamquam memoriae martyrum instituuntur, in quibus nullum corpus aut reliquiae martyrum conditae probantur, ab episcopis qui locis eisdem praesunt, si fieri potest, evertantur.*

[429] Council of Carthage 401; Canon 83 (Munier 1974, 204): *Si autem per tumultos populares non sinitur, plebes tamen admoneantur, ne illa loca frequentent, ut qui recte sapiunt nulla ibi superstitione devincti teneantur, et omnino nulla memoria martyrum probalilter acceptetur, nisi ubi corpus aut aliquae reliquiae sunt aut origo alicuius habitationis vel possessionis vel passionis fidelissima origine traditur.*

reveal a change in the type of language used, which was first “humble et dépouillé”, became in the end of the fourth and early fifth century a poetic language full of literary *topoi*.[430] This was no longer a cult cared by the people, it was controlled by the clerical elites. The great victory of the bishops was that the cult and its martyrs gradually abandoned the graveyards, their funerary *mensa* and their *domus aeterna* and made their way into the heart of church, the altar, under the bosom of the preaching bishop.

* * *

In the first part of this chapter, I examined Tertullian's and Cyprian's testimonials of the cult of the dead and juxtaposed them with archaeological findings. My analysis reveals that early Christians displayed a significant interest in caring for the dead, not unlike that of the pagans. The Christians used in fact same structures as pagans for post-funerary rites. This challenges the notion, promoted by Christian intellectuals, of a complete rejection of pagan practices. Instead, there is evidence that ordinary Christians participated in rites honouring the dead, including sharing food and drinks, akin to pagan traditions. Thus, I attribute the same psychological motivations highlighted in the previous chapter, the concern for forging and preserving one’s familial identity, to Christians as they tended to their deceased.

In the second section of this chapter, I analysed the pre-Constantinian cult of the martyrs using texts and archaeological findings. Initially centred around martyrs' tombs, the cult involved rites like the *refrigerium* ritual, which aimed to ensure the well-being of the deceased. Martyrs were also seen as intercessors for the living, prompting the practice of offering votive gifts. These offerings, often by humble laypeople, highlight their central role in caring for the martyr cult. While the cult of the dead focused on shaping and preserving familial identity, the cult of the martyrs extended these functions to foster communal and religious identities that transcended familial bonds.

In the third section of this chapter, I have traced the history of the African schism during the fourth century, focusing on debates surrounding the veneration of the dead and martyrs. From early on, the Donatists upheld existing martyr cults, deriving authority from portraying themselves as new martyrs. The Catholics countered this by discrediting Donatist martyrs as false and fanatical. Yet it was only Augustine who spearheaded an extensive effort to reform the cult of martyrs, arguing that it was crucial to eliminate the indecencies taking place at the tombs of revered martyrs.

Delving deeper, I explored the underlying motivations driving Augustine's campaign. Building on earlier insights and considering the decentralized authority of localized martyr cults, I posit that these presented a threat to Augustine's vision of universal unity under the Catholic banner. The perseverance of the Donatist identity, which became crystallized in martyr tombs, exemplified this threat. I finally argue that Augustine aimed to emulate Ambrose's strategy with relics by transferring martyr authority from lay-controlled graves to bishop-controlled altars.

[430] Duval 1982, 751: “Les [épitaphes] plus anciennes ont un formulaire proche de celles de simples fidèles, humble et dépouillé hormis la mention explicite de la sainteté du défunt, a partir de la fin du IVe siècle et au Ve, apparaissent des expressions poétiques et scripturaires décrivant la cruauté des persécuteurs et la béatitude au Ciel de leurs victimes , topoi communs aux actes des passions qui s’élaborent et aux sermons prononces a l’occasion des fêtes.”

Conclusion

The Donatist controversy encompassed numerous factors and points of contention. In this discussion, I have focused solely on one aspect: the debate over the cult of martyrs and its commemoration. However, this debate sheds light on how the conflict impacted ordinary Christians. My approach aimed to provide an informed understanding of the early Christian cult of martyrs, prioritizing pagan influences and material evidence to avoid the biases of Christian elites.

Taking this approach, the evidence strongly suggests a significant continuity from the pagan cult of the dead to Christianity. The Roman mindset associated with the cult of the dead, inherited from Republican aristocracies, aimed to use it as a cornerstone for identity, a mentality which I term the Trimalchian attitude. Local elites in African provinces mediated this practice, eager to demonstrate their status. For those unable to afford monumental tombs, concern for the dead was expressed through regular post-funerary commemorations. These periodic commemorations were crucial not only for shaping identity but also for uniting the living, serving a dual purpose of connecting individuals to their past kin and current community.

The cult of the dead was pivotal for identity formation, but with the rise of Christianity and the rejection of previous myths, martyr veneration gained further importance. Memory demands physical spaces and Africans, which were deeply connected to their local landscapes, found it easier to relate to martyrs whose tombs were accessible than to distant biblical stories. This and other factors fostered significant growth in the martyr cult, which remained under laypeople's care.

The Donatists' self-presentation as the new martyrs posed a significant challenge to their opponents. While the cult of martyrs was widely revered, Catholics like Gratus had to undermine the authority of Donatist martyrs without alienating the Christian populace. They attacked these martyrs by labelling them suicidal fanatics and issued canons against their veneration. However, the true influence of martyrs was determined not by the Church or ecclesiastical councils, but at their tombs, where the so-called false martyrs continued to be revered.

The rise of Augustine marked a new era for the cult of martyrs. Under the pretence of purging the cult from pagan corruptions and returning it to its origins, Augustine initiated a reform. His actions, however, aligned with those of his Catholic predecessors, driven by the Donatist controversy. Given the established importance of the martyr cult to the people, I dismiss Augustine's argument of cleansing corruption and seek deeper motives for his campaign. I highlight the parallel between Ambrose's actions towards Monica and Augustine's actions towards African Christians, suggesting that Augustine's campaign was a continuation of Ambrose's efforts. Central to these reforms was a shift of power from the graves to the altar. In the post-Constantinian period, where martyrs were seen by Catholics as a thing of the past, there was a need to "rewire" the cult to channel its authority through the bishop.

This shift of power occurred broadly, certainly under Ambrose in Italy. However, only in Africa did a Church, the Donatists, defending the old ways of commemorating martyrs. This adherence, I argue, was key to their popular support. Unlike the Catholics, who sought change, the Donatists aimed to preserve the Church as it was before Constantine. For the people, tradition made the Donatists the obvious choice: they defended their most sacred Christian sites, the tombs of the martyrs, and upheld ancient commemorations with food and drink. In contrast, the Catholics sought to alter these practices,

considering that Constantine's reign demanded changes in Church dynamics, particularly in the cult of the martyrs.

This investigation into the cult of the dead sheds light on important aspects and roles assumed by different Churches. Examining the material evidence of the cults of the dead and of the martyrs reveals a robust culture of popular initiative, which is overlooked in elite texts or intertwined with criticisms of Donatists or pagans. Catholic bishops often recontextualized these issues to suit their agenda but by emphasizing the significance of material evidence and conducting thorough analysis, a different contextual understanding emerges that challenges the narratives promoted by the bishops.

Augustine sought to redefine the cult of the martyr, placing it under clerical control and removing it from popular dominion. Contrary to the usual portrayal by Church historians of the Donatists as a revolutionary movement, this work concludes that the Donatists were very conservative. Meanwhile, the Catholics led a revolutionary movement, although always disguised as a return to the roots, to reorganize Christian cults by removing them from local and lay control, allowing bishops to assume total authority.

Having concluded this investigation, I can confidently affirm that my main research question, what insights a study on the cult of the dead can provide into issues of identity, particularly that of the Donatists, has been answered. By examining the Christian graveside cults and their importance, some debates central to the Donatist controversy appear in a new light. This approach highlights the conservative nature of the Donatists and the reforms prompted by the Catholics, which goes against the prevailing view of scholars of the Donatist controversy that depict the Donatists as proponents of a progressive movement. Instead of attributing the perseverance of the Donatists to sheer fierceness, we see that it likely stemmed from the early Christian identity which was rooted deeply within the tombs of their dead. To dismantle the Donatists meant to uproot this identity, which the Catholics eventually achieved but only through brute force.

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