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The Downfall of Caelestis

Salvian of Marseille and the End of Public Cult in Roman Carthage

ABSTRACT: In *De gubernatione dei* 8, Salvian claims that Carthaginian Christian noblemen worshipped Caelestis until the Vandalic conquest in 439. This article argues that Salvian's account is fundamentally unreliable. Augustine and the anonymous *Liber promissionum* allow one to reconstruct the restrictions on Caelestis' cult across 399–421. Salvian is ignorant of these developments, and his picture of Carthaginian society does not cohere with Augustine or post-Augustinian sermons. Salvian may not be engaging in outright fiction, but he is distorting cultural patterns attested in Augustine's works, and so cannot be used as a source for Romano-African cult during its demise.
Keywords: Salvian, Vandal Africa, Caelestis, Augustine, Quodvultdeus, Christianization

After the death of Augustine in 430, we have one vivid account of traditional Romano-African religious practice. The writer is a contemporary living outside Africa, an educated Rheinlander, become a monk in southern Gaul, who was well-informed about details of Carthaginian administration and civic life prior to the Vandalic conquest.[1] Writing a few years after the city's fall in 439, Salvian of Marseille alleged that God had brought judgment on Carthage and all Africa, not just for tolerating homosexual practices and hating monks, but also for harboring "an internal evil: the famous Caelestis, demon of the Africans."[2] Though he refers to *paganitas*, Salvian was not attacking the devotion of

* This paper, written while the author was a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, is dedicated to the memory of David Riggs of Indiana Wesleyan University. A draft was presented to the Oxford Late Roman Seminar in January 2021. My thanks to the participants for discussion, and especially to David Lambert (the respondent) and Simon Loseby for their expertise on Salvian and fifth-century Gallic monasticism. I also thank Robin Whelan for comments that decisively shaped the paper's framing, and *Historia's* readers for advice and additional literature. Abbreviations: *Ep.* = *Epistula*; Salvian, *Gub.* = *De gubernatione dei*; Augustine, *Ciu.* = *De ciuitate dei*, *En. Ps.* = *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, *S.* = *Sermones*; *CSEL* = *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, *CCSL* = *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, *PL* = *Patrologia Latina*.

1 Lepelley 1979–81, 1:360, "Comme toujours, Salvien exagerait … Mais il était bien informé des choses africaines et il connaissait l'importance des persistances païennes dans l'aristocratie du pays." Cf., e. g., Lepelley 1979–81, 2:33–5, on Salvian's knowledge of the local police-force.

2 *Gub.* 8.9 (*CSEL* 8: 194–5), "Caelestem illam scilicet Afrorum daemonem." For Salvian's life and movements, see Badewien 1980, 14–18. Salvian spent time in Lerins; whether he was yet in Marseille, where Gennadius knew him when he wrote *De uiris illustribus* 68 (Richardson 1896: 84–5) in the late fifth century, is unknown.

convinced non-Christians, but the syncretism of Christian aristocrats.[3] "Many of those who had sworn their profession to Christ served idols in their mind."[4] They worshipped Caelestis before Christ, apparently literally. "Who," Salvian exclaims, "did not cross the threshold of the house of God full of the reek of demonic sacrifices and ascend to the altar of Christ stinking of the demons themselves!"[5]

Salvian had the bad luck to write eight books on a theme lately explored by a masterpiece. *De gubernatione dei*, which seeks to explain why the wicked Romans had been conquered by the more virtuous barbarians, has been overshadowed by Augustine's longer and subtler *De ciuitate dei*.[6] Salvian's portrayal of the Carthaginian nobility has not even entered into influential recent accounts of Romano-African society and pagan religion in late antiquity.[7] Taken at face-value, it would seem to offer a potent confirmation for modern doubts, not just about the practical realities underlying Theodosian-era celebration in Christianity's legal triumph, but about a hard division between "Christians" and "pagans."[8] Behind Salvian's horror, we might find another illustration of the "secular" complexity we are used to seeing in late Roman civic life.[9] To be a Christian did not seem, to such men, to require renunciation of their patriotic duty to honor their city by joining in the feasts of its ancestral goddess.

As it stands, historians have dealt with Salvian's claims only in passing, generally seeing him as a witness either to the weakness of Christian devotion in Augustine's day or to a continuation of the cult of Caelestis after his death in 430.[10] The two possibilities are not mutually exclusive, yet neither has been grounded in much more than rudimentary comparison with statements by Augustine.[11] Even an insightful discussion of the

3 Nobility: *Gub.* 8.14 (*CSEL* 8: 196), "at, inquis, non omnes ista faciebant, sed potentissimi quique ac sublimissimi."

4 *Gub.* 8.10 (*CSEL* 8: 195), "multi eorum, qui professionem Christo dicauerant, mente idolis seruiebant."

5 *Gub.* 8.11 (*CSEL* 8: 195), "quis non daemoniacorum sacrificiorum nidore plenus diuinae domus limen introiit et cum faetore ipsorum daemonum Christi altare conscendit, ut non tam immanis criminis fuisset ad templum domini non uenire quam sic uenire, quia Christianus, qui ad ecclesiam non uenit, neglegentiae reus est, qui autum sic uenit, sacrilegii."

6 For comparison of his and Augustine's ideas and ideals, see O'Donnell 1983, Markus 1990, 168–77, Lambert 1999.

7 No mention in Cameron 2011, 783–801, Shaw 2011, 195–259, or Rebillard 2012.

8 Triumphalism: for North Africa, see now Lander 2016, 176–214. For the flexibility of Christian "identities" in Augustine's day, esp. Rebillard 2012, 61–91. Though I will persist in distinguishing between those who were associated with a church ("Christians") and those who were not but did worship the gods ("pagans"), I do not mean to imply that none of the former ever took part in rituals aimed at the gods: we will in fact see such participation from some Augustinian examples below.

9 Secularity: Markus 1990, modified in Gassman 2020.

10 To my reading, Lepelley 1979–81, 1:360, Audollent 1901, 388, 534–5, and Braun 1964, 1:72 n. 2, tend toward the first possibility (adopted unambiguously by Lepelley 1996, 244), Riggs 2001, 295, Benko (1993) 2004, 43, and Clover 1978, 11, toward the second. Halsberghe 1984, 2223, "encore quelques adeptes isolés," is an attempt to salvage Salvian's account. For the cult of Caelestis, see Lancellotti 2010, Cadotte 2007, 65–111, and Halsberghe 1984.

11 Audollent 1901, 534–5; cf. Elm 2017, 22 n. 89, who remarks on parallels between the two authors' accounts of Carthaginian homosexuality.

importance of Carthage for Salvian's conception of Roman society gives his account of Caelestis only a glance.[12] Closer examination allows a decisive, and negative, judgment. Salvian may have gained genuine knowledge of aspects of Carthaginian life by exchange of letters or conversation with Africans before or after the completion of the Vandalic conquest. That nucleus of fact is nonetheless swathed in vitriolic exaggeration, in his account of Carthaginian religious affairs no less than in the account of Carthaginian sexual affairs that dominates the preceding, seventh book. Only on an abstract level is he right: some people in Carthage, including some Christians, did do things that looked idolatrous to other Christians, and some people (none necessarily linked to a Christian church) did still maintain their devotion to Caelestis at least into the 420s. However, Salvian is ignorant of the most important parameters of the practical cultic situation. He gives no hint that he is thinking of clandestine, private cult: quite the opposite, in fact. Yet the public worship of Caelestis had ceased by, at latest, 399, when her image was probably removed from the temple, and the temple itself had in fact been demolished in 421.

The chronology of these events has never received a definitive exposition, and the narratives of modern historians are often confused in details. My first aim in this paper is simply, therefore, to lay out the convoluted data, passed down by Augustine and a younger African cleric (possibly but not certainly Quodvultdeus, bishop of Carthage), on the end of the cult of Caelestis, sketch the possible chronologies, and suggest (following David Riggs) a more dramatic end to her temple than has often been supposed. Though we have no account to set alongside the episcopal interventions, street violence, and ensuing demolition of the Serapeum at Alexandria in 391–392,[13] we can begin, at least, to reconstruct episcopal, official, and popular actions that ensued ultimately in the demolition of the greatest temple of Carthage. Building on that reconstruction, we will then return to Salvian's account, setting what he reports alongside the data about traditional devotion and Christian interest in "pagan" practices relayed by Augustine in sermons and letters. Salvian, as we shall see, is not a credible witness to actual religious affairs in Carthage, let alone to a pervasive vogue for syncretism in the local aristocracy. His attacks may nonetheless reveal a distant grasp of the uncertainty and ambivalence that still marked the city's Christianization, of the doubts, hesitations, and (in the eyes of a convinced Christian) sins that Augustine, an actual eyewitness to Caelestis' cult, challenges in his sermons and polemics.[14] Salvian is not engaging (I will suggest) in totally unbridled fantasy, but the apparent continuation of Caelestis' cult into the 430s is a mirage conjured by his vitriolic rhetoric.

12 Elm 2017, 22.

13 Hahn 2008, with Burgess and Dijkstra 2013 on the dating. The absence is typical, as Lander 2016, 191, notes ("Unlike the cities of Alexandria, Gaza, or Constantinople, no exorbitant tales of spectacular temple destructions survive from North Africa").

14 Salvian's account of the cult of Caelestis will thus be a specific example of the general tendency toward rhetorical amplification of locals' moral concerns identified by Courtois 1955, 151, in a brief but justly skeptical assessment of Salvian's reliability.

A Downfall in Slow-Motion

In fact, the public cult of Caelestis in the strictest sense – the rituals, including sacrifices, in the goddess's honor – had likely vanished before the fifth century began. Our data come from Augustine, who had seen Caelestis' image being honored at theatrical shows when he was a young man.[15] The holiday that he recounts in *De ciuitate dei* 2 will have taken place, at latest, in the early 380s. In a sermon delivered a year or two before he wrote that book, he could declare, "Caelestis has long-since been overturned, because she was not heavenly but earthly."[16] A reaction to the sack of Rome by Alaric's Goths in 410, *Sermo* 105 supplies a *terminus ante quem* for a decisive change in the goddess's public cult.[17] The likely date for the "breaking," as Augustine calls it elsewhere, of the "kingdom of Caelestis," was March 19, 399.[18] On that day, as Augustine said some twenty-five years later in *De ciuitate dei* 18.54,

> when Mallius Theodorus was consul … in Carthage, the most famous and prominent city in Africa, Gaudentius and Jovius, counts of the emperor Honorius, overthrew the temples of the false gods and broke their images.[19]

Whatever the *comites* or others did to deface or destroy shrines, "idolatrous" rites were clearly supposed to be the main target. That August, Honorius wrote to Apollodorus, proconsul of Africa, to forbid demolition of "shrines" (*aedes*) now "empty of illicit things by the benefit of our sanctions." He also banned sacrifices, while allowing festivals and feasts devoid of "superstition," and ordered Apollodorus to determine which statues were being used for cult.[20] The emperor appears now to envision removal rather than destruction even of the images. In fact, he had already forbidden destruction of the "ornaments of public works" in a law sent to Spain and Gaul that January.[21] Perhaps protests out of Carthage had garnered imperial lenience following initial demolitions;[22] perhaps Augustine is describing destructive actions (not necessarily by the *comites* themselves) that had exceeded Honorius' first instructions. In either case, the image of Caelestis, as patron goddess of Carthage, will have enjoyed symbolic significance and public notori-

15 *Ciu.* 2.4, 26 (*CCSL* 47: 37–8, 62), focusing especially on Caelestis but linking her to the Magna Mater, as well. How the goddesses were associated is obscure: though Cadotte 2007, 105–10, notes similarities in their titulature and iconography, there is no epigraphic evidence for outright assimilation.

16 *S.* 105.12 (*PL* 38: 624), "et olim euersa est Caelestis, quia non fuit caelestis, sed terrestris."

17 Perler 1969, 397–405, puts *S.* 105 in 411, Hombert 2000, 247 n. 7, in 412.

18 *En. Ps.* 98.14 (*CCSL* 39: 1391–2), "regna idolorum, regna daemoniorum fracta sunt … regnum Caelestis quale erat Carthagini! ubi nunc est regnum Caelestis?", put in 410 by La Bonnardière 1977, 355. On such a dating, there can, of course, be no connection with the temple's demolition in 421 (despite Lander 2016, 200–1).

19 *Ciu.* 18.54 (*CCSL* 48: 655), "consule Malio Theodoro … in ciuitate notissima et eminentissima Carthagine Africae Gaudentius et Iouius comites imperatoris Honorii quarto decimo Kalendas Aprilis falsorum deorum templa euerterunt et simulacra fregerunt."

20 *Codex Theodosianus* 16.10.17–18 (Mommsen 1905, 2:902).

21 *Codex Theodosianus* 16.10.15 (Mommsen 1905, 2:901–2). Such restrictions are typical of Theodosian-era legislation: texts and commentary in Lepelley 1994, 2020.

22 Lepelley 1994, 8. Lizzi Testa 2022, 163, suggests that the law sent to Spain was known in Carthage, as well.

ety. It will most likely, therefore, have been "overthrown," whether by outright destruction or a more restrained removal, in March 399.[23] If the festivals linked to her name were still functioning then, they seem either to have ceased or to have been so completely transformed that Augustine could treat them, in *De ciuitate dei*, as events of the past.[24]

A long-influential chronology inferred that the festivals had already stopped eight years earlier. We will return to the matter, on which we have no certain evidence, after discussing the closely related problem of the temple's closure and destruction. If Caelestis' image was most likely destroyed in 399, its house remained standing until 421. On the customary dating of *De ciuitate dei* 18 to ca. 424 or 425, Augustine will already have known of its demolition, but he, focused on rebutting a pagan oracle that allotted 365 years for Christianity, ignores events more recent than 399.[25] For the temple's fate we must turn to the work of a younger African cleric. Around 450, a catholic churchman, living in exile in Italy, described the anti-pagan successes that had unfolded, in what he saw as fulfillment of prophecy, over the preceding decades.[26] This section of the *Liber promissionum et praedictorum dei* includes both tall tales and mistakes. Thus, the cleric says that, until the supremacy of Stilicho, maidens were sacrificed to a mechanical dragon in a cave at Rome, and thinks that Theodosius, dead in 395, was responsible for Gaudentius and Jovius' mission.[27] Of Q. Aurelius Symmachus, he tells the strange story, not to be confirmed by any other account, that he attempted to win over Theodosius on the issue of the altar of Victory and was punished by banishment from the court.[28] It is, perhaps, a story of the writing of the famous *Relatio* 3, to Valentinian II in Milan in 384, that has grown in the telling.[29] The exile's presentation of legal details is likewise loose. Where Augustine reports destructions within Carthage, he implies universal closure of temples, without noting that Gaudentius' and Jovius' actions were limited to Africa.[30]

23 I thus concur with Rebillard 2016, 420 n. 11, that Caelestis will likely have been a primary target of the *comites*' actions, though I see no reason to limit their remit to a single temple.

24 The verbs are imperfect in *Ciu.* 2.4, 26 (*CCSL* 47: 37–8, 62).

25 Augustine's calculations are garbled, but the date is confirmed by an ancient consular list, the so-called *Consularia Constantinopolitana* (ed. Burgess 1993, 243), "Manilio et Theodoro $\overline{\text{uc}}$ HIS CONSS. templa gentilium demolita sunt Iouiano et Gaudentio comitibus." On the chronological problems O'Daly 2020, 313–14, offers a succinct but incomplete account. I intend to devote a separate discussion to this exceedingly complicated matter.

26 Dating in Braun 1964, 1:15–17.

27 *Liber promissionum* 3.38.43, 41 (*CCSL* 60: 183–5).

28 *Liber promissionum* 3.38.41 (*CCSL* 60: 183), "cui [sc. Theodosio] Symmachus ille mirabili eloquio et scientia praeditus, tamen paganus, praeconia laudum in consistorio recitans, subtili arte qua ualuit, aram Victoriae in senatu restitutui christiano, ut nouerat, principi intimauit. quem statim a suis aspectibus pulsum, in centesimo lapide redae non stratae impositum eadem die manere praecepit." For a brief discussion, with prior opinions, see Braun 1964, 1:66–7.

29 Cf. Cameron 2011, 47. "Mirabili eloquio," "praeconia laudum," and "christiano, ut nouerat, principi" certainly could fit *Relatio* 3; it was sent to Milan (Ambrose, *Ep.* 72(17).13 [*CSEL* 10/3: 17]), but some modern scholars have likewise inferred or at least implied oral delivery (e. g., Chastagnol 1960, 161, Cracco Ruggini 1974, 437). There was a later appeal to Theodosius, not necessarily involving Symmachus: Ambrose, *Ep. extra coll.* 10(57).4 (*CSEL* 10/3: 207).

30 Rebillard 2016, 419. *Liber promissionum* 3.38.41 (*CCSL* 60: 184), "Theodosii uero religiosi principis imperio per Iouium et Gaudentium comites templa omnia clausa exspoliataque uana figmenta quis nostrum permittitur ignorare? … Honorius etiam Theodosii minor filius christiana religione ac deuotione praeditus

He also claims that Honorius "granted all the temples with their adjacent spaces to the churches," while a constitution of Honorius sent to Carthage in 415 in fact commanded the properties of the temples to be added to his own, the yields, however, to be reserved to particular recipients where he or previous emperors had so granted.[31] The exile may not be inventing Honorius' generosity, as we will discuss below; but he is extrapolating, in panegyrical mode, from particular examples to a general principle.

The demise of the temple of Caelestis is quite a different matter. The author says that he was present as a young man, together with "friends and associates," when Aurelius of Carthage, Augustine's contemporary, took over the temple one Easter.[32] Together with style, theology, and biographical considerations, this anecdote has led scholars to identify him as Quodvultdeus, the cleric who induced Augustine to write *De haeresibus* and is perhaps identical with the bishop of that name who was driven from Carthage upon the Vandalic conquest in 439.[33] Neither identification is completely secure, but, if Augustine's Quodvultdeus was not this clergyman, he will have been his colleague and contemporary.[34] In that case, his hazy knowledge of events and laws up through the mid-410s does not surprise at all. Augustine's Quodvultdeus was a deacon in the late 420s, and, whether the exile was the same man or a colleague of roughly the same age, the occupation and destruction of the temple of Caelestis may well have been the first major steps in the local demise of traditional cult of which he had more than a child's vague awareness.

Quodvultdeus (as I will call him for simplicity) reports a series of developments after the temple's closure, all of which reflect not just clerical and official zeal to end the goddess's cult, but also the local attachment to the traditional gods on which Augustine had remarked in the sermon on Caelestis' "kingdom."[35] "When it had been shut for a long time," Quodvultdeus says, "and, through lack of maintenance, spiny bushes had covered it over, shutting it in, and the Christian people wanted to claim it for the use of true worship, the gentile people would shout that dragons and snakes were there to guard the temple."[36] Though the *dracones* hearken back to the previous story of the girl-

templa omnia cum suis adiacentibus spatiis ecclesiis contulit simulque eorum simulacra confringenda in potestatem dedit." For doubts about each account, see Shaw 2011, 227, and Kelly 2015, 145 n. 8.

31 *Codex Theodosianus* 16.10.20.1 (Mommsen 1905, 2:903), "omnia etiam loca, quae sacris error ueterum deputauit, secundum diui Gratiani constituta nostrae rei iubemus sociari ita ut ex eo tempore, quo inhibitus est publicus sumptus superstitioni deterrimae exhiberi, fructus ab incubatoribus exigantur, quod autem ex eo iure ubicumque ad singulas quasque personas uel praecedentium principum largitas uel nostra maiestas uoluit peruenire, id in eorum patrimoniis aeterna firmitate perduret."

32 *Liber promissionum* 3.38.44 (*CCSL* 60: 185), "ipse tunc aderam cum sociis et amicis atque, ut se adulescentium aetas impatiens circumquaque uertebat."

33 Braun 1964, 1:19–24, 88–113, lays out the issues, with extensive discussion of previous scholarship. Request for *De haeresibus*: Augustine, *Ep.* 221–4 (*CSEL* 57: 442–54); exile: Victor of Vita, *Historia persecutionis* 1.15 (*CSEL* 7: 8).

34 Cf. Whelan 2018, 53–5. Cautions against the identification in Pignot 2020, 241–8; otherwise, Vopřada 2020, 67–76.

35 *En. Ps.* 98.2 (*CCSL* 39: 1379), "magis remanserunt idola in cordibus paganorum, quam in locis templorum."

36 *Liber promissionum* 3.38.44 (*CCSL* 60: 185), "cum diutius clausum incuria spinosa uirgulta circumsaeptum obruerent uelletque populus christianus usui uerae religionis uindicare, dracones aspidesque illic esse ad custodiam templi gentilis populus clamitabat."

eating mechanical dragon at Rome, what Quodvultdeus describes here has nothing legendary about it. Abandoned, the temple of Caelestis was being taken over by scrub and wildlife.[37] To prove pagan claims wrong, one Easter, "when a multitude was gathered there, coming from every direction out of every kind of curiosity," the bishop Aurelius "placed his seat there in Caelestis' place" – the image, we are again reminded, had been removed – "and sat down."[38] Quodvultdeus and his companions stood around gawking, and lit upon a portentous sight: the inscription, written on the front of the temple, *Aurelius the pontifex dedicated it*. To those who saw it, this memorial of what was probably a second-century imperial dedication seemed a mark of God's providence.[39] When "a certain pagan" brought forth what he claimed was a prediction from Caelestis herself, "that the road and temples would again be restored to the old ritual of the *sacra*," God intervened to show the truth of his prophesies. Under the rule of Constantius and Galla Placidia, the tribune Ursus ordered the *templa* to be razed to their foundations, putting a cemetery on the field left behind. Now, when the exile was writing, even the road once named for Caelestis had been destroyed by the Vandals.[40]

Sub Constantio et Augusta Placidia places the temple's destruction between February 8 and September 2, 421, though a looser dating within their marriage (celebrated on January 1, 417) is not impossible.[41] Augustine says that his Quodvultdeus knew of Ursus, having been a deacon when the tribune, "then in charge of the royal household," ferreted out Manichaeans in Carthage.[42] Even if he was not Augustine's Quodvultdeus, the author of the *Liber promissionum* will have witnessed the events of the temple's downfall first-hand, just as he witnessed Aurelius' display. We thus have two dates: removal of the image of Caelestis on March 19, 399, followed, twenty-two years later, by the destruction of the temple itself. What happened in between? To be overgrown by shrubs and

37 A literal construal of the sentence that follows (*Liber promissionum* 3.38.44 [*CCSL* 60: 185], "quo magis christiani feruore succensi ea facilitate omnia amouerunt inlaesi qua templum suo uere caelesti regi et domino consecrarent") would suggest that the bushes were removed by Christians eager to take control of the temple. The reference might simply be, however, to bold removal of metaphorical obstacles (fear of demonic retribution or social opposition, etc.), at the moment of Aurelius' takeover.

38 *Liber promissionum* 3.38.44 (*CCSL* 60: 185), "namque cum sanctae Paschae sollemnis ageretur festiuitas, collecta illic et undique omni curiositate etiam adueniens multitudo, sacerdotum multorum pater et dignae memoriae nominandus antistes Aurelius, caelestis iam patriae ciuis, cathedram illic posuit in loco Caelestis et sedit."

39 *Liber promissionum* 3.38.44 (*CCSL* 60: 185), "hunc legentes populi mirabantur praesago tunc spiritu acta quae praescius dei ordo certo isto fine concluserat." Dedication: Hurst 1999, 92, against the idea that the temple was damaged in a fire and restored (for which, e. g., Braun 1964, 2:576 n. 2).

40 *Liber promissionum* 3.38.44 (*CCSL* 60: 185–6). This may, so Hurst 1999, 94–5, be the two-mile *platea* mentioned by Quodvultdeus in his description of the temple, though the description of the *platea* is awkward and (Hurst surmises) possibly interpolated. The destruction of the road is also mentioned by Victor of Vita, *Historia persecutionis* 1.8 (*CSEL* 7: 5).

41 Braun 1964, 1:16 n. 3, Ennabli 1997, 36. Hanson 1978, 263, puts the event, without argument, "about the year 418," and is followed by Leone 2013, 33.

42 Augustine, *De haeresibus* 46.9 (*CCSL* 46: 315), "detecti sunt tamen in ecclesia, sicut scis, apud Carthaginem, iam te ibi diacono constituto, quando instante Urso tribuno, qui tunc domui regiae praefuit, aliqui adducti sunt." Ursus may (so Shaw 2015, 57) have been "a lower-level *ad hoc* official who was put in charge of local enforcement and not a grand *tribunus et notarius*" like several Augustine had dealt with, including Fl. Marcellinus, the addressee of *De ciuitate dei*.

overrun by snakes, the temple has to have been closed for some years before Aurelius occupied it. The study of the end of North African civic cult yields few precise dates, and the ones we do have tend to attract other events to themselves. So also here. Two chronologies are commonly advanced:

The first, which goes back to the beginnings of modern historiography of the ancient church, assumes that Aurelius' action at Easter should have followed on that of Gaudentius and Jovius in late March 399.[43] The closure of the temple therefore fell several years earlier, following on Theodosian legislation banning exercise of traditional religion. That suggestion is undermined, however, by the details of the extant legislation. None of three laws on pagan cult known to have been promulgated in 391 and 392 was definitely enforced in Africa. One, the most often cited, has a Western addressee. According to the *Codex Theodosianus*, this law was sent from Milan in February 391 to Albinus the praetorian prefect, and forbade pagans from entering temples.[44] Albinus, however, was in fact urban prefect, not praetorian prefect, in 391, and so the law's scope was limited to Rome and the suburbicarian provinces.[45] It is an unlikely trigger for the abandonment of a temple in Carthage. Similar provisions in laws later sent to the prefect of Egypt and the Eastern praetorian prefect reveal Theodosius' desire to close temples to worshippers throughout the empire,[46] but we have little to no evidence of enforcement in North Africa, where pagan cult appears to have continued unabated in the countryside, at least, after Augustine's ordination as bishop in 396.[47] Whether the same was true in the cities or not, Augustine marks a major change in works datable from around 399 onward, when he begins to herald a serious decline in the legal status of traditional religion.[48]

Other scholars, including René Braun in his *Sources chrétiennes* text of the *Liber promissionum*, have put the temple's abandonment, more plausibly, in 399 itself.[49] Its occupation by Aurelius they then put after 407, when the court of Honorius handed down its first extant law expressly granting African bishops the right to intervene against pagan rites.[50] From then until its destruction (or so the argument goes), the temple was used for the liturgies of the church of Carthage. This law, however, was not posted in Carthage

43 Tillemont 1720, 515, Audollent 1901, 391–2, Perler 1969, 391–5, Halsberghe 1984, 2223; cf. Leone 2013, 33, who does not speculate on the date of closure. Easter fell on April 10 in 399, under both the Roman and the Alexandrian calculations: Mosshammer 2008, 214–15, table 9.

44 *Codex Theodosianus* 16.10.10 (Mommsen 1905, 2:899–900).

45 McLynn 1994, 331–32, with *PLRE* 1 (Albinus 15), 37–8.

46 *Codex Theodosianus* 16.10.11–12 (Mommsen 1905, 2:900–1), with Shaw 2011, 224–5.

47 Thus *Ep.* 46 from Publicola (*CCSL* 31: 198–202), addressed to Augustine as a bishop. For the date of Augustine's ordination, see Trout 1991.

48 Note, among many other passages, references to bans on sacrificing, destruction of idols, and preemptive hiding of images at *Contra Faustum* 13.9 (*CSEL* 25: 389), *De consensu euangelistarum* 1.14.21, 26.41–28.43 (*CSEL* 43: 20, 41–3), and *Contra epistulam Parmeniani* 1.9.15 (*CSEL* 51: 35). The customary dates of such works often rest in part on the presumptive link to the imperial actions in March 399, but their placement in the second book of Augustine's late review of his oeuvre (*Retractiones* 2.7, 16, 17 [*CCSL* 56: 95–6, 202–4]) will situate all after his elevation to the episcopacy at the very earliest, and so well after the laws of 391/392. A particularly detailed description of the closure, abandonment, repurposing, or destruction of temples at *Ep.* 232.3 (*CSEL* 57: 513) belongs in or after 404 (Mastandrea 1985, 81–8).

49 Braun 1964, 1:72 n. 1, Ennabli 1997, 35–6, Barnes 1970, 96.

50 *Codex Theodosianus* 16.10.19 = *Constitutio Sirmondiana* 12 (Mommsen 1905, 2:902–3, 916–17).

until June 5, 408. That it was known earlier in the spring has been inferred from its citation, a few days later, in a dispute at Calama, some two hundred miles away.[51] Even so, the delay in promulgation means that June 408 can only mark the point after which Aurelius' Easter occupation of the temple would have borne a reasonable presumption of legality. The law cannot supply the immediate motivation for an action undertaken a season before, or three seasons after, it entered into force. Unlike in the spring of 399, it is no longer possible to imagine Aurelius riding a triumphant swell of iconoclastic energy into the derelict temple of his pagan foes, and so there is no particular reason to propose a close chronological link between the law and the takeover.

Moreover, the idea that the temple was used as a church is unlikely in itself. In a sermon delivered, most likely on September 24, 417, in a certain Basilica Honoriana, Augustine refers to the presence, at some previous time, of idols "here."[52] Scholars once inferred that this basilica was none other than the now-Christianized temple of Caelestis.[53] That idea goes far beyond anything Augustine says, but the Basilica Honoriana, evidently owed to the emperor's generosity, may well have been a temple his agents had seized for public use and then handed over to the church of Carthage.[54] Absent a similar grant, a long-term occupation of the temple of Caelestis would have been of doubtful legality. Under the provisions of the law of 407/408, as of another law promulgated in 415, such temples were to belong to the public or the emperor.[55] If Aurelius really had taken the building over for regular church services, Ursus' demolition was an assertion of imperial authority over a building disputed between pagans and Christians and belonging to neither. Though perfectly legal, it would have caused considerable offense to local catholics: an imperial official (a noted heresy-hunter, no less) had just demolished a building in use for several years by the most important church in Africa. The scenario strains credulity.[56] Quodvultdeus is triumphant, not offended, and nothing in his account suggests that the wishes of the Christian laity were fulfilled by an actual adaptation of the temple to long-term Christian usage.[57] It was, most likely, used only for the Easter service itself, to assert victory at a moment of particular interreligious tension.[58]

51 Augustine, *Ep.* 91.8 (*CCSL* 31A: 158), suggesting some uncertainty about the span of time since a first altercation on June 1: "deinde post dies ferme octo, cum leges notissimas episcopus ordini replicasset"; Hermanowicz 2004, 489–91.

52 *S.* 163.1 (*CCSL* 41Bb: 218), "quae autem hic simulacra fuerunt." On the transmitted title of the sermon (one of several in the same collection delivered in named churches), see Dolbeau 1997, 451–2. For the date, see Partoens 2005, 251.

53 Partoens 2005, 252–3, surveys the literature.

54 Ennabli 1997, 31, infers that it was funded by Honorius, but the former presence of idols ought to make it either a converted temple or a new building erected over a demolished temple.

55 *Codex Theodosianus* 16.10.19.2, 20.1 (Mommsen 1905, 2:903); the former assigned temples to the *usus publicus*, the latter (quoted above, n. 31) to *nostra res*.

56 Thus already Audollent 1901, 392; cf. Hanson 1978, 263.

57 Hence *Liber promissionum* 3.38.44 (*CCSL* 60: 185), "templum … uelletque populus christianus usui uerae religionis uindicare … christiani feruore succensi ea facilitate omnia amouerunt inlaesi qua templum suo uere caelesti regi et domino consecrarent."

58 Lander 2016, 199, Leone 2013, 32–3. However, nothing suggests, *pace* Lander 2016, 199–200, that Aurelius was trying to counter the March festivals of the Magna Mater, linked to Caelestis by Augustine, *Ciu.* 2.4, 26 (*CCSL* 47: 37–8, 62).

The most parsimonious chronology, as David Riggs has seen, would put both the occupation and the destruction in 421.[59] Shuttered on March 19, 399, the temple was occupied by Aurelius twenty-two years later, at Easter 421, after rumors had begun to spread that the snakes living in the precinct had been sent by the gods (presumably, in fact, by the offended goddess herself). Made to declare the victory of Christ over the demonic powers, Aurelius' parade to the temple with the crowds that swelled, as usual, during the Paschal celebration further enflamed religious animosities.[60] Ursus, himself probably a devout catholic, razed the derelict temple to the ground, preventing further unrest and putting a stop to pagan claims that Caelestis would, someday, restore her worship to the building. This scenario provides a close fit for what Quodvultdeus describes and for the known legal provisions, explains why Ursus had the temple destroyed, and requires the fewest explanatory hypotheses to be invented. There is still one difficulty, however: the way in which Quodvultdeus describes the events – a long concessive clause on the oracle, followed by an emphatic declaration of the fulfillment of prophecy, the approximate time of destruction, then finally the destruction itself, with Ursus in an ablative absolute – does imply that the oracle triggered Ursus' action, but it separates Aurelius' occupation from the demolition.[61] The implication may, however, be only an accidental product of Quodvultdeus' rhetoric. He wants to prove the truth of God's prophecies from the temple's destruction, and so does not care to explain exactly when the other events had taken place.

Christian worshippers of Caelestis?

The account of the *Liber promissionum* is a remarkable testimony to the continuity of pagan devotion in Carthage well after the early 400s, the period of "heady optimism," as Peter Brown once called it, "which the sudden collapse of paganism had induced, for a moment, before the disasters of the next decade."[62] The oracle, the excited crowd gathering around Aurelius, the tribune's intervention: all sound like phenomena from twenty years before the temple was demolished. Quodvultdeus' oracle is parallel not just to the one, long obsolete, that Augustine rebutted in the 420s, but also to the predictions

59 Riggs 2006, 301 n. 15; for the scenario, cf. Lepelley 1979–81, 2: 42–4, who, following Quodvultdeus, leaves the date of the takeover uncertain (likewise Lepelley 1996, 245, who holds that "Aurelius … convertit en basilique le temple desaffecté").

60 For the holiday expansion of ancient congregations, see MacMullen 1989, and, e. g., Augustine, *S.* Denis 17.8 (Morin 1930: 88).

61 *Liber promissionum* 3.38.44 (*CCSL* 60: 185), "cumque a quodam pagano falsum uaticinium uelut eiusdem Caelestis proferretur, quo rursus et uia et templa prisco sacrorum ritui redderentur, ille, ille uerus deus cuius prophetica uaticinia nesciunt omnino mentiri nec fallere, sub Constantio et Augusta Placidia quorum nunc filius Valentinianus pius et christianus imperat, Vrso insistente tribuno, omnia illa templa ad solum usque perducta agrum reliquit, in sepulturam scilicet mortuorum."

62 Brown 1964, 110, following, however, too narrow a dating of Augustine's sermons and treatises that declare the defeat of paganism. The new *S.* Dolbeau 4, for example, can be dated between 403 and 406 (Dolbeau 1993b, 402–9). Cf. Markus 2000, 203.

that he credits, without description, to pagan *fanatici* in sermons.[63] The parade up to the abandoned temple and Ursus' final removal of the contentious building likewise mirror the uproar, under circumstances now hardly less obscure, surrounding the application and subsequent removal of a gilt beard belonging to a statue of Hercules, by the usual and plausible dating, in June 401.[64] Nonetheless, there are noticeable, and for pagans ominous, differences. In 401, Aurelius and Augustine were trying to moderate Christian passions, and the proconsul, faced by strong Christian sentiment but also by an appeal from prominent local citizens, had either ordered the removal of the gilt or retroactively authorized its removal by Christian provocateurs.[65] The statue itself was left *in situ* and, if less glorious, unharmed. Now, an imperial official headed off interreligious conflict by razing a once-vital temple to the ground and placing (to pagans, polluted) graves over it, in an ostentatious display of a Christian emperor's power over a traditional holy-site. Some people remained devoted to the gods, but Christians' confidence in their own power to remake Roman society had only increased.

Quodvultdeus confirms the strength of pagan sentiment in the 420s. He does not corroborate Salvian's claims about Christian devotion to Caelestis. In fact, the destruction of the temple undercuts Salvian's narrative severely. In itself there is nothing implausible about the idea that Christians sometimes participated in traditional rites, or were tempted to do so. We need not assume that the *populus christianus* and *gentilis populus* (to use Quodvultdeus' labels) were generally opposed when moments of special fervor had passed.[66] To judge from the many warnings against divination in Augustine's sermons,[67] Aurelius' parade might have aimed as much to bolster the confidence of Christians credulous of pagan oracles as to show forth to the pagans themselves the defeat of their goddess. Neither need all worship of Caelestis have ceased when her temple was overthrown. On the artificial hill, near the Punic tophet, that likely housed the goddess's temple, female figurines, some marked out with the iconography and sexual imagery of traditional deities, have been found in layers dating as late as the 7th century.[68] After David Frankfurter's reconsideration of popular religiosity in late antique Egypt, we can no longer be confident, from iconography alone, that these images were not meant to express a piety the worshippers perceived as Christian.[69] They do, however, express that piety in a pre-Christian idiom. No doubt Salvian would have thought them pagan. Just as indubitably, they do not reflect the kind of paganism he was worried about. Salvian's pseudo-Christians are great and sophisticated men, the *nobilissimi* of the city, out sacrificing and eating at the goddess's table before church. To the kind of men who would have held civic and priestly offices before the Theodosian era and now

63 To *Ciu.* 18.53–54 (*CCSL* 48: 652–6), cf. *En. Ps.* 40.1, 70/2.4, 12 (*CCSL* 38: 448, *CSEL* 94/2: 348, 358–9).
64 *S.* 24 (*CCSL* 41: 326–33), on which see Kelly 2015, Magalhães de Oliveira 2012, 227–51, and, briefly, Riggs 2006, 298–9.
65 *S.* 24.5–6 (*CCSL* 41: 530–2).
66 Rebillard 2012, esp. 86–91.
67 Dolbeau 2003.
68 Hurst 1999, 87–8.
69 Frankfurter 2018, 34–68, 162–7.

hoped to see the restoration of the old order, the loss of the temple of their city's most famous public cult would have been a serious check. It was another experience suggesting that their gods were powerless before a God who had foretold their overthrow centuries before.[70] Salvian shows no awareness that his Christians, if they had once worshipped Caelestis, might not have kept on doing so without doubt or hesitation.

Salvian's image contrasts with that which can be painted, albeit around many lacunae, from Augustine's letters and sermons. Throughout, Augustine distinguishes between "bad" or "false" Christians (people inconsistent in their Christian practice) and outright "pagans" who do not belong to any church.[71] In his understanding, the worship of the traditional gods through their images, generally with sacrifices, is typical of pagans; when he speaks of Christian involvement in idolatry, he is usually referring to divination (only sometimes involving sacrifice).[72] A sermon on John puts it neatly: "Haven't many drunkards been baptized? Haven't many greedy fellows? Haven't many idolaters, and, what's worse, secret ones? Don't pagans go to idols publicly (or at least used to go)? Now Christians secretly ask diviners, consult astrologers."[73] The vice is "idolatry," its danger more, however, to do with demons than with images in themselves. To be a *socius idoli* is strictly impossible, to be a *socius daemonii*, too easy: all it takes is a visit to a *sortilegus* or a *haruspex*.[74] Augustine is speaking against such practices, when he warns against those who, thinking God's concern limited to eternal matters, seek "by nefarious sacrifices and I know not what remedies … to provide for themselves that which is temporal."[75]

However, because both invoke powers that seemed to devout Christians demonic, the deviations of the "bad" Christians overlap with the worship offered by non-Christians. In another sermon, he reports that some people say, "God is necessary for eternal life … but those powers ought to be worshipped by us, for these temporal affairs." He replies by questioning the power of Neptune over seafarers and Juno over women in childbirth. These opponents, "vain people" who "worship demons," might not have been baptized or catechumen members of a church.[76] Yet, in a mixed society, many Christians still felt a pull to ancestral traditions. Some people, when God does not supply food

70 For the Christian argument, see, before 410, Augustine, *De consensu euangelistarum* 1.26.40–1 (*CSEL* 43: 39–41), *De diuinatione daemonum* 8.12–10.14 (*CSEL* 41: 613–18).

71 For Augustine's vocabulary for "pagans," see briefly Borgomeo 1972, 49–73, on bad Christians, 112–16.

72 *Haruspices* constitute only a subset of diviners, among whom astrologers are especially prominent: Dolbeau 2003, 169–73.

73 *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 6.17 (*CCSL* 36: 62), "nonne multi ebriosi habent baptismum? nonne multi auari? nonne multi idololatrae, et quod est peius, furtim? nonne pagani ad idola eunt, uel ibant publice? nunc occulte Christiani sortilegos quaerunt, mathematicos consulunt."

74 *S.* Dolbeau 6.9–10 (Dolbeau 1993a, 102).

75 *En. Ps.* 34/1.7 (*CCSL* 38: 304), "sunt qui dicunt … ista uero saecularia et temporalia ad daemones pertinent, et ad potestates illas harum tenebrarum. … et quaerunt nefandis sacrificiis, ac nescio quibus remediis, … prouidere sibi quod temporale est." In the preceding section (*CCSL* 38: 303), Augustine has said, "in inopia temporalium, quaerit auxilium plerumque a daemonibus, arreptitios daemonum uult consulere, sortilegos quaerit."

76 *En. Ps.* 26/2.19 (*CSEL* 93/1B: 113), "sed putant uani homines, quia hoc daemones praestent quos adorant, et aliquando dicunt sibi: deus ad uitam aeternam necessarius est, ad illam uitam spiritalem; potestates autem istae debent a nobis coli propter ista temporalia."

to sate gnawing hunger, turn, Augustine says, to Mercury, Jupiter, "or the one they call Caelestis."[77] Now, Augustine certainly has Christians in mind. He is warning his congregation that the "good and faithful Christian" – *fidelis*, as usual, signifying the baptized – ought to seek every temporal good from God, not "from demons, idols, and I know not what powers of this age."[78] Here, the worship of Caelestis is a temptation for the Christian under great physical need, not an everyday occurrence, whether at Hippo, Carthage (the site of a quarter of the sermons that can be located), or somewhere else.[79] It is also an isolated instance: so far as I can tell, Augustine suggests Christian worship of Caelestis nowhere else in his sprawling corpus. The lack of chronological indices makes it impossible to say whether he became more or less wary of idolatry over time,[80] but it is unlikely that her worship became a new issue as his death approached. Down even to the end of his life, he was trying to win over sophisticated pagans from Carthage, not least through the agency of sophisticated Christians.[81] Nowhere does he suggest in a letter to a Carthaginian clergyman tasked with outreach work, a wavering catechumen with "superstitious" friends, or a visiting official he is trying to recruit for his efforts, that Christians in their social circles typically devoted themselves to their city's traditional gods.[82]

Convinced of the need for all to enter the catholic church, Augustine was willing to accept conversions others found suspect, but he did not neglect the motives behind conversion, where they could be discerned, or the professed beliefs of the would-be Christian.[83] The Carthaginian outreach-man, speaking to a general audience, is to begin by exhorting them to come for the sake of eternal rest in God, not any earthly benefit, and (Augustine elsewhere protests) not even the proponents of easy-believism would admit an unrepentant idolater or pagan priest to baptism.[84] The absence of evidence is not, indeed, proof of absence, especially when one is drawing on a manifestly incomplete corpus. Augustine would nonetheless have been strangely negligent, had he failed to warn against what ought, per Salvian's account, to have been the most pressing temptation facing upper-class converts at Carthage. If the lofty Christians of Carthage were regularly worshipping Caelestis, he did not know about it.

Augustine, an African born, knew Carthage far better than did Salvian, a Gaulish monk from the Rhineland who likely never set foot on the Mediterranean's southern

77 *En. Ps.* 62.7 (*CSEL* 94/2: 86), "sunt enim qui quando famem patiuntur in isto saeculo, dimittunt deum et rogant Mercurium, aut rogant Iouem ut det illis aut quam dicunt Caelestem aut aliqua daemonia similia: non deo sitit caro ipsorum."

78 *En. Ps.* 62.7 (*CSEL* 94/2: 86), "bono Christiano et fideli etiam in hoc saeculo caro deo sitit, quia si opus est carni pane, si opus est aqua, si opus est uino, si opus est nummo, si opus est iumento carni huic, a deo petere debet, non a daemoniis et idolis et a nescio quibus potestatibus huius saeculi."

79 In fact, Carthage is likely overrepresented: Drobner 2012, 112–13.

80 Despite the cautious arguments of Rebillard 2009.

81 Pignot 2016, Gassman 2021.

82 *Ep.* 102 (ca. 406–410), supplying arguments to Deogratias to convince a Carthaginian pagan, and late letters to readers of *Ciu.*: 1A*, 2*, to the Carthaginian catechumen Firmus, 229–31, from and to the visiting *uir illustris* Darius (*CCSL* 31B: 8–33, 88: 7–21, *CSEL* 57: 497–510).

83 *S.* Morin 1 (Morin 1930: 589–93), on the *argentarius* Faustinus, whose conversion Brown 2000, 227, calls "transparently politic."

84 *De catechizandis rudibus* 16.24–17.27 (*CCSL* 46: 148–52); *De fide et operibus* 12.18 (*CSEL* 41: 57–8).

shore. An inference follows: during Augustine's episcopal career, Christian Carthaginians were not regularly worshipping Caelestis.

Reframing Salvian's rhetoric

Augustine died in 430. It is not impossible that Salvian is describing a revival of the cult of Caelestis in the decade following. With the crumbling of Roman power, the arguments that Augustine had rebutted in *De ciuitate dei* would have seemed to grow more plausible by the year. Contemporary sermons, plausibly Carthaginian in origin and commonly attributed to Quodvultdeus, attest to their currency.[85] They also imply that those who did still worship the gods were now (for the most part) nominal Christians,[86] but we would be reading much out of ambiguous statements, if we suggested that a resurgence of sacrificing had actually taken place. One sermon denounces an all-night masquerade, possibly at New Year's.[87] It claims that the participants were sacrificing their own souls: as direct an admission as we could wish that no physical sacrifices were actually occurring, any more than they had been when Augustine levelled similar complaints.[88] At most, we can confirm that Quodvultdeus and his devout listeners were troubled by widespread participation in routine civic festivals, none of which probably saw overt sacrificing or veneration of cult-images.[89] The time for a renaissance of the city's foremost cult would, regardless, be very tight. If Salvian is describing a recent renewal of *paganitas* among the Christian "best set" of Carthage before the city's conquest, it would have had to unfold over less than a decade.[90] Salvian, however, gives no hint that anything has recently changed. Set in a timeless past, his account is a description of what Carthage simply is like, or was like up to 439 – *ecce quae Afrorum et maxime nobilissimorum fides quae religio quae christianitas fuit!*[91] To infer a new vogue for Caelestis-worship is not, therefore, to follow Salvian's own thinking, but to attempt to fit his account, in spite of its rough edges, into our other data. If we must rationalize, another possibility lies to hand: that

85 For arguments against Christianity and the *christiana tempora*, *De tempore barbarico* 1.3.21, 2.3.1–7 (*CCSL* 60: 428, 474–5). The sermons need not have been preached at Carthage (Pignot 2020, 245), though the setting is a reasonably large, religious mixed city, and so at least analogous to it.

86 *De accedentibus ad gratiam* 1.9.11 (*CCSL* 60: 448), "tamen istis dicit, qui talia colunt: ubi sunt qui tales adorant? quanti sunt? aestimas omnes istos adhuc esse paganos. eorum frontes inspice, et inuenies perfidos christianos."

87 Nock 1949, 55.

88 *De tempore barbarico* 1.4.12–13 (*CCSL* 60: 429). For Augustine the games at the Kalends of January constituted an inward, metaphorical idolatry (*S.* Dolbeau 26.3 [Dolbeau 1992, 92]).

89 *De tempore barbarico* 2.4.2 (*CCSL* 50: 475) reports the strange story of a "iuuenem fortem," a Christian with royal authority, who lost his hand after sacrificing. Per 2.4.1, he was someone of similar political importance to the historical examples taught in schools; Franses 1920, 66–8, and Morin 1917, 214, suggest a reference, by way of irony, to the aging Priscus Attalus.

90 *Pace* Elm 2017, 22 n. 91, I find no reason to see Caelestis behind the Vandalic imagery of *Felix Karthago* documented by Clover 1986.

91 *Gub.* 8.12 (*CSEL* 8: 195–6).

Salvian is simply describing, through the jaundiced gaze of a distant vituperator, the culture visible in Augustine's works.[92]

Examination of Salvian's other exposés of African mores suggests that that is precisely what is happening. *De gubernatione dei* 7.65–83 is an invective, rolling for pages, against the vices of a great city, the kind of place where, as Augustine remarked, ordinary, unambitious people "want to rejoice and rest in taverns, fornications, the theaters, and the frivolous games they have for free in the big cities."[93] That Salvian's complaints against rampant prostitution and greed should find rough parallels in Augustine's preaching is unsurprising,[94] though Salvian's prudish refusal to think ill of the clergy robbed him of the opportunities for invective that the scandals of Antoninus of Fussala and Apiarius of Sicca Veneria (a city famous for cultic prostitution!) would have afforded.[95] There is, however, a close resemblance, as Susanna Elm has noted, between his description of the Carthaginian *molles* and Augustine's account of the *galli* of the Magna Mater in *De ciuitate dei*.[96] Effeminates are few, Salvian admits, but pollute the whole population:

> When men took women's clothing and rolled their stride more than women do, when they bound on themselves certain tokens of monstrous impurity and veiled their heads with the womanly bindings of headscarves – and did this publicly in a Roman city, in the chief and most illustrious city of that province – what was it, except a disgrace to the Roman Empire, that, right in the bosom of the Commonwealth, a most execrable impiety should openly be allowed?[97]

Augustine, complaining that he has to learn about the cult of Attis from Porphyry of Tyre, not from the polymathic Varro, says:

> By the same taken, Varro did not want to say anything – nor do I recollect that I have ever read anything – about the effeminates, consecrated to the Great Mother in defiance of every modesty proper to men or women, who, until yesterday, went with damp hair, whitened faces, flowing limbs, and a feminine gait through the thoroughfares and side-streets of Carthage, and demanded even from hawkers something on which to make their ignominious living.[98]

92 Cf. the comments of Markus 1990, 173–4, contrasting Augustine's critique of still-active games with Salvian's critique of defunct games as if they were active.

93 *De catechizandis rudibus* 16.25 (*CCSL* 46: 149–50).

94 Cf., for the former, especially *S.* 9 (*CCSL* 41: 105–51, delivered at Chusa, perhaps La Kessera: Duval 1998, 173), Denis 17.7–9 (Morin 1930: 87–9, delivered at Bulla Regia). Warnings against the temptations of wealth are many: e. g., *S.* 14.7–8, 21.10 (*CCSL* 41: 189–90, 285–6).

95 *Gub.* 7.74 (*CSEL* 8: 179). Sicca: Valerius Maximus, 2.6.15 (Briscoe 1998, 1:117). For the affairs of Antoninus and Apiarius, see Merdinger 1997, 111–35, 154–99. In Antoninus' case, the charges of *stuprum* were not found credible: Augustine, *Ep.* 209.4 (*CSEL* 57: 394).

96 Elm 2017, 22 n. 89.

97 *Gub.* 7.83 (*CSEL* 8: 182–3), "cum enim muliebrem habitum uiri sumerent et magis quam mulieres gradum frangerent, cum indicia sibi quaedam monstruosae impuritatis innecterent et femineis tegminum inligamentis capita uelarent, atque hoc publice in ciuitate Romana, urbe illic summa et celeberrima, quid aliud quam Romani imperii dedecus erat, ut in medio rei publicae sinu execrandissimum nefas palam liceret admitti?"

98 *Ciu.* 7.26 (*CCSL* 47: 207–8), "itemque de mollibus eidem Matri Magnae contra omnem uirorum mulierumque uerecundiam consecratis, qui usque in hesternum diem madidis capillis facie dealbata, fluentibus

The feminine gate and dress are clichés, and Salvian makes no exact reminiscence of Augustine's words; for Carthaginian effeminacy he could also have consulted Cyprian, for example.[99] The situation is nonetheless the same: a small number of cross-dressing men openly disport themselves in Carthage. What Augustine makes a proof of pagan corruption, Salvian turns against Carthaginian society at large.

With the wrath of a monk defending his own, Salvian thunders against the Africans – all Africans – for mocking, deriding, cursing, and harrying "the monks, that is, the saints of God," and "doing just about everything that the impiety of the Jews did to Our Savior" before his Passion.[100] Honesty forces him to admit that the Africans had not, in fact, done physical harm to the monks. Hatred, however, is tantamount to homicide, and it was their enmity for the monks' holy living that led to mockery of monks in every city in Africa:

> Not without reason, therefore, did it happen that, within the cities of Africa and especially the walls of Carthage, the populace, as unfortunate as unfaithful, could scarcely look without reproach and curses at someone wearing a cloak, pale of face, who cut back the mane of his flowing locks as far as the shorn skin.[101]

Salvian heightens the horror, for a late antique person attuned to the new sacred topography of Christian monasticism. At Carthage, monks endured such curses, though they came "from the *coenobia* of the Egyptians, the sacred places of Jerusalem, or the holy and venerable hidden-places of the desert."[102]

Augustine says much the same of the ordinary Christian layman who arrives in cities now Christian, but finds his austere lifestyle at odds with common custom. "He endures as his mockers the Christians themselves, and endures harsh words; they say, 'You are great and righteous; you are Elijah, you are Peter, you have come down from heaven.'"[103] In his experience, monks' habit and hairstyle can provoke peculiar incomprehension:

> Sometimes, when the show is finished at the theater or amphitheater, when the crowd of lost souls has begun to belch forth from those bleachers … they very often see, as it chances, that the servants of God are going by, they recognize them from the manner of their clothing or hair-

membris, incessu femineo per plateas uicosque Carthaginis etiam a propolis unde turpiter uiuerent exigebant, nihil Varro dicere uoluit nec uspiam me legisse commemini."

99 At Cyprian, *Ad Donatum* 8, the crowd is most pleased in the theater by "quisque uirum in feminam magis fregerit"; he follows with accusations of secret sodomy in *Ad Donatum* 9 (*CCSL* 3A: 8).

100 *Gub.* 8.19 (*CSEL* 8: 197–8), "ita igitur et in monachis, id est sanctis dei, Afrorum probatur odium, quia inridebant scilicet quia maledicebant, quia insectabantur quia detestabantur, quia omnia in illos paene fecerunt, quae in saluatorem nostrum Iudaeorum impietas ante fecit, quam ad effusionem ipsam diuini sanguinis perueniret."

101 *Gub.* 8.21 (*CSEL* 8: 198), "non sine causa itaque illud fuit, quod intra Africae ciuitates et maxime intra Carthaginis muros palliatum et pallidum et recisis comarum fluentium iubis usque ad cutem tonsum uidere tam infelix ille populus quam infidelis sine conuicio atque execratione uix poterat."

102 *Gub.* 8.22 (*CSEL* 8: 198).

103 *En. Ps.* 90/1.4 (*CCSL* 39: 1257).

> cut, or perhaps they are acquainted with them, and they say to themselves and to one another, "O, those poor fellows – what a thing they're missing!"[104]

Here, the parallels are even more striking than between the two authors' description of the Carthaginian *molles*. Augustine, however, is more compassionate than angry, bidding his congregation pray for those whose values are so warped from the Christian ideal.[105] His other works enable one to understand reasons, beyond mere disdain for ascetical self-denial, why laypeople might react negatively to monks. In sermons, he says that the Devil has sown "tares," false Christians, everywhere, including both apse and monastery.[106] Writing to his own church about the mutual accusations of sexual advances leveled between the presbyter Boniface and the monk Spes, he warns against thinking every "bishop, cleric, monk, or nun" equally corrupt just because one "has fallen," any more than they would conclude that their own wives or mothers were adulteresses just because "some married woman" was guilty.[107] In the monasteries, he says, he has found both the best and the worst people he has known.[108] Again, Salvian's attack reads like a streamlined and exaggerated version of things Augustine says with greater attention to the vicissitudes of lived experience.

For Salvian's Christian Caelestis-worshippers, as I have said, Augustine's sermons offer only one direct parallel, but another sermon suggests a remarkably similar situation.[109] In *Sermo* 62, Augustine tries to dissuade up-and-coming Christians, made wealthy by the city's leading pagans, from attending a feast of the Carthaginian genius put on by their patrons.[110] The *genius* of Carthage could conceivably have been identified, like that of Thuburbo Maius, with Caelestis, and Augustine concludes by defending the church's destruction of a rural shrine on an estate it had recently obtained.[111] An ingenious suggestion, offered by David Riggs, would thus see here the continuation of the cult of Caelestis, past Honorius' restrictions, in "sacrificial banquets in the countryside."[112] Augustine's wording suggests, however, that sacrifices were not actually taking place – they are a

104 *En. Ps.* 147.8 (*CSEL* 95/5: 206), "aliquando, dimisso theatro aut amphitheatro, cum coeperit ex illa cauea euomi turba perditorum … uident, plerumque ut fit, transire seruos dei, cognoscunt ipso habitu uel uestis uel capitis, uel forte notos habent, et dicunt apud semetipsos et secum: o miseros istos, quid perdunt!"

105 The festival-goers are prototypically pagan (hence *En. Ps.* 147.7 [*CSEL* 95/5: 205], "et quam multos putamus ibi nunc sedere futuros non solum Christianos, sed etiam episcopos", 147.8 [*CSEL* 95/5: 206], "ne putent gentes se habere spectacula, et nos non habere"), but definitely include Christians, as well (thus, a little earlier, *En. Ps.* 147.7 [*CSEL* 95/5: 204], "hi sunt qui modo gaudent talibus pompis; inter illos sunt qui propterea hodie non uenerunt, quia munus est").

106 *S.* Caillau/Saint-Yves 2.5.3 (Morin 1930: 250–1), 73.4 (*CCSL* 41Ab: 130); cf. *En. Ps.* 132.4 (*CSEL* 95/3: 322).

107 *Ep.* 78.6 (*CCSL* 31A: 88–9). On the charge, Augustine is delicate: *Ep.* 78.2 (*CCSL* 31A: 84), "ut si innocens est presbyter uester, quod magis credo, quia cum sensisset alterius motum impudicum et immundum, nec consentire uoluit nec tacere." Cf. *Ep.* 77 (*CCSL* 31A: 81–2), and, for Augustine's procedure in handling such cases, Hunter 2020.

108 *Ep.* 78.9 (*CCSL* 31A: 91), "quomodo difficile sum expertus meliores quam qui in monasteriis profecerunt, ita non sum expertus peiores quam qui in monasteriis defecerunt."

109 Cf. Audollent 1901, 534–5, Riggs 2001, 294–5.

110 On the worship of such *genii*, see Lepelley (1992) 2001.

111 *Inscriptions latines d'Afrique* 228, Augustine, *S.* 62.17–18 (*CCSL* 41Aa: 311–13).

112 Riggs 2001, 295.

temptation, the feasting a reality – and, when he imagines the Christian protesting that the genius of Carthage is not a god, he does not retort that it is in fact the *dea Caelestis*, but that Mars and Mercury are not gods, either.[113] The sermon does not verify Christian involvement in the worship of Caelestis during Augustine's career. It does show that the well-to-do Christians of Carthage, dependent for career-success on their pagan patrons, could come under pressure to participate in rites that seemed, to those alert to iconography (Augustine refers to an altar and statue) and the beliefs of local power-brokers, to be overtly idolatrous.[114] These men were not among the very best set at Carthage, but they were their associates, perhaps lesser decurions.[115] Elsewhere, Augustine repeats as a common saying the lament, "If that *nobilis* were a Christian, no one would remain a pagan."[116] That the *potentissimi quique ac sublimissimi*, as Salvian calls them, were a reservoir of traditional piety, anyone familiar with Augustine's world or writings would have known. Salvian simply makes them out to be Christians, or confuses them with their *arriviste* peers, as Augustine, once a transplant in Carthage, later a social climber in a city at the center of imperial power, does not.

Conclusion

Salvian's invective against African immoralities and Caelestis-worship reads like a polemical expansion upon complaints present, in more concrete and often more ambivalent form, in Augustine's works. That does not mean that he was relying on them: Augustine is our source, often in the absence of any other, for early fifth-century North African affairs, but Salvian would have had other books, letters, and people to whom to turn for information. We have found no exact verbal parallels, and none are to be expected, any more than Salvian's knowledge of Carthaginian government and amenities need draw on anything in Augustine's now-lost works.[117] What Augustine's letters and sermons offer is a more human, finer-grained vision of the world that Salvian is attacking.

113 *S.* 62.7 (*CCSL* 41Aa: 302), "qui uident ista, aedificantur ad alia, ut non tantum ibi manducare sed et sacrificare desiderent," 10 (*CCSL* 41Aa: 305), "non est, inquit, deus, quia genium est Carthaginis. quasi, si Mars aut Mercurius esset, deus esset!" For the neuter *genium*, cf. *TLL*, s. v. *genius*, 6/2: 1827.5–16. Riggs 2001, 300 n. 34, doubts whether Caelestis is distinct from the *genius Carthaginis* on *ILS* 3923 = *CIL* III 993, erected in Raetia by the legates Olus Terentius and Pudens Uttedianus. I think one can be more certain. "Caelesti Augustae | et Aesculapio Augusto et Genio | Carthaginis et | Genio Daciarum" ought, unless we were to accept an identification of Eshmun-Aesculapius with a Dacian *genius*, to rule out any conflation of Caelestis with the *genius Carthaginis* by these officials of presumptive African origin. On the other hand, the identification of a masculine bust excavated at Carthage (Gros 1997, 343–4, and Lepelley [1992] 2001, 53) with the genius is wholly speculative.

114 *S.* 62.10 (*CCSL* 41Aa: 306), with Gassman 2020.

115 Thus Lepelley (1992) 2001, 51.

116 *En. Ps.* 54.13 (*CSEL* 94/1: 155–6).

117 As Lambert 1999, 129, remarks, "The *City of God* had long been available when Salvian wrote, but his extant works contain no reference to Augustine, and no evidence of familiarity with his works. … He sometimes uses arguments that resemble ones used by Augustine, but never closely enough to establish a debt."

Neither author spares the feelings of the Carthaginian *molles*, but Augustine shows, through his attempts to persuade the congregation of his own view, just why an ordinary Christian might curse or pity a monk, or even feel that he had to find a way to justify feasting beside an altar and image of his city's guardian deity. Salvian, operating in good vituperative mode, sees nothing for which to have even imaginative sympathy; in the Africans' criticism of monks he finds only hatred, not the misguided pity of Augustine's theatergoers. That marks the difference not just between two men with different conceptions of the ascetical ideal and of the meaning of historical events, but between a monastic polemicist, even one who tried by writing and his own intervention to redress the sufferings of the disadvantaged, and a bishop who dealt daily with late Roman urban life and had a relatively sympathetic view of its leading figures.[118] It would, therefore, be most hazardous to infer from Salvian any vogue, current in Augustine's day or new to Salvian's, for the worship of Caelestis among Carthaginian Christians, any more than one could infer a new fashion for cross-dressing or mocking monks. Salvian is not trying to represent his target accurately, but to amplify all that he found most objectionable in others' reports of it. His account casts much light on the legacy of Roman Carthage after its conquest, but only shadows on the religious *realia* of fifth-century Africa, for which one must turn to Augustine, his correspondents and colleagues, and, with due care, the works now attributed to Quodvultdeus.

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118 Salvian reports trying to defend a poor man from dispossession at *Gub.* 4.74–5 (*CSEL* 8: 92). Badewien 1980, 100–16, surveys his social criticism.

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