Eranos 112, 27–50

Latinity in Early Islamic North Africa

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Abstract: This paper explores the social function of Latin in the early Islamic Maghrib and the concerns of the local communities who continued to use the language beyond the Arab capture of Carthage in 697/98. By focussing on those Latin sources whose origins can be assigned to North Africa between the end of the seventh and the mid-thirteenth century, it considers evidence for the use of Latin as a language of Christian commemoration, worship, and education; the survival of Latin and then Romance as a spoken language in the medieval Maghrib; the role of Latin as at least a short-lived language of religious disputation between the region's new Muslim ruling class and their Christian and Jewish subjects; and the use of Latin as a language of trans-Mediterranean communications. The language probably enjoyed a more robust afterlife in Islamic North Africa than scholars have sometimes imagined, yet the way in which Latin was deployed in mediating relationships overseas may ultimately have undermined sustained interest in the region by medieval European Christians.

Keywords: Latin; Maghrib; epigraphy; numismatics; diplomacy.

Reflecting on Roman Africa's Classical and Christian literary tradition, Peter Brown once mused that "the only two books of Latin literature that a modern man can place with ease beside the fiction of today were written by Africans—the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius and […] *The Confessions* of Augustine."[2] Such praise of North African Latinity is not an exclusively modern phenomenon. At least, in the mid-sixth century a contemporary observer in Constantinople agreed that Africans spoke Latin even more elegantly than Italians.[3] Yet by the time of the Islamic conquests, which integrated the Maghrib into the caliphate over the course of the later seventh and early eighth centuries, that eloquent Latin chatter had mostly fallen silent in the sources which survive to us.[4] Mostly, but not entirely. For at least three and a half centuries after the final Arab capture of Carthage in 697/98, Latin texts continued to be produced in North Africa. The surviving attestations are not abundant, but they are significant: at least 78 known funerary inscriptions, to which I here propose adding another five; the earliest Islamic coinage from the Maghrib, which included terse religious aphorisms in Latin; a late antique martyrdom account

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[2] Brown 1967, 23.

[3] John Lydus, *De magistratibus populi Romani*, 3.73.

[4] On the latest Latin literature from Byzantine North Africa, see Hays 2016.

which underwent its final revision in the eighth century; a collection of liturgical manuscripts long thought to have been written in the Holy Land but now plausibly assigned to North Africa itself; and a fragment of a letter which was said to have been written by the clergy of tenth-century Carthage to the pope, and which is quoted in the correspondence of a contemporary papal legate.[5]

The existence of these sources has, for the most part, long been well known, and scholars have used the texts fruitfully to explore the survival of both Latinity and Christianity in Islamic North Africa.[6] A sense of an ending nonetheless dominates scholarly study of these subjects. Even at the height of Roman imperial power, Latin had been only one feature amongst many in North Africa's complex and heterogeneous linguistic landscape. By Late Antiquity, Latin had become firmly established as a language of daily exchange in the territory of what is now Tunisia, eastern Algeria, and western Libya. In the latter two regions, however, Punic also continued to be spoken.[7] In the western Maghrib, along the pre-desert zone, and in the Saharan oases, a rich array of autochthonous languages in the Amazigh (or "Berber") branch of the Afroasiatic language family predominated.[8] Greek was spoken in at least some North African coastal ports, and the Islamic conquests established Arabic as a new language of power across the entire region.[9] In modern minds, the long-term persistence or disappearance of Latin in this context easily became entwined in academic (and other) discourses about the "Romanisation" of North Africa.[10] Scholarship of the post-Classical period has also been refracted through the eventual disappearance of a Maghribi Christian community at an uncertain date in the later Middle Ages. Considering the scant and episodic nature of the Latin evidence from the Maghrib itself in the Islamic period, medievalists have furthermore typically explored the local sources in the context of other occasional references to North African Christians, either in European Christian texts written in Latin or Greek or in Islamic texts written in Arabic. It is hard to resist connecting these few data points into a narrative and—given the foreordained conclusion—harder still to resist constructing that narrative as one of decline.

Yet removing the European and Islamic frames subtly changes the kinds of stories which we can tell about this time and place. It allows us to focus instead on the social function of Latin in the early Islamic Maghrib and on the concerns of the local communities who continued to use the language, de-emphasising the inevitability of decline and accentuating in its place the resilience of Christian

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[5] See below.

[6] Latinity: see esp. Février 1968; Lancel 1981. Christianity: Courtois 1945a; Courtois 1945b; Talbi 1990; Savage 1997; Handley 2004; Prévost 2007; Valérian 2011; Conant 2012, 362–70.

[7] See Conant 2012, 187–9, 261–3, and the sources cited there.

[8] Múrcia Sànchez 2011.

[9] Greek: Conant 2012, 244–6. Arabic: see below.

[10] On the "Romanisation" debate, see Oyen 2015; the discussion by Versluys et al. 2014; Mattingly 2011; and Wallace-Hadrill 2008; foundational to the debate in Africa specifically is Bénabou 1976.

Latinate culture in early medieval North Africa.[11] This paper therefore deliberately sets aside all sources except those written in Latin whose origins can, with a greater or lesser degree of plausibility, be assigned to North Africa itself between the end of the seventh and the middle of the thirteenth century. It will consider in turn evidence for the use of Latin as a language of Christian commemoration, worship, and education; the survival of Latin and then Romance as a spoken language in the medieval Maghrib; the role of Latin as at least a short-lived language of religious disputation between the region's new Muslim ruling class and their Christian and Jewish subjects; and the function of Latin as a language of trans-Mediterranean communications, especially with Rome, but also with the Frankish kingdoms and the Holy Land. The language probably enjoyed a more robust afterlife in Islamic North Africa than scholars have sometimes imagined. Paradoxically, however, the way Latin was deployed in mediating relationships overseas may ultimately have undermined a sustained, long-term interest in the region on the part of medieval European Christians.

I Latin Communities in Islamic North Africa

As an epigraphic language, Latin is still attested in North Africa as late as the mid-eleventh century. In Kairouan and in En Ngila (near Tripoli), fourteen funerary inscriptions dating to the century between 945 and 1046 commemorate the passing of members of local Christian communities in a formulaic but still touching Latin.[12] In fact, Latin was probably more widely used as an epigraphic language in the Islamic Maghrib than these inscriptions alone might suggest. Subsequent excavation at En Ngila revealed at least another three undated medieval Latin inscriptions.[13] Scholars have long recognised too that an additional 61 undated Latin inscriptions, preserved amongst two groups of over 120 tombs at Áin Zára, near Tripoli, probably also belong to the early Islamic period, before the mid-tenth century.[14] Though scholars have, to my knowledge, never made the connection, the same would seem to be true of a small number of Latin inscriptions found elsewhere in Tripolitania, at Sabratha and at Lepcis Magna. In their seminal review of the region's Christian antiquities, J. B. Ward-Perkins and R. G. Goodchild identified two groups of later tombs in Sabratha which are typologically similar to those at En Ngila and Áin Zára. One of these clusters is located within the extensive cemetery to the south of Church 3 and the other constitutes a small

[11] Cf. Février 1968, esp. 216.

[12] Saumagne and Poinssot 1928–29, 370–71; Seston 1936; Courtois 1945a, 113, n. 2, 114, n. 1; *Année Épigraphique* (1965), 47–8, no. 147 (Kairouan); Mahjoubi 1966; Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977.

[13] Gualandi 1973.

[14] The inscriptions are edited and analysed by Aurigemma 1932, who dated them to the late fifth or sixth century (246); for the Islamic-era date, see Vita 1967, 136–9.

and compact cemetery immediately to the northeast of the Theatre.[15] At Lepcis Magna, Ward-Perkins and Goodchild identified another two late groupings of tombs, the first in the Old Forum, in the portico to the northwest of Church 2, and the second covering the area behind the Severan Forum and associated with Church 3.[16] The latter cemetery in particular seems to have remained in use down to the eleventh century.[17] As at Áin Zára, Antonino di Vita has plausibly argued in favour of dating all of these late tombs from Sabratha and Lepcis Magna to the Islamic period.[18] This attribution has important implications for the history of Latinity in North Africa, because at least two of the late tombs from Sabratha and at least three from Lepcis Magna preserve still-legible Latin inscriptions, which can therefore be assigned to the early Islamic era.[19] In early medieval Tripolitania, then, it was not just the area around Tripoli that sustained the epigraphic habit: both of the region's two other major cities did so as well.

These inscriptions speak to the survival of a culture of commemoration in Latin amongst local Christian communities well into the medieval period. Perhaps tellingly, according to eighth- and ninth-century Greek bishop-lists, all three of the Tripolitanian cities in and around which Latin inscriptions are preserved—Tripoli (Oea), Sabratha, and Lepcis Magna—also continued to function as episcopal sees well into the early Islamic age.[20] Both here and at Kairouan, the lamented deceased do not appear to have been merchants, exiles, enslaved captives, or other migrants who had died on foreign shores; rather, they appear to have been fully-integrated members of their local societies. In many cases we have little more to go on than their names, and to be sure many of these were common across the Christian Mediterranean, including Peter—which enjoyed particular popularity in medieval North Africa—as well as Andreas, John, and Maria.[21] Other names have more of an eastern flavour, like George, Irene, Isidore, Sisinnius, Solomonina, and Fokio (the Greek "Phōkion").[22] Yet one man was called Firmus and another Speratus,

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[15] Ward-Perkins & Goodchild 1953, 18–9.

[16] Ward-Perkins & Goodchild 1953, 27, 31, 81–2.

[17] Ward-Perkins & Goodchild 1953, 81–2; and Bartoccini 1961, 109–10.

[18] Vita 1967, 134, 136.

[19] *IRT*, nos 205 and 209 (Sabratha); nos 838, 841, 846 (Lepcis Magna); 59–60, 196–8; with Ward-Perkins & Goodchild 1953, 18–9, 27, 31.

[20] Parthey (ed.) 1866, 83; Gelzer 1893, 31; Mesnage 1914–15, vol. 2, 181–2, 184–9; Romanelli 1925–26, 165.

[21] Peter: Aurigemma 1932, no. 14, 74–8; Mahjoubi 1966, 85, n. 2; Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, nos 6–7, 187–92. Andreas: Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, no. 1, 175–8. Maria: Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, no. 4, 182–5. John: Aurigemma 1932, 169–70. See also in general Aurigemma 1932, 174–5; Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, 164–6.

[22] Aurigemma 1932, no. 26, 97–101 (Isidore); no. 33, 118–20 (George); and in general 175; *IRT*, no. 209, 60 (Irene); Mahjoubi 1966, 85, n. 1 (Sisinnius). Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, no. 9, 193–6 (Fokio); no. 10, 196–7 (Solomonina); and in general 165–6.

names which reveal important continuities with Africa's late Roman past.[23] The names Boniface and Faustinus—both remarkably widespread in North Africa in Late Antiquity—are two of only six personal names clearly attested at Áin Zára.[24] The names Victorinus and Carinus, found at En Ngila, similarly fit comfortably within Africa's late ancient Christian onomasticon; while in the assessment of Karel Jongeling the name Ianacis, discovered at Sabratha, is probably Amazigh.[25] The society revealed in the Islamic-era Latin inscriptions is also one in which ties of kinship and affection undergirded those of shared faith and commemorative obligation. In Kairouan and En Ngila, at least, Christians were members of domestic communities of fathers and sons, husbands and wives, as well as clergymen, monks, and local notables.[26] This was presumably the case at Sabratha and Lepcis Magna too, where five of the six deceased commemorated with Latin inscriptions were young children of only three to ten years of age.[27] In these cities, and indeed across Tripolitania, there was a persistent, if formulaic, emphasis on the good memory (*bona memoria*) of the beloved departed.[28]

The epitaphs also reveal African Christian communities where Latin continued to be both the Scriptural and the liturgical language. The inscriptions from Sabratha and Lepcis are very terse, but elsewhere in the region, at Kairouan, En Ngila, and Áin Zára, epigraphic commemorations evoke the ancient prayer for the dead, derived from II Esdras 2:34-5, *Requiem aeternam det tibi Dominus et lux perpetua luceat tibi* ("May the Lord give you eternal rest and everlasting light shine upon you").[29] At Áin Zára, one epitaph preserves the liturgical prayer, recited during the funeral procession, *Suscipiat te Christus qui vocavit te; in sinum Abrahae angeli deducant te* ("May Christ, who has called you, receive you; may the angels lead you to the bosom of Abraham").[30] One inscription at En Ngila draws inspiration from the prophet Ezekiel, while others elaborate on a passage from Lamentations 1:12, "All you who pass along the way, look and see if there is any grief like my

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[23] Mahjoubi 1966, 85, n. 1 (Firmus); Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, no. 6, 187–9 (Speratus); and in general Lassère 1981, 280.

[24] Aurigemma 1932, no. 28, 104–6 (Boniface); no. 54, 156–62 (Faustinus). On the names, see Mandouze (ed.) 1982, 146–62, *s.nn*. Bonifatius 1–29, 385–9, *s.nn*. Faustinus 1–14.

[25] Victorinus: Gualandi 1973, 271; and, on the name, Mandouze (ed.) 1982, 1195–1202, *s.nn*. Victorinus 1–25. Carinus: Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, no. 4, 182–5; and on the name, Mandouze (ed.) 1982, 194, *s.n.* Carus, 208, *s.n.* Charus. Ianacis: *IRT*, no. 205, 59; and on the name Jongeling, 69, *s.n.* Ianacis.

[26] Mahjoubi 1966, 85, nn. 1–2; Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, nos 4, 6–7, 182–5, 187–92; Gualandi 1973, 265, 271.

[27] *IRT*, nos 205, 209, 838, 846, 59–60, 196, 198.

[28] En Ngila: Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, nos 1–4, 7, 9, 10, 175–85, 189–92, 193–7. Sabratha: *IRT*, nos 205, 209, 59–60. Lepcis Magna: *IRT*, nos 838, 841, 196–7. Áin Zára: Aurigemma 1932, 178–9; though note that here the beginnings of inscriptions often do not survive.

[29] Aurigemma 1932, 188–90; Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, nos 2, 4–9, 178–9, 182–96, with discussion at 174; Mahjoubi 1966, 85, n. 1; Février 1968, 210.

[30] Aurigemma 1932, no. 39, 128–33, with discussion at 187–8.

grief."[31] A number of inscriptions invoke the Psalms.[32] Other tombs preserve the phrase *Deus Sabaoth*, an element of the Sanctus (*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth*, "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Hosts"), which itself had been incorporated into the African liturgy already in the days of Saint Cyprian (d. 258).[33] At least thirteen of the inscriptions from Áin Zára contain fragments of the liturgical formula *Sanctus Deus, sanctus fortis, sanctus immortalis, miserere mei* ("Holy God, holy strong one, holy immortal one, have mercy upon me"), pronounced at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.[34] Two epitaphs at En Ngila explicitly cite the Apostle James's exhortation to "Pray for each other, that you may be healed" (James 5:16).[35] Others, both there and at Kairouan, speak of a more generalised community of the saints and of the elect.[36] The emphasis throughout is on a Christian faith of Chalcedonian confession, the Resurrection, the Day of Judgement, and the eternal rest of the blessed.

The survival of Latin as a language of Christian worship in the medieval Maghrib is further attested by a remarkable collection of liturgical manuscripts now housed at Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, including a Psalter, an epistolary, and an antiphonary. These manuscripts have long been associated with a North African Christian community, based primarily on their use of the African text of the Old Latin Bible and on a liturgical calendar which accompanies the Psalter and celebrates a distinctively African constellation of saints. The manuscripts appear to have been produced in a single scriptorium, and their script shows signs of contemporary Arabic, Greek, and Syriac influence.[37] Though these characteristics led E. A. Lowe to assign the documents to an eastern atelier, a recent re-examination of the texts by Jean Vezin suggests that the Latin liturgical manuscripts from Sinai might have been copied in the Maghrib itself.[38] The date of the documents is not entirely clear, though the Psalter was certainly in Saint Catherine's by 1230/31.[39] Lowe thought that the palaeography of all three manuscripts suggested a considerably earlier date, but the paper on which the antiphonary was written seems to have been made in Christian Spain only in the twelfth century.[40] In any case, the community which

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[31] Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, no. 9, 193–6 (cf. Ezekiel 37:4); nos 1–4, 6, 11, 175–85, 187–9, 197–8 (Lamentations 1:12); Février 1968, 211.

[32] Aurigemma 1932, nos 1, 52, 49–58, 153–5 (cf. Psalm 19[20]:2), with discussion at 186–7; Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, nos 5, 7, 185–7, 189–92 (cf. Psalm 7:2).

[33] Aurigemma 1932, nos 9, 19, 66–7, 83–4, with discussion at 183–5; Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, nos 4, 9, 182–5, 193–6.

[34] Aurigemma 1932, 183–5.

[35] Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, nos 1, 6, 175–8, 187–9.

[36] Mahjoubi 1966, 86; Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, nos 6–8, 187–93.

[37] Lowe 1955; Gribomont 1957; Lowe 1964; Fischer 1964; Lowe 1965; Gryson 2010.

[38] Vezin 2002–03, 316–8; Gryson 2010, 14–6; Février 1968, 213–6.

[39] Lowe 1955, 177–8.

[40] Lowe 1955, 179, 194–5; Lowe 1965, 13–4; Vezin 2002–03, 318; Gryson 2010, 16.

used these texts does not appear to have been monastic.[41] Rather, it seems to have been similar to those which produced the inscriptions from Kairouan and Tripolitania: a community of medieval North African Christians whose forms of worship preserved ancient regional traditions but also continued to evolve in dialogue with liturgical developments elsewhere in the larger Latin Christian *ecumene*.[42]

Taken together, the inscriptions and liturgical manuscripts provide two other brief glimpses into the function of Latinity in medieval North African society. First, both the calendar which accompanies the Sinai Psalter and the dating formulas employed epigraphically in the region indicate that, within their own faith community, medieval Christians continued to structure their year by the months of the Roman calendar and its Christian holy days.[43] They also persisted in reckoning time according to the indiction (the late Roman fifteen-year tax cycle), supplemented on occasion with the year either from God's creation of the world or from Christ's incarnation.[44] In early eleventh-century Kairouan, the heirs of an anonymous local Christian further clarified that the year of his death, *anno Domini* 1007, was also the year 397 "of the infidels" (*est annorum infidelium. ccc.xc.vii*).[45] Secondly, the production of manuscripts and inscriptions implies at least a degree of education. So too does a list of eight liberal arts included in the Sinai Psalter manuscript (grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, arithmetic, astrology, music, and geometry, plus philosophy).[46] The same may also be true of reminiscences of Virgil (*Aeneid* 6.429 = 11.28, and *Aeneid* 11.215–6) and perhaps of Ovid (*Tristia* 1.6.3) incorporated, whether consciously or not, into a handful of inscriptions from Áin Zára.[47]

II Latin as a Spoken Language in Early Medieval North Africa

For a time at least, the persistence of Latin as a language of Christian education, worship, and commemoration in the Islamic Maghrib will have been grounded in the survival of an African form of Latin and then Romance as a spoken language. To be sure, Arabic quickly supplanted Latin as the regional language of law and power, and by the tenth century *fatwas* (the learned opinions of Islamic legal scholars) indicate that Arabic was the common language amongst North African Muslims, Christians, and Jews.[48] Yet the region's cultural and religious reorientation

[41] Gribomont 1957, 126; Fischer 1964, 293.
[42] Fischer 1964; Vezin 2002–03, 314–6; Gros 2002.
[43] *Kalendarium*, ed. Thibaut 2010, 142–4. For the inscriptions, see Aurigemma 1932, 280–81; Mahjoubi 1966, 85, nn. 1–2, 86; and Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, 175–98, *passim*, esp. no. 1, 175–8 (Christmas).
[44] Aurigemma 1932, 278–9 (indiction only); Mahjoubi 1966, 85–90 (indiction and *anno domini*); and Bartoccini and Mazzoleni 1977, nos 1–9, 175–96 (indiction and *anno mundi*).
[45] Mahjoubi 1966, 86.
[46] Thibaut 2010, 144.
[47] Aurigemma 1932, 241–4.
[48] Talbi 1990, 316–7, 322–3.

coincided only roughly with its military conquest by the armies of the caliphate in the seventh and early eighth centuries, and the displacement of a Latinate vernacular by Arabic as a language of everyday communication was probably a long, slow process. Though much work remains to be done in terms of the archaeological exploration of the Byzantine-Islamic transition in North Africa, early returns suggest that, down to the ninth century, the building of mosques may have been largely concentrated in the region's fortresses and provincial capitals, which were presumably also the places where Arab settlement initially concentrated and thus where the Arabic language was most widely spoken.[49]

In the other towns and in the countryside the situation was more complex. As mentioned above, outside of what is now Tunisia and the Medjerda River valley, autochthonous languages predominated across most of the Maghrib, though Punic might still have been spoken in some parts of rural eastern Algeria and western Libya.[50] Alongside Latin, Greek had also long been spoken in the port cities which dotted Africa's Mediterranean littoral. In fact, the region's integration into the Byzantine Empire in the sixth and seventh centuries probably meant that, at the time of the Islamic conquest, Greek rather than Latin was the preferred language of the imperial administrators sent to govern the province.[51] The Greek-language lists of African episcopal sees mentioned above attest to continued Byzantine interest in the region into the early Islamic period.[52] Indeed, much of what we know about the condition of the North African Christian community in the ninth century comes from a handful of Greek-language saints' lives and martyrdom accounts written about Sicilians and southern Italians captured in cross-Mediterranean raiding and sold into slavery in Aghlabid Ifrīqiya.[53] In Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, distinctively African saints' cults also spread across the sea into the Greek-speaking Christian communities of Sicily and southern Italy.[54] Perhaps more to the point, the continued significance of Greek to local African Christians is hinted at by a medieval seal which has an image of Saint Nicholas on one side and the Greek inscription *Iō(annēs) episkopos tēs Afrikēs* ("John, bishop of Africa") on the other.[55] Thus Greek too may have continued to be spoken in the region's coastal cities into the medieval period. In the early eighth century, the same was probably true of Coptic. At least, shortly after the fall of Carthage, Africa's new Muslim rulers were said to have transferred Coptic Christians from Egypt to Tunis to develop the region's naval power.[56]

Elsewhere, however, Latin- or Romance-speaking communities probably

[49] Fenwick 2020, 47–50, 133–40; Fenwick 2013, 27.
[50] See above.
[51] See above.
[52] See above.
[53] Conant 2015.
[54] Conant 2010, 10–12.
[55] Monceaux 1903, 74–5, no. 14.
[56] Amari 1933, vol. 1, 291–2; McCormick 2001, 858, no. 57.

continued to predominate long after the Islamic conquest. Tadeusz Lewicki and Serge Lancel have gathered compelling evidence for the influence of Romance on the Arabic vocabulary, place names, and personal names of the Maghrib.[57] Jean-Marie Lassère has similarly sought to show the influence of Latin on the region's Amazigh languages.[58] These examples are drawn from both urban and rural contexts, but how long—and where—Romance continued to be spoken in North Africa remains something of an open question. The language certainly appears to have been well-established in the Jabal Nafūsa region of western Libya, some 200 kilometres southwest of Tripoli.[59] In the area around Kairouan, a form of Romance was apparently spoken until at least the early ninth century.[60] According to the twelfth-century Muslim traveller al-Idrīsī, an African dialect of Romance was still spoken three hundred years later in the oasis town of Gafsa in the Chott el Djerid region of what is now west central Tunisia—though this fact also seems to have struck the geographer as exceptional and worthy of note.[61] Indeed, by the eleventh century even Christian preachers may more typically have expounded to their congregations upon the Scriptures and the principles of the faith in Arabic.[62]

III Contesting Christian Latinity

To judge from North Africa's first Islamic coinage, in the early Middle Ages Latin was probably also a language of theological disputation amongst Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Following their first capture of Carthage in 695, the region's Islamic authorities began to mint a new coinage in gold and copper which initially bore legends in Latin, and which divides broadly into two series. One of these, seemingly struck at Carthage, employed figurative imagery, adapting earlier seventh-century Byzantine imperial portraiture on the obverse, and modifying the Christian cross-on-steps motif into a column on steps on the reverse. The other series was purely textual (aniconic) and seems to have been struck at a mobile mint which travelled with the *amīr* of Ifrīqiya, including to Iberia in 711 for the conquest of the Visigothic kingdom. In 715/16 gold coins began to be issued in North Africa with dual-language Arabic-Latin legends, which in turn were replaced within a few years by a totally Arabic and Islamic "reform" coinage in gold, silver, and copper.[63]

These coins attest to the gradual character of the transition from Byzantine to

[57] Lewicki 1951–52; Lancel 1981, 290–96.
[58] Lassère 1981, 281–3.
[59] Lewicki 1951–52, esp. 422–3.
[60] See below.
[61] Al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq*, 104–5 (text), 122 (translation).
[62] Cf. Valérian 2011, 147, n. 87; on the evidence of Idris 1954, 271.
[63] On early Islamic coinage in the Umayyad Maghrib, see Walker 1956, xxxix–li, xcviii–ci, 54–73, 76, 78–9, 99–100, 114–8, 231; Jonson 2015; Jonson, Blet-Lemarquand & Morrisson 2014; Jonson 2012; Bates 1995; Bates 1986; Balaguer 1979; Leuthold Jr. 1967.

Islamic rule in the region. Although Muslims had effectively controlled much of the province for decades, it is only after their second (and in the event final) capture of Carthage in 697/98 that explicit expressions of Arab power seem to have found their way onto the coinage. At least, in 699/700 the Muslim governor of North Africa, Hasān ibn al-Nuᶜmān, issued a series of (figurative) copper coins with purely Arabic legends dated by the Hijri calendar.[64] By this point, "transitional" issues had been phased out in Egypt and Syria in favour of a reform-style coinage, but in Africa, Latin text was quickly restored to the local copper *fulūs*. Later in 699/700, Ibn al-Nuᶜmān was replaced as governor of Ifrīqiya by Mūsā ibn Nusayr. Over the next several years Mūsā too oversaw at least two issues of copper coins struck in his name and on his authority as *amīr*, but these issues had legends in Latin, not Arabic.[65] Similarly, in 704, when his gold coins began to bear dates, they were dated according to the indiction.[66] Only in 712/13 was the Hijri year—designated simply as *annus* ("the year")—added alongside the indiction date.[67] Then, in the following year, the indiction was dropped entirely, and for the next four years even the Latin legends were dated according to the Hijri calendar alone.[68]

For roughly a generation, the legends on the region's gold and copper coinage alike also affirmed a remarkable collection of gnomic statements about the Islamic faith in the Latin language. Though the texts are heavily abbreviated, they seem to ascribe majestic qualities to the divinity: God is great (*magnus*), eternal (*eternus*), all-knowing (*omnia noscens*), merciful (*misericors*), life-giving (*vivificus*), and the creator of everything (*omnium creator*).[69] Numerous legends insist emphatically on God's oneness. Initially they did so in terms which would probably have conciliated local Christian and Jewish elites.[70] Thus, for example, some of the earliest coins from Carthage assure the reader that "Your god is God and there is no other" (*DeUS TUuS DeUS ET ALiUS NON Est*).[71] Early coins from Kairouan simply assert that "God is one" (*UNuS DeuS*).[72] With time, however, "neutral" monotheistic slogans like these came to be replaced with ones which might have provided fuel for Christian-Muslim disputation: for example, "There is no god but He alone, who has no associate" (*NON EST DeuS NISI IPSE SOLus, CuI Socius Non est*).[73]

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[64] Walker 1956, 61–2 and pl. X, nos 164–ANS.12; and for the identification Jonson 2015, 227–30.
[65] Walker 1956, 59–61 and pl. X, nos 159–Cod.1; Jonson 2015, 230–33.
[66] Walker 1956, 70–73 and pl. XI, nos C.11–C.13; Balaguer 1979, no. 2, 230.
[67] Walker 1956, 73 and pl. XI, nos B.12–C.14; though note that AH 94 (712/13 CE), was not a twelfth indiction, as the coins themselves suggest.
[68] Walker 1956, 76, 78–9 and pls. XI–XII, nos P.46–B.15 and 184–P.50.
[69] Walker 1956, c.
[70] Bates 1995, 13.
[71] Walker 1956, 55, no. J.5a; cf. e.g. Walker 1956, 55 and pl. X, no. 144; and see also Bates 1995, 12–4; Jonson 2015, 224.
[72] Walker 1956, 66–7, 69–70 and pl. XI, nos 170, HSA.3, 172, HSA.4–HSA.5, B.8–P.36, and B.10; cf. 59 and pl. X, nos 157–G.3.
[73] Walker 1956, 54–6 and pl. X, nos 143–HSA.1 and 145; Leuthold Jr. 1967, 97–9. Cf. Walker

Over the early eighth century Latin aphorisms like these also began to share the field with Arabic legends. An issue of gold *dīnārs* proclaims the *shahāda* in Arabic, "There is no god but God" (*la ilah ilā Allāh*) on the obverse, and "Muhammad is the Prophet of God" (*Muhammad rasūl Allāh*) on the reverse. The accompanying Latin legends similarly assert the sole divinity of the one true God on the reverse, and date the coins to the (Hijri) years 97 and 98 (715/16 and 716/17 CE) on the obverse.[74] On two other undated, dual-language issues, the Latin legends ask, *domine deus quis tibi similis*? ("O lord God, who is similar to you?"), while the Arabic invokes the name of God **(***bismillāh***)** and testifies either that Muhammad is the Prophet and servant of God **(***Muhammad rasūl Allāh wa ʿabdhu***)** or, rather more prosaically, that the individual coin had been struck in Tangier (*fals daraba bi-Tanja*).[75]

The extensive and often enigmatic system of abbreviations as well as recurrent engraving errors and the use of flans which were slightly too small for their dies all render the Latin coin legends remarkably challenging both to read and to interpret.[76] Indeed, Michael L. Bates has even contended that, taken together, "[t]hese difficulties eliminate the argument that Latin was used as a means of communication with the provincial population."[77] To be sure, if North Africa's new ruling class wanted to expose their subjects for the first time to the precepts of Islam, these puzzling coin legends would have been a singularly poor vehicle to do so. It is also true that, although the transitional coinage does not imitate those Byzantine issues being struck in Africa at the time of the conquest itself, the coins' iconography and epigraphy were carefully fashioned both to assure their users of continuities of power as well as to signal a new religious and political order. The use of Latin script played an important role in this regard. But the occasional inclusion of strictly secular statements of power like those alluded to above—legends such as *MVSE Filius NVSaIR AMIR Africae* ("Mūsā ibn Nusayr, *amīr* of Africa") or *SoLiDus FeRiTus IN AFrIca* ("a gold coin struck in Africa")—indicate that the converse decision to express religious sentiments on the coinage was a conscious and considered one.[78] These religious testimonials in Latin mostly translate ideas simultaneously being expressed in Arabic on the coins of the Umayyad East, but

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1956, 64–6, 72–3, 76 and pl. XI, nos 168–HSA.2, P.42–C.14 and P.46–B.15; and, on the legend in general, see also xcix. For a new, but semantically similar, reading of this legend, see Jonson 2015, 224; on the transition from "neutral" to more deliberately Islamic statements of faith, see Bates 1995, 13.

[74] See e.g. Walker 1956, 78–9 and pl. XII, nos 184–P.50.

[75] Walker 1956, 62–4, nos P.30 (Muhammad) and P.28–P.29 (Tangier), with the discussion at xliii–xlv; and now Jonson 2015, 235–8. For the Latin phrase, cf. Exodus 15:11 and Psalms 34:10, 70:19, 88:9.

[76] Walker 1956, xcix; Bates 1995, 12–3.

[77] Bates 1995, 13.

[78] See above; and Walker 1956, 65, 67–8, 70–73, 76, 78–9 and pl. XI, nos 169–Cod. 4, 173–†, C.11–C.14, P.46–B.15, and 184–P.50.

they do so with a certain independence of expression which would shortly also manifest itself on the post-reform Islamic coinage of the Maghrib.[79]

Moreover, it is at least conceivable that the engravers' heavy reliance on abbreviation in the coin legends could indicate that the expressions they reiterated were particularly well-known ones. The phrase *deus unus* ("God is one") could be a direct translation of an axiom repeated numerous times throughout the Qur'ān, *ilah wāhid* (e.g. 18:110, 22:34, 41:6); *omnia noscens* ("all-knowing") may similarly translate *bi-kull shay'ᶜalīm* (e.g. 2:282 and 24:64).[80] Even so, the attributes which the coins initially ascribed to God would have been equally acceptable to Christians or Jews as to Muslims. For the most part, too, the Latin coin legends do not so much translate the Qur'ān as evoke or recollect it. If scholars have correctly read the coins' abbreviations, then by far the most controversial of these legends is likely to have been the assertion that God has no associates. This contention opens a passageway into the Sura al-Mā'ida: "Whoever associates others with God, God will forbid him Paradise, and his refuge will be the fire […] They are surely disbelievers who say that God is a third of three" (5:72–3). Nonetheless, in keeping with the broader trends in early Islamic epigraphy recently and deftly explored by Frédéric Imbert, even dual-language Arabic-Latin coins initially make no reference to the Prophet Muhammad.[81] Indeed, the Islamic profession of faith only appeared on the North African coinage in 709, fully a decade after the final conquest of Carthage, when Arab power in the region was increasingly well established.[82]

It is also worth pausing to consider who, precisely, the intended audiences of these enigmatic Latin or mixed Arabic-Latin inscriptions were. In the context of the complex and charged debates about Christ's nature, will, and energy which had vexed North African society in Late Antiquity, local Christian theologians are unlikely to have acknowledged the accuracy of the larger Qur'ānic characterisation of the Trinity of which Sura al-Mā'ida 72–3 is a part.[83] However, North Africa's religious intellectuals were at best probably only a small fraction of the coin legends' target audience. As Eduardo Manzano Moreno has recently underscored for al-Andalus, the primary function of striking early medieval coinage was less to stimulate "the economy" than it was to create and reinforce social bonds. Amongst the hyper-elite, gold served this end; for troops under arms, it was copper, which helped defray the soldiers' daily expenses.[84] Securing the compliance of the North African elite was an unambiguous priority for the first *amīrs* as they set about consolidating Arab power in the region, a fact that doubtless explains the transitional gold coin legends in Latin and mixed Arabic-Latin. The existence of similar issues

[79] Walker 1956, lvii–lviii and xcix.
[80] Cf. Walker 1956, c.
[81] Leuthold Jr. 1967, 96. Broader trends: Imbert 2019; Imbert 2013; Imbert 2011.
[82] On this period, see Kaegi 2010, 247–65; and now Fenwick 2020, 31–51.
[83] On these debates in Africa, see Conant 2012, 353–9; Adamiak 2016, 95–114, 157–67.
[84] Manzano Moreno 2018.

in copper, however, raises the important possibility that, from a very early date, the *amīrs*' military forces in the Maghrib may have included Latin-speaking Christians who had been recruited locally. Such a situation would help make sense of the trace linguistic elements of African Romance detected by Roger Wright north of the Strait of Gibraltar, in the general dialect mix which eventually developed into Old Spanish.[85] The suggestion also gains plausibility from the fact that the Latin *acta* of Saint Maximilian, a third-century Christian soldier from Tébessa executed for refusing to serve in a "pagan" army, continued to be read and revised in the Islamic world at least into the eighth century.[86] The revision provides eloquent if subtle testimony to the continued relevance of the text to local Christians who were themselves perhaps wrestling with a similar issue under the early *amīrs*. Thus, it does not seem unreasonable to see behind the transitional coin legends reflections of an ongoing debate within late seventh- and eighth-century African society, conducted at least in part in Latin, about the nature of God's oneness and its respective interpretation in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. In any case, with time African Christians certainly did convert to Islam, a fact which was probably at the root of some of the anxieties about the state of African Christianity displayed in the medieval European sources.

IV Africa and Latin Christendom

At the end of the tenth century, in the context of his own correspondence with the West Frankish king Hugh Capet (987–96), the abbot and papal legate Leo of Saint Boniface in Rome claimed to quote a letter sent some years earlier by the clergy of Carthage to Pope Benedict VII (975–84), asking him to ordain a priest called James as bishop of their city. The letter was written, or at least quoted, in Latin and, if genuine, it provides our sole known witness to the way in which medieval African Christians themselves represented their community and the challenges facing it to their correspondents across the sea. Although in their vision Carthage was protected by God (*a Deo protecta*), they also wrote that the city was wretched (*misera*) and desolate (*desolata*). Indeed, it was "so far reduced to nothingness that, where once there was a metropolis, now priests are hardly to be found" (*ita ad nichilum redacta est, ut ubi olym metropolis fuit, vix ibi modo sacerdotes habeantur*). The city's clergy begged Benedict to come to their aid by confirming their election of James and ordaining him to preach.[87] This letter, then, has at least a twofold significance. First, it helps to suggest that Latin continued to serve as a language of trans-Mediterranean communications in medieval North Africa, and second, in so doing, it utilises a highly charged and emotive rhetoric of crisis.

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[85] Wright 2012.

[86] Woods 2003; Barnes 2010, 379–86; Conant 2019, 47.

[87] Leo abbas et legatus, *Epistola ad Hugonem et Rotbertum reges*, 689.

The letter of the Carthaginian clergy to Benedict VII is not alone in suggesting the continued importance of Latin to the interchanges between Europe and North Africa in the Middle Ages. As late as the eleventh century, popes like Leo IX (1049–54) and Gregory VII (1073–85) continued to correspond in Latin with the bishops of Africa's dwindling Christian flocks.[88] The significance of this point is mitigated to some extent by the fact that Latin was the language of the papal curia in general, including Gregory VII's communications with the Hammādi *amīr* al-Nāsir ibn ᶜAlnās (1062–88).[89] Similarly, in writing to the West Frankish king, Abbot Leo is unlikely to have quoted the missive of the Carthaginian clergy in any language other than Latin. However, the survival of Latin in North Africa as a language of Christian worship, commemoration, and education in the medieval period strongly suggests that the African ecclesiastical hierarchy would indeed have used the same language in their own correspondence with Rome. Moreover, in the mid-ninth century a Palestinian monk named George was sent to Africa from the monastery of Saint Sabbas outside Jerusalem, charged with a financial mission whose precise details are unfortunately obscure to us; given that he later moved on to Spain and also considered travelling to the Frankish kingdoms, though, it seems likely that George was selected for this assignment at least in part because of his facility with Latin, as well as with Greek and Arabic.[90] A Latinate vernacular also seems to have facilitated the only known diplomatic exchange between the Carolingian empire and the Aghlabid amirate of North Africa, an encounter which played a part in the larger diplomatic relationship between Charlemagne (768–814) and the ᶜAbbāsid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (786–809). According to the *Royal Frankish Annals*, in 801 the caliph's envoy brought an elephant named Abū al-ᶜAbbās as a gift to Charlemagne. The caliphal embassy was accompanied by an agent of the North African *amīr* Ibrāhīm I ibn al-Aghlab, whose assistance would have been needed at least in part to help facilitate the transfer of Abū al-ᶜAbbās across the Mediterranean. In that same year Charlemagne's notary Ercanbald arranged for a fleet to sail to North Africa to collect the elephant and bring him to the Frankish empire.[91] That these exchanges were mediated by Africans speaking a Romance dialect is suggested by the name which the Frankish sources give to the Aghlabid capital, ᶜAbbāsīyah, a new city which had just been built about five kilometres to the southeast of Kairouan and which also came to be known as al-Qasr al-abyad ("the white fort") or even al-Qasr al-qadīm ("the old fort"). In the *Royal Frankish Annals* the city is called "Fossatum".[92] Sceptical as to the veracity of the whole story, Christian Courtois once rightly observed that this would be an odd and somewhat

[88] Leo IX, *Epp*. 83–4, ed. *PL* 143, cols 727–31; Gregory VII, *Epp*. 1.23, 3.19–20; and on these letters, see esp. Courtois 1945a.
[89] Gregory VII, *Ep*. 3.21; Valérian 2011, 147.
[90] Eulogius of Toledo, *Memoriale sanctorum*, 2.10.23–35, ed. *PL* 115, cols 786–92.
[91] *Annales regni Francorum*, *s.a.* 801.
[92] *Annales regni Francorum*, *s.a.* 801.

recherché way for a ninth-century Frank to translate the Arabic word *qasr* ("fortress"); but, as Michael McCormick has argued, it is more likely that Fossatum was the name that local Latin-speaking Africans gave to the site, in reference to the fortifications (*fossatum*) with which the city was surrounded.[93] The fact that the toponym is also attested elsewhere in the Maghrib lends added plausibility to McCormick's case: as Lewicki has demonstrated, the name of Fusātū, a site in the Jabal Nafūsa region of western Libya, probably derives from the Romance **fossato*, which in turn is derived from Latin *fossatum*.[94] For at least a fleeting moment in the early ninth century, then, a spoken dialect of Latin would seem genuinely to have been a language of encounter and exchange between Franks and North Africans. In its written form, it seems entirely plausible that Latin should have continued to serve this function not only from a papal perspective but also from a North African one into the tenth and even eleventh centuries.

In any case, Latin was certainly the language in which medieval popes intervened in African ecclesiastical affairs. Occasionally their interest was with matters of religious practice, as when Pope Leo IV (847–55) admonished the Tripolitanian bishop Galerius about the importance of penance and the indissolubility of Christian marriage, even in the face of sexual abstinence.[95] As far as the surviving record goes, though, papal involvement in Africa seems more typically to have taken one of two forms. The first was the papal ordination of African bishops. By Leo IX's day, popes appear routinely to have invested the bishops-elect of Carthage with the *pallium*.[96] In this regard, Benedict's earlier ordination of James may not have been anything particularly unusual. Early in his pontificate, Gregory VII also consecrated a bishop for Buzea—perhaps ᶜAnnāba (Classical Hippo Regius), as suggested by a medieval gloss, or perhaps Béjaïa (Classical Saldae), as suggested by Courtois—with the consent of the local Muslim *amīr* and on the grounds that the African episcopacy no longer sustained the three sitting bishops required by canon law to ordain a new colleague.[97] One wonders too whether consecration lies behind the otherwise enigmatic statement in a ninth-century codex from Regensburg that Pope Hadrian I (772–95) secured bishops for "captive" Africa.[98] The popes also arbitrated internal disputes within the African ecclesiastical hierarchy. In an incident about which we are particularly well-informed, Leo IX was called upon to settle a conflict over precedence between the bishops of Carthage and Mahdia (ancient Gummi).[99] Leo ruled in favour of the former, emphasising that the bishop of Mahdia did not have the authority to ordain or depose bishops or

[93] Courtois 1945b, 80–82; McCormick 2001, 890, n. 83; Amari 1933, vol. 1, 270–71.
[94] Lewicki 1951–52, 458.
[95] Leo IV, *Ep*. 26; Jaffé et al. 1885, vol. 1, 336, no. 2640.
[96] Leo IX, *Ep*. 84, col. 730.
[97] Gregory VII, Epp. 3.19–21; on *Buzea* as Béjaïa (formerly Bougie), see Courtois 1945a, 207–10.
[98] *Epitaphium Adriani I Papae*, ll. 47–8.
[99] On the identification, see Courtois 1945a, 195–203.

to call provincial councils without the consent of the archbishop in Carthage.[100] Indeed, despite the venerable African tradition of recognising precedence according to bishops' order of ordination rather than according to the respective ranks of their cities, Leo insisted that Carthage was still the primary episcopal see in Africa, and as such its bishop presided over the entire African church, second only to the pope.[101] Two decades later, Gregory VII alluded to news which he had received from Bishop Cyriacus of Carthage of "false children" (*pseudofilii*) who were upsetting the church in Africa.[102] Nearly two hundred years before that, at the end of the ninth century, African legates similarly travelled to Rome to seek a response from Pope Formosus (891–6) about a schism which was then troubling the region's bishops.[103] Strikingly, in the European accounts it was African Christians who appealed to Rome in all of these cases.

Also arresting is the rhetoric of desolation which the tenth-century Carthaginian clergy employ in their letter to Benedict VII. Significantly, this rhetoric is counterpointed in a European narrative of African weakness and insufficiency, reflected for example in the sources for the popes' interactions with the Maghribi bishops. In theological terms, reports of schism and heresy will have resonated with long-standing papal anxieties about African orthodoxy, which had themselves informed repeated admonitions against accepting Africans into ecclesiastical orders from the late fifth century down to the mid-eleventh.[104] Papal concerns with the dwindling number of bishops in Africa also do not seem to have been new to the pontificate of Gregory VII. Leo IX had similarly worried that, whereas 205 bishops had once attended a council in Carthage, by the mid-eleventh century scarcely five could be found in all of Africa.[105] A similar concern may even have motivated Hadrian I. Both Leo IX and Gregory VII also seem to have been worried about the harassment of African Christians. Leo felt that the glory of the African church was being oppressed (*conculcatum*) by the Muslim majority, while Gregory exhorted Bishop Cyriacus of Carthage to hold out against the pressures of persecution (*persecutio*), pressures about which the pope had apparently heard from Cyriacus himself.[106]

A similar rhetoric of privation was deployed in ninth-century Frankish sources, which within a generation began to stake grander claims about Charlemagne's involvement with North Africa than even the transfer of the elephant Abū al-ᶜAbbās entailed. Less than fifteen years after Charlemagne's death, his courtier and biographer Einhard claimed that the first Frankish emperor had entered into diplomatic

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[100] Leo IX, *Epp*. 83–4, cols 728–31.
[101] Leo IX, *Ep*. 84, cols 729–31.
[102] Gregory VII, *Ep*. 1.23.
[103] Flodoard of Rheims, *Historia Remensis ecclesiae*, 4.2.
[104] See Gelasius I, *Constituta quae episcopi in sua ordinatione accipiunt*, ed. PL 59, col. 137D; reiterated in Gregory I, Ep. 2.31; Gregory II to Boniface (= Boniface, Ep. 18); *Liber diurnus Romanorum pontificum*, 6; Nicholas II, *Ep*. 25, ed. *PL* 143, col. 1347A.
[105] Leo IX, *Epp*. 83, 84, cols 728A, 729B.
[106] Leo IX, *Ep*. 84, col. 729B; Gregory VII, *Ep*. 1.23.

relations with the Aghlabid *amīr* Ibrāhīm I so as to care for the poverty-stricken Christians of Carthage.[107] Writing probably in the late 820s or 830s, the deacon Florus of Lyon imagined exchange flowing the other way, and claimed—both in a martyrology and in two short poems—that Charlemagne's agents had removed the body of Cyprian and the relics of other local saints from the Aghlabid amirate to the Frankish empire on account of their neglect in Africa.[108] Both claims were taken up and repeated by subsequent generations. In the second half of the ninth century, Ado of Vienne reworked and elaborated upon Florus' account in his chronicle and in his own martyrology, while some decades later an anonymous Saxon poet reiterated Einhard's assertions about Charlemagne's munificence to Africa's Christians, and Notker the Stammerer, the raconteur monk of Saint Gall, believed that the emperor had specifically sent wealth, grain, wine, and oil to the region.[109] Whatever the truth-value of these claims, they attest to a deeply-rooted narrative of African poverty in the ninth-century Frankish empire.

To be sure, the position of the Catholic church in Africa doubtless had been weakened by its loss of state support in the wake of the Islamic conquest. Though several churches in the region show archaeological signs of use into the Islamic period—at sites like Sbeitla and Sabratha even into the tenth and eleventh centuries—the material evidence has not yet substantiated the continued functioning of any of the Christian basilicas at Carthage. Indeed, over the early Middle Ages the metropolis even seems to have de-nucleated into a cluster of agrarian villages.[110] Whatever the state of the church in Islamic North Africa, though, it was probably substantially poorer than it had been under the late Roman and Byzantine regimes. Conversion to Islam seems to have taken place at about the same rate in the Maghrib as elsewhere in the former Byzantine and Sassanian worlds, with the result that the Christian community there probably became a minority in the ninth century and a small minority at some point in the late tenth.[111] Over the course of the ninth century, foundations like the Great Mosques of Kairouan, Sousse, and Tunis also took their definitive forms, making the permanence and power of the region's new religion all the more manifest.[112] As I have suggested above, Arabic slowly effaced Latin as the majority language of everyday communication, perhaps

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[107] Einhard, *Vita Karoli magni*, 27.

[108] Florus of Lyon, *Carmina*, 13 (Rector magnificus), 14 (Hac locuples); Florus of Lyon, *Martyrologium*, 348; on Florus's credibility, see the contrasting opinions of Courtois 1945b; McCormick 2001, 890–91, nos 254–7.

[109] Ado of Vienne, *Chronicon*, s.a. 807; Ado of Vienne, *Martyrologium*, 507–14; Poeta Saxo, *Annales de gestis Caroli magni imperatoris*, 5.497; Notker Balbulus, *Gesta Karoli magni imperatoris*, 2.9; see also 2.14; on the unreliability of Ado's testimony, however, see Courtois 1945b, 58–66.

[110] Sbeitla: Duval 1964, 99, 103. Sabratha: Vita 1967, 134. Carthage: Stevens 2016; Fenwick 2020, 62–5. See also Picard 1957, 130, 147, on Mactar; and in general Fenwick 2020, 140–45.

[111] Bulliet 1979, esp. 76–9, 92–103.

[112] Creswell 1932, vol. 2, 208–26, 248–53, 308–26; Zbiss 1957; and in general Fenwick 2020, 53–80.

along a similar trajectory. Amid these religious and cultural transitions, tensions and hostility unquestionably arose between the region's shrinking Christian population and its new Muslim majority.

Even so, reports of inter-communal violence are rare.[113] Indeed, amongst at least 83 Islamic-era Latin inscriptions from five different cemeteries across North Africa, only one mentions an individual who died a violent death: a certain R… from Áin Zára who was "killed with an untamed sword" (*[pe]r gladium indomitem okisu[m])* one December at the age of 25.[114] Just who wielded that sword is entirely unclear, but this R… does not seem to have been regarded by his local community as a martyr. At least, he is not designated as such in what remains of his epitaph, and his tomb did not become the focus of *ad corpus* burial.[115] It would not be surprising if the Christians of Islamic North Africa felt themselves to be a community in crisis or if they appealed to their co-religionists across the Mediterranean in terms which invoked their own disempowerment and need. Yet the inscriptions from Kairouan, Sabratha, En Ngila, Áin Zára, and Lepcis Magna stand as a poignant reminder that this population confronted concerns other than the advancing Islamisation of the Maghrib: they mourned the loss of loved ones, they celebrated the joys of marriage and childbirth, they sought the protection of their God and his saints, and some of them, at least, also pursued an education in the Latin language and its Scriptural and (perhaps) secular literature.

V Conclusion

Medieval European interest in contemporary Africa may have peaked at critical moments of accelerating conversion to Islam.[116] The letter from the clergy of Carthage to Benedict VII raises the tantalising possibility that, as part of that process, Maghribi Christians themselves may have helped to shape a European sense of crisis within the African church. This rhetoric of desolation drew on well-established late antique precedents, but in the long run it does not seem to have worked to the advantage of the African Christian community. Rather, it allowed European observers from the early Middle Ages onward to begin to write Islamic North Africa out of the history of Christianity. Augustine's *City of God* was said to have been Charlemagne's favourite book, and the extraordinary explosion of textual production which came to characterise the Frankish territories in the ninth century was also concerned, for example, with the lives of ancient African saints.[117] Those saints' cults may have continued to spread across the Latin- as

[113] On Muslim-Christian relations, see esp. Speight 1972; Speight 1978; Speight 1995; Talbi 1990; and most recently Conant 2015, esp. 9–12.
[114] Aurigemma 1932, no. 21, 87–91.
[115] Contra Aurigemma 1932, 90–91; on the lack of burial *ad corpus*, see Tav. II.
[116] Conant 2012, 369.
[117] Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, 24; Conant 2010, 25.

well as the Greek-speaking Mediterranean far into the Middle Ages, and African liturgical practice was in turn shaped by developments elsewhere in Latin Christendom. The name-stock of the North African Christian community continued to develop along pan-Mediterranean lines, and members of that same community were certainly involved in the economic activities which linked the northern and southern Mediterranean from the later eighth century onward.[118] But everything which struck medieval Europeans as good and worthy about Africa lay in its distant, pre-Islamic past. Once the bodies of Africa's holiest men were believed to have been moved across the sea—Augustine to Pavia and Cyprian to Lyon and then Compiègne—there was little to anchor western European interest in what remained of the African Christian community. Already by Notker the Stammerer's day, Africans were most famous not for the triumphs of their intellectual tradition or for the holiness of their saints—but for their poverty.[119]

Latin survived amongst Africa's Christians well into the Islamic period, in some places even down to the twelfth century. Latin also continued to connect the Maghribi Christian community to their co-religionists elsewhere in the Mediterranean, and above all in Rome. However, those connections proved to be something of a double-edged sword. They eased the one diplomatic exchange which we know almost certainly did take place between Charlemagne and the *amīr* of Ifrīqiya, and they similarly facilitated ongoing interchanges with the papal administration down to the pontificate of Gregory VII. But these connections also came at a price. In the longer term, the power of Latinity in the Islamic Maghrib was the power to shape perceptions, and above all, the perception that the church in Africa was moribund, and that a living, breathing African church was a thing of the remote past.

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[118] McCormick 2001, 244–53, esp. 246–7.

[119] Notker Balbulus, *Gesta Karoli magni*, 1.26.

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