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Who was Agrippinus?

Identifying the first known bishop of Carthage

Abstract

It is generally assumed that Agrippinus was one of the earliest known bishops of Carthage, if not the earliest. He probably presided over the first recorded council of bishops in North Africa around AD 220. It was presumably Agrippinus who opposed Tertullian when the latter attacked the church's practice of forgiving sexual sins in his work *De pudicitia*. This article will first provide a historical overview of the development of what has become the commonly accepted image of Agrippinus, combining the hypotheses just mentioned, and will then re-examine the extant sources and popular arguments for the dating of his term of office. It will conclude that the sources do not support a dating of the first council in Carthage before AD 230. Furthermore, there is not much evidence in the available sources to substantiate the commonly held belief that Agrippinus was Tertullian's episcopal opponent.

Keywords

Agrippinus; Carthage; Tertullian; Cyprian of Carthage; Augustine of Hippo; North African Christianity; Historical identification; Research history

I. Introduction

The first bishop of Carthage known by name with certainty is Agrippinus.¹ He earned his place in the history of North African Christianity by organizing and presiding over the first recorded council of that region, and especially by taking a leading role during this ecclesiastical meeting. At that synod, he argued in favour of renewing the baptism of converted heretics. His plea for rebaptism, however, was not Agrippinus's only theological endeavour that formed the texture of North African Christianity. It also seems that he opposed Tertullian, who acted as an 'apostle' for the rigorous *apocalyptic* and charismatic movement known as 'the New Prophecy' or 'Montanism', which rejected the possibility of earthly ecclesiastical forgiveness for adultery, remarriage after divorce, and sexual relationships outside wedlock. Agrippinus was a church leader who took a high view of his office, a true '*bonae memoriae vir*' in Cyprian's words.² A man with outstanding theological abilities and an impressive personality at the very beginning of North African Christianity, the history of which was only recorded relatively late.³ Such at least is the image that a first glance produces. The available studies – historical-theological standard reference works,⁴ research on

¹ Bishop Optatus is mentioned in the eschatological dream of Saturnus in the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 13.1.6 (= SC 417, 150,1-152,13 Amat). Whether he has to be considered the bishop of Carthage or Thuburbo Minus, is a matter of discussion as it depends on the localization of his martyrdom, which is not evident from the primitive text tradition. For an overview of the research tradition, see R. D. Butler, *The new prophecy & 'new visions': evidence of Montanism in The passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, Washington 2006, 134, note 3. Lately, T. J. Heffernan, 'The Legacy of Misidentification: Why the Martyrs in the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* were not from Thuburbo Minus', *Journal of Early Christian History* 6 (2016), 126–51, argued extensively for Carthage.

² Cyprian, *Epistula* 71.4.1 in *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera: Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Epistularium*, G. F. Diercks (ed.), CCSL 3C, Turnhout 1972, 521.

³ See, e.g., W. Ellinger, 'Karthago', *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 20 (2004), 229–84, 248; J. P. Burns and R. M. Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa: the development of its practices and beliefs*, Grand Rapids 2014, XLIX–L, 1-6 and note 98 for further references.

⁴ For instance, A. Audollent, 'Agrippinus', *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique* 1 (1912), 1039–43; B. Altaner and A. Stuiber, *Patrologie: Leben, Schriften und Lehre der Kirchenväter*, 8th ed., Freiburg [u.a.] 1978, 159; J. Quasten, *Patrology*, 4th ed., Westminster, Md. 1986, 312–4; S. G. Hall, 'Calixtus I. (Bischof von Rom, reg. 218–222)', *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 7 (1981), 559–63, 562; R. D. Sider, 'Carthage2', *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* 1 (1997), 215–9, 215–9; Ellinger, 'Karthago', 258; M. A. Tilley, 'North Africa', in M. M. Mitchell and F. M. Young (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Vol. 1: Origins to Constantine*, Cambridge 2006, 381–96, 387; T. Sardella, 'Agrippinus of Carthage', *Encyclopedia of Ancient*

early North African Christianity⁵ and its councils,⁶ monographs on Tertullian⁷ and on his work *De pudicitia*⁸ – not only propagate this impression, but also seem to agree, ‘often confidently’ as G. W. Clarke has observed,⁹ that Agrippinus presided over the first council of North Africa at the beginning of the third century, probably around 220.¹⁰ He must therefore also have been Tertullian’s episcopal opponent, given the presumed time frame of *De pudicitia*. While uncertainties about Agrippinus’s identity are occasionally noted,¹¹ genuine doubt is rarely expressed.¹² But the studies by Clarke and Y. Duval, which touch on the dating of the council, and which propose a later date, tell a different story.¹³

In this contribution, we will provide new arguments for Clark’s and Duval’s chronological claim concerning Agrippinus’s council. Additionally, we will widen the

Christianity 1 (2014), 65.

⁵ E.g., M.-E. Mombili Thumaini, *L’aspect d’autonomie et de communion dans la praxis africaine des recours à Rome (IIIe-Ve siècles): essai d’interprétation du comportement ambivalent de l’épiscopat africain*, Roma 2001, 15; *Africa cristiana: storia, religione, letteratura*, M. Marin and C. Moreschini (ed.), Brescia 2002, 12–3; A. Carpin, *Battezzati nell’unica vera Chiesa? Cipriano di Cartagine e la controversia battesimale*, Bologna 2007, 13–5; C. G. MacGaw, *Le problème du baptême dans le schisme donatiste*, Pessac 2008, 134–5, 148 and repeated in C. G. MacGaw, ‘Tradition et transmission. Augustin, Cyprien et la question du baptême dans le contexte du schisme donatiste’, *Dialogues d’histoire ancienne* 40 (2014), 109–23, 112; Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 176; F. Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, Cambridge 2014, 31, 46, 208.

⁶ J. A. Fischer and A. Lumpe, *Die Synoden von den Anfängen bis zum Vorabend des Nicaenums*, 1997, 50–52, 153–157.

⁷ C. B. Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan and his Influence: An Essay in Historical Theology*, Blackrock 1993, 41–2, 46–50; D. Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, Cambridge 1995, 14.

⁸ W. P. LeSaint, *Tertullian, Treatises on Penance: On penitence and On purity*, Westminster 1959, 48; C. B. Daly, ‘The “Edict of Callistus”’, *Studia patristica* 3 (1961), 176–182; C. Micaelli, ‘Introduction’, *Tertullien, La pudicité*, Paris 1993, 15–27.

⁹ *The letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, vol. 4, G. W. Clarke (ed.), New York 1989, 197–99 with further references.

¹⁰ For an overview of earlier dating attempts, see: Audollent, ‘Agrippinus’, 1042.

¹¹ T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study*, Oxford 1971, 71; W. Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments: Ecclesiastical and Imperial Reactions to Montanism*, Leiden/Boston 2007, 67–8; V. Saxer, ‘Fortschritte in der Ausgestaltung der kirchlichen Organisation in den Jahren 180 bis 250’, in J.-M. Mayeur, L. Pietri and N. Brox (ed.), *Die Geschichte des Christentums*, Bd. I: *Die Zeit des Anfangs (bis 250)*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, 825–62, 838; C. Moreschini and E. Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin literature: a literary history*, Peabody 2005, 344.

¹² See K. Beyschlag, ‘Kallist und Hippolyt’, *Theologische Zeitschrift* 20 (1964), 103–24, 103–5; H. Tränkle, ‘§ 474. Q. Septimius Florens Tertullianus’, in K. Sallmann (ed.), *Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike*, Bd. IV: *Die Literatur des Umbruchs. Von der römischen zur christlichen Literatur, 117 bis 284 n. Chr.*, München 1997, 438–511, 499.

¹³ Clarke, *Letters* 4, 198 argues that the issue of rebaptism was also discussed in the East at a council in Iconium, which he dates around 230 in the light of a remark made by Dionysius of Alexandria. For Duval’s arguments [Y. Duval, ‘Sur les conciles africains antérieurs à Cyprien’, *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 49 (2003), 239–51] cf. *infra*.

horizon to construct a more comprehensive view of his person, given the inconclusive and problematic nature of the sources on the early Carthaginian bishops generally, and on Agrippinus in particular. We will therefore reconsider the historical arguments used for the early dating of the first African council and the research tradition on Agrippinus, as it will transpire that the establishment of a chronology for this period is often linked to the attempt to identify Tertullian's episcopal opponent in *De pudicitia*.

II. Historical *status quaestionis*

The reconstruction of the research tradition will shed light on the creation and development of the current image of Agrippinus and of the commonly accepted date of his council. As will become clear, however, neither the image nor the dating rely exclusively on sources of the council, but also result from further developments in the church of Carthage based on and reflected in Tertullian's writings. Our historical survey will therefore also focus on the discussion about the identity of Tertullian's anonymous opponent in *De pudicitia*.

Beginning in the sixteenth century, scholars became aware of Agrippinus in the context of debates about the validity of baptism administered by heretics. In this period, scholars were mostly unsure of his identity. Thus Bernardus de Lutzenburgo († 1535), a Dominican and professor in Leuven, and Matthias Flacius (1520-1575), a Lutheran professor at the University of Jena, saw him as a contemporary of Bishop Stephen I of Rome (254-257).¹⁴ Other scholars, like the Cistercian Sebastian Faber (1560–1633), Abbot of Kaisheim Abbey in Bavaria, or the Franciscan Miguel de Medina (1489-1578), professor at the University of Alcalá, preferred

¹⁴ Bernardus de Lutzenburgo, *Catalogus haereticorum omnium pene: qui ad haec usque tempora passim literarum monumentis proditi sunt*, 4th ed., Coloniae 1529, Liber III, *Haeret. de litera A*; M. Flacius, *Ecclesiastica Historia: integram ecclesiae Christi ideam, quantum ad locum, Propagationem ... attinet, secundum singulas centurias, perspicuo ordine complectens: singulari diligentia et fide ex vetustissimis et optimis historicis patribus et aliis scriptoribus congesta. Per aliquot studiosos et pios viros in urbe Magdeburgica*, Basileae 1562, 194–5.

instead to refrain from identification or from any precise chronology.¹⁵ At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the idea gained ground that Agrippinus's episcopate coincided with that of Zephyrinus of Rome (199?-217?). In his monumental work '*Nouveauté du Papisme*' (1627), the French church historian and Huguenot pastor Pierre Du Moulin or Petrus Molinaeus (1568-1658) went even further by averring that the Council of Carthage had been led by Agrippinus and had assembled in 217. With unexpected precision, Du Moulin stated firmly: 'The 217th year of our Lord. Agrippinus, bishop of Carthage, assembled a council of the African and Numidian bishops, which definitively resolved that all those who had been baptised by the heretics must be rebaptised when they convert, and that the baptism conferred by the heretics is null.'¹⁶ Unfortunately, he offered no further details or information about this dating. In the same book, he identified Tertullian's opponent mentioned in *De pudicitia* as Bishop Zephyrinus of Rome (199?-217?).¹⁷

The hypothesis propagated by Du Moulin rapidly evolved into a *communis opinio*. It is no surprise therefore that a historical overview written by the French Jesuit and theologian Denis Pétau (1583-1652) for instance contended that Agrippinus of Carthage read Tertullian's *De monogamia* in 215.¹⁸ Pétau's compatriot, the Oratorian Jean Morin (1591-1659), similarly regarded Bishop Zephyrinus as Tertullian's antagonist in *De pudicitia*.¹⁹ Gaspard Juénin (1650-1713) took the process one step further in a theological reader (1696) for use in French seminaries. Although he still regarded the Roman Bishop Zephyrinus as Tertullian's

¹⁵ S. Faber, *Christlicher un[d] rechtgschaffner bericht, wie sich ein gemainer Christ halten soll, wann mancherlay Spaltungen und Ketzereyen, in der Christenhait sich entpören*, Ingolstat 1563, 14–5 M. de Medina, *Christianae Paraenesis siue de recta in Deum fide libri septem*, Venetiis 1564, 172.

¹⁶ 'L'an du Seigneur 217. Agrippin Euesque de Carthage assembla vn Concile des Euesques d'Afrique & de Numidie auquel fut resolu & défini que tous ceux qu auoyent esté baptizez par les heretiques, deuoient estre rebaptizez quand ils se conuertissoient, & que le baptesme conferé par les heretiques est nul.' P. Du Moulin, *Nouveauté du Papisme, opposée à l'antiquité du vray christianisme: Contre le livre de Monsieur le cardinal du Perron, intitulé replique à la response du Serenissime Roy Jaques I. Roy de la Grand Bretagne*, Genève 1627, 226.

¹⁷ Ibid. 247.

¹⁸ D. Petau, *Opus de doctrina temporum*, Lutetiae Parisiorum 1630, 394.

¹⁹ J. Morin, *Commentarius historicus de disciplina in administratione sacramenti poenitentiae tredecim primis seculis in ecclesia occidentali et huc usque in orientali observata*, 2nd ed., Antverpiae 1682, 7.

adversary,²⁰ he provided arguments both *pro* and *contra*, based on Tertullian's oeuvre, thus introducing Agrippinus into the debate. He concluded: '[r]atio est, quia Agrippinus & Tertullianus eodem tempore Carthagine floruerunt'.²¹

In his '*Dissertatio historica*' (1730), the Dominican scholar and later Cardinal Giuseppe Agostino Orsi (1692-1761) initially followed the traditional interpretation that Zephyrinus was the bishop rebuked in *De pudicitia*; he did not even mention Agrippinus in this work.²² In another treatise, dedicated to the question of papal infallibility (1739), he did refer to Agrippinus in the context of the first Carthaginian council, but without providing a clear date.²³ Around a decade later, Orsi published '*Della istoria ecclesiastica*' (1748) in which he offered a thorough, and influential, exegesis of *De pudicitia*. This study contained innovative conclusions. He did not doubt that *De pudicitia* had been composed during the pontificate of Zephyrinus; nevertheless, he did not accept the Roman origin of the *edictum peremptorium* that is recorded and rebuked in it.²⁴ If this *edictum* had been issued by Rome, Tertullian would not, in a further passage, have declared that his opponent's church was 'related' to the Church of Peter, for if he was chastising Zephyrinus, the church in question must have been the

²⁰ G. Juenin, *Commentarius historicus et dogmaticus de sacramentis in genere et specie*, Lugdunum 1696, 338.

²¹ Ibid. 79–80, here 80.

²² G. A. Orsi, *Dissertatio historica, qua ostenditur catholicam Ecclesiam tribus prioribus saeculis capitalium criminum reis pacem et absolutionem neutiquam denegasse*, Mediolani 1730, 96.

²³ G. A. Orsi, *De irreformabili romani pontificis in definiendis fidei controversiis iudicio*, Roma 1739, 62–63, 72 and 78.

²⁴ Tertullian, *De pudicitia* 1.5-6 in *Tertullianus: Opera Montanistica*, E. Dekkers (ed.), CCSL 2, Turnhout 1954, 1281-82.

Church of Peter itself.²⁵ This remarkable insight nonetheless did not (yet) entail identifying Agrippinus as Tertullian's foe.

The contribution by the German Protestant professor of Church history at the University of Göttingen, Christian Wilhelm Franz Walch (1726-1784), was significant from another perspective. In his study of ecclesial councils and synods (1759), he addressed one of the more problematic points of the attempted identification by arguing, '... there is no hope to obtain assurance here. It depends on two questions: First, when did Agrippinus live? And subsequently, in which order did he preside over the Church of Carthage before Cyprian?'²⁶ Despite this thoughtful query, he confidently dated Agrippinus's episcopate, situating it surprisingly early: 'Our opinion is the most probable. According to this, [his office] is to be dated right at the beginning of the third, or even at the end of the second century.'²⁷ This opinion was soon adopted by others. The most comprehensive German encyclopaedia project of the eighteenth century, the '*Grosses Universal-Lexicon*', published by Johann Heinrich Zedler (1706-1751), included a list of bishops of Carthage. The unknown author of the entry on 'Carthago' began the list with Agrippinus as the first known bishop of Carthage, with 215

²⁵ G. A. Orsi, *Della istoria ecclesiastica*, Roma 1748, 10–2. E. Dekkers reads in the CCSL edition for *De pudicitia*, 21.9 (CCSL 2, 1327): '... idcirco praesumis et ad te deriuasse soluendi et alligandi potestatem, id est ad omnem ecclesiam petri propinquam?' The SC edition (*Tertullien: La pudicité*, C. Micaelli and C. Munier (ed.), Paris 1993, 272) provides the following reading: '... idcirco praesumis et ad te deriuasse soluendi et alligandi potestatem, id est ad omnem ecclesiam Petri prouinciam ...' The differing readings of 'petri propinquam/prouinciam' will play an important role in later discussions, and is heavily debated. A. Harnack, 'Ecclesia Petri propinqua: zur Geschichte der Anfänge des Primats des römischen Bischofs', *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse* 18 (1927), 139–52; W. Köhler, 'Omnis ecclesia Petri propinqua', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 31 (1932), 60–7; H. Stoeckius, 'Ecclesia Petri propria: Eine kirchengeschichtliche Untersuchung der Primatsfrage bei Tertullian', *Archiv für Katholisches Kirchenrecht* 117 (1937), 24–126; B. Altaner, 'Omnis ecclesia Petri propinqua', *Theologische Revue* 38 (1939), 130–8; E. Molland, 'Encore une fois "Omnis ecclesia Petri propinqua": Edit de Calliste ou edit d'Agrippinus?', *Melanges d'histoire des religions offerts a Henri-Charles Puech*, Paris 1974, 215–24.

²⁶ '... es ist auch keine Hofnung da, iemals hierinnen zur Gewisheit zu kommen. Es kommt auf zwey Fragen an, einmal, wenn der gedachte Agripinus gelebet? hernach, in welcher Ordnung derselbe vor dem Cyprian der Kirche zu Carthago vorgestanden.' C. W. F. Walch, *Entwurf einer vollständigen Historie der Kirchenversammlungen*, Leipzig 1759, 91, note 2.

²⁷ 'Unser allen Meinungen ist diejenige die wahrscheinlichste, nach welcher es gleich in den Anfang des dritten; oder wol gar in das Ende des zweyten Jahrhunderts gesezet wird.' *Ibid.*

as the year of his accession to this see.²⁸ The Italian Jesuit Stefano Antonio Morcelli's (1737-1822) *'Africa christiana'* (1816), long regarded as a standard reference work on the genesis of African Christianity, also opted for an early dating. But this work was based on a new argument: since Morcelli believed that Optatus was the Carthaginian pastor mentioned in the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, and since he situated the latter's episcopate between 200-203, the only remaining option was to date the start of Agrippinus's term of office before 200.²⁹ It is not surprising therefore that he did not identify this bishop with the opponent in *De pudicitia*, because he believed this treatise had been written around 215.³⁰ Only a couple of years later, the German Church historian and Antiquity scholar at Copenhagen University, Friedrich Christian Münter (1761-1830), repeated the claim that *De pudicitia* had an (anti-)Carthaginian orientation. He admitted in respect of Agrippinus, *'Sed quis hic fuerit, utrum Agrippinus, [...], vitam protraxit, an successor ejus, definiri nequit.'*³¹

The remainder of the nineteenth century brought some new general findings concerning *De pudicitia*, but none regarding Agrippinus. The (re)discovery of the *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, traditionally – but probably incorrectly – attributed to Hippolytus of Rome,³² also affected the issue of the identification of our (anonymous) bishop of Carthage. While the German Catholic Church historian Ignaz von Döllinger (1799-1890) still clearly believed that Zephyrinus was the antagonist in question,³³ the Italian archaeologist Giovanni Battista de

²⁸ 'Carthago', *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste, welche bißhero durch menschlichen Verstand und Witz erfunden und verbessert worden* 5 (1733), 1161–5, here 1163.

²⁹ S. A. Morcelli, *Africa christiana*, Bettoni 1816, 44–55.

³⁰ Ibid. 80–1.

³¹ F. Münter, *Primordia ecclesiae Africanae*, Hafniae 1829, 46.

³² In the light of extant evidence and according to contemporary research, it is difficult to link a (or even more than one) bishop/martyr 'Hippolytos' to the anonymous work known as the *Refutatio omnium haeresium*. For the *status quaestionis* of the 'Hippolytfrage', see *Des évêques, des écoles et des hérétiques: actes du colloque international sur la 'réfutation de toutes les hérésies'*, Genève, 13-14 juin 2008, G. Aragione and E. Norelli (ed.), Prahins 2011; C. Scholten, 'Die Funktion der Häresienabwehr in der Alten Kirche', *Vigiliae christianae* 66 (2012), 229–68; E. Castelli, 'L'Elenchos, ovvero una "biblioteca" contro le eresie', in A. Magris (ed.), *Confutazione di tutte le eresie*, Brescia 2012, 21–56; A. Handl, *Calixtus I, der Bischof von Rom und der Konflikt um seine Person in der Refutatio omnium haeresium*, Leiden/Boston, in press.

³³ I. Döllinger, *Hippolytus und Kallistus: oder die römische Kirche in der ersten Hälfte des dritten Jahrhunderts; mit Rücksicht auf die Schriften und Abhandlungen der HH. Bunsen, Wordsworth, Baur und*

Rossi (1822-1894) suggested an alternative scenario: based on the obvious similarities between the ‘edict’ of Bishop Calixtus I of Rome (217?-222?) preserved in the *Refutatio*,³⁴ and the *edictum peremptorium* contained in *De pudicitia*, de Rossi proposed that both writings resulted from one and the same Roman conflict. This meant that *De pudicitia* was also directed against the Roman bishop Calixtus.³⁵ Soon, leading scholars of the time were all arguing in favour of de Rossi’s hypothesis.³⁶

Meanwhile, French scholars tended to prefer Morcelli’s position and advocate an early date of the Council, around the turn of the third century.³⁷ However, a few scholars, including such authorities as Louis Duchesne³⁸ (1843-1922) and Pierre Batiffol³⁹ (1861-1929), adopted a contrary opinion, defending the alternative position, and dating the Council to 220.

In 1873, the German Benedictine monk and Church historian Pius Bonifacius Gams (1816-1892) presented an extensive overview of the history of episcopal successions of the Catholic Church (1873). In this work, he also offered a reconstruction of the Carthaginian *sedes*. The list began with Optatus, who was succeeded by Agrippinus, dated between 215-220.⁴⁰ Gams’s work was soon established as a standard reference work, and his reconstruction remained authoritative for generations of scholars.

Gieseler, Regensburg 1853, 126–7, especially note 11 and 190-1.

³⁴ *Refutatio* 9.12.21 in *Hippolytus, Refutatio omnium haeresium*, P. Wendland (ed.), Griechische Christliche Schriftsteller 16,3, Leipzig, 1916, 249.

³⁵ G. B. de Rossi, ‘Esame archeologico e critico della storia di S. Callisto narrata nel libro nono dei Filosofumene’, *Bullettino di archeologia cristiana* 4 (1866), 1-14; 17-33; 77-99, 26–30, 83.

³⁶ E.g. A. Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, Bd. II: *Die Verbreitung*, Leipzig 1906, 240; A. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Bd. I: *Die Entstehung des kirchlichen Dogmas*, 4th ed., Tübingen 1909, 442–3, 484; A. d’Alès, *L’édit de Calliste: Étude sur les origines de la pénitence chrétienne*, Paris 1914, 396–8; E. Rolffs, *Das Indulgenz-Edict des römischen Bischofs Kallist: kritisch untersucht und rekonstruiert*, Leipzig 1893 offers even a complete ‘reconstruction’ of the Edict.

³⁷ For instance, P. Allard, *Histoire des persécutions*, Bd. II: *Histoire des persécutions pendant la première moitié du troisième siècle*, Paris 1886, 4–5 argues in favor of 200; P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l’Afrique chrétienne depuis les origines jusqu’à l’invasion arabe*, Paris 1901, 19–20, 27 in favor of the end of the 2nd century; H. Leclercq, *L’Afrique chrétienne*, Paris 1904, 32, 41 opts for 197/198. A. d’Alès, *La théologie de Tertullien*, Paris 1905, 218, 330 does not provide an exact date but states: ‘il semble bien difficile de le placer après Tertullien’.

³⁸ L. Duchesne, *Histoire ancienne de l’Église*, Paris 1906, 396, 422.

³⁹ P. Batiffol, *L’Église naissante et le catholicisme*, 4th ed., Paris 1909, 463.

⁴⁰ P. B. Gams, *Series episcoporum ecclesiae catholicae*, Ratisbonae 1873, 463.

The research of Gerhard Esser (1860-1923), Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Catholic Theological Faculty of Bonn in Germany caused a paradigm shift. Despite the fact that he aligned himself with de Rossi in his ‘Bonner Universitätsprogramm’,⁴¹ shortly afterwards he admitted to having doubts on the matter,⁴² which he then systematically unfolded in his ‘*Der Adressat der Schrift Tertullians De pudicitia und der Verfasser des römischen Bußediktes*’.⁴³ Esser presented a long list of arguments in favour of a Carthaginian target of *De pudicitia*, without identifying the anonymous bishop as Agrippinus. Only a few years later, the influential Catholic historian of dogma, then at the University of Munich, Karl Adam (1876-1966), brought Esser’s observation to its full conclusion in his ‘*Das sogenannte Bußedikt des Papstes Kallistus*’ (1917).⁴⁴ In this publication he posed the question – ‘[w]ho was the primate of Carthage at the time that the polemical writing [*De pudicitia*] was composed?’ – and he answered it to the effect that ‘Optatus or Agrippinus or an unknown predecessor of Donatus’ should be considered as candidates.⁴⁵ He then immediately disqualified Optatus as having most probably died in one of the several persecutions in Carthage at the beginning of the third century. The option of an unknown predecessor of Donatus was equally untenable, Adam believed, because ‘Many clues suggest that during the time that Tertullian attacked the *edictum peremptorium*, Agrippinus was the primate of Carthage.’⁴⁶ He did not discuss this any further, basing his assertion on the generally accepted dating of Agrippinus’s council between 213 and 220, as well as on the internal chronology of Tertullian’s works.

⁴¹ G. Esser, *Die Busschriften Tertullians De paenitentia und De pudicitia und das Indulgenzedikt des Papstes Kallistus: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Bussdisziplin*, Bonn 1905.

⁴² G. Esser, ‘Nochmals das Indulgenzedikt des Papstes Kallistus und die Bußschriften Tertullians’, *Der Katholik* 1 (4. Folge) (1908), 12-28; 93-113, 103, note 2.

⁴³ G. Esser, *Der Adressat der Schrift Tertullians De pudicitia und der Verfasser des römischen Bußediktes*, Bonn 1914.

⁴⁴ K. Adam, *Das sogenannte Bußedikt des Papstes Kallistus*, München 1917.

⁴⁵ ‘Wer war zur Zeit der Abfassung der Schamschrift Primas in Karthago? Optatus oder Agrippinus oder ein uns unbekannter Vorgänger des Donatus.’ Ibid. 56–7.

⁴⁶ ‘So steht vieles dafür, daß zu jener Zeit, als Tertullian gegen das *edictum peremptorium* schrieb, Agrippinus Primas von Karthago war.’ Ibid. 62.

Adam's position became the subject of controversy even beyond German borders.⁴⁷ His research ultimately inspired the majority view for later generations, after authorities like Hans von Campenhausen⁴⁸ (1903-1989) and Bernhard Poschmann⁴⁹ (1878-1955) accepted it and argued for it.

More recent studies on the bishop lists of Carthage and North Africa have followed Gams's reconstruction, except in the case of Optatus. Jean-Louis Maier, for instance, thinks Optatus was the bishop of Thuburbo Minus Proconsularis,⁵⁰ and he has therefore placed Agrippinus at the top of the list of bishops of Carthage, also considering him to have been the president of the first known African council in 220.⁵¹ Giorgio Fedalto remains in doubt about where Optatus was appointed bishop. He has placed him both in Thuburbo Minus,⁵² and also – somewhat hesitantly – in Carthage, around 203. With regard to Agrippinus, he has followed Gams's and Maier's lead.⁵³

The currently widespread 'powerful image'⁵⁴ of Agrippinus – that he was the first known bishop of Carthage, that he presided over the first council in Carthage at the time of

⁴⁷ Many scholars took a position in this debate. Early examples of those in favour of Agrippinus include G. Bardy, 'L'édit d'Agrippinus', *Recherches de science religieuse* 4 (1924), 1–25, 20–2; A. Donini, 'L'Editto di Agrippino', *Ricerche Religiose* 1 (1925), 56–71; K. G. Preysing, 'Römischer Ursprung des „Edictum peremptorium“?', *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 1 (1926), 143–50; P. Galtier, 'Le véritable édit de Calliste', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 23 (1927), 465–88; Daly, 'The Edict of Callistus'.

Advocates of Calixtus are A. d'Alès, 'Tertullien et Calliste', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 13 (1912), 5–33, 221–56, 441–9, 621–39; Alès, *L'édit de Calliste*, 228–251; H. Koch, *Kallist und Tertullian: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Bußstreitigkeiten und des römischen Primats*, Heidelberg 1920; A. d'Alès, 'Zéphyrin, Calliste ou Agrippinus?', *Recherches de science religieuse* 1 (1920), 254–6; A. Harnack, 'Die älteste uns im Wortlaut bekannte dogmatische Erklärung eines römischen Bischofs: (Zephyrin bei Hippolyt, Refut. IX 11.)', *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse* (1923), 51–7, 52, Anm. 3; C. Figini, 'Agrippino o Callisto?', *Scuola Cattolica* 3 (6. serie) (1924), 204–11. See also above, note 24.

⁴⁸ H. Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 2nd ed., Tübingen 1963, 251–3.

⁴⁹ B. Poschmann, *Paenitentia secunda: Die kirchliche Buße im ältesten Christentum bis Cyprian und Origenes. Eine dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Bonn 1940, 361.

⁵⁰ J.-L. Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine*, Rome 1973, 219.

⁵¹ Ibid. 17–18, 253, here 18: 'Carthago (Proconsulaire) / Agrippinus (vers 220) / Donatus I (236/240) / Cyprianus (248/249-258).'

⁵² G. Fedalto, 'Liste vescovili dell'Africa christiana. Secoli III-IX', *Studia Patavina* 55 (2008), 393–571, 430: 'Tuburbitana eccl., Tuburbitanorum Minorum (Thuburbo Minus, Tebourba, Tunisia): Optatus 203, Maier 219.'

⁵³ Ibid. 398: 'Optatus(?) 203; Agrippinus (-220c.); Donatus (-<236/248>) 248c.; Cyprianus 249/258.'

⁵⁴ T. J. Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, Oxford/New York 2012, 12.

Tertullian, that he was Tertullian's opponent – is essentially founded on two old assumptions which were only joined together a century ago, as the last logical step in a long development, in Karl Adam's comprehensive hypothesis. The first assumption is that the first Carthaginian council took place in 215-220, a view that has become mainstream in scholarship. The second is that *De pudicitia* was directed against Carthaginian abuses by the local 'Psychics', and was consequently addressed to the bishop of Carthage rather than Rome.⁵⁵

III. Sources

We will take a closer look in this section at the extant sources concerning the council of Agrippinus. The name Agrippinus appears more often in the ancient sources than one might suppose in light of the scarce information we have about him. This is due mainly to the fact that not only Cyprian, Agrippinus's later successor on the episcopal *cathedra* of Carthage (248/249-258), but also, and above all, Augustine, bishop of the North African port city of Hippo (396-430), pondered the question whether baptism administered by heretics should be accepted or rejected. Augustine referred to Agrippinus no less than 27 times in his writings against the Donatists.⁵⁶

In a letter to the possibly Mauretanian bishop Quintus dated to 255,⁵⁷ Cyprian referred to the North African ecclesiastical tradition of rebaptizing converted heretics, 'This decision was

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Beyschlag, 'Kallist und Hippolyt', who rejects the Carthaginian hypothesis. A. Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-bishop*, Leiden/Boston 1995, 501–17 argues in favour of Calixtus. R. E. Heine, 'Hippolytus, Ps.-Hippolytus and the early canons', in F. M. Young (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, Cambridge/New York 2004, 142–51, 133 believes in the possibility of the Roman option. D. Wilhite, 'Identity, Psychology, and the Psychici: Tertullian's "Bishop of Bishops"', *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 5 (2009), Article 9 argues for it.

⁵⁶ The digital search engine *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense* (CAG) shows 27 references to Agrippinus in 13 passages of Augustine's œuvre: *bapt.* 2,12-14 ; 3,2-3 ; 3,17 ; 3,28 ; 4,8 ; *un. bapt.* 22 ; *c. Gaud.* 2,8 ; *ep.* 93,35.

⁵⁷ For this discussion see Y. Duval, 'Densité et répartition des évêchés dans les provinces africaines au temps de Cyprien', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité* 96 (1984), 493–521, 517–9 and for the dating see Clarke, *Letters*, vol. 4, 206.

also made by Agrippinus, a man cherished in our memory, together with his fellow bishops, who at that time led the Church of the Lord in the province of Africa and Numidia.’⁵⁸ A year later, in 256, he wrote in a similar vein to the Mauretanian bishop Jubaianus, ‘Many years and much time has passed since many of the bishops gathered together under Agrippinus, a well-remembered man.’⁵⁹ Both references indicate that a synod gathered in North Africa under the presidency of Agrippinus to discuss the theme of baptism by heretics.⁶⁰ At this meeting, the majority of the council fathers repudiated the validity of baptism administered by heretics. This conciliar decision obviously met with the approval of Cyprian, who explicitly refers to his predecessor as ‘a fondly-remembered man’.⁶¹ Nevertheless, Cyprian did not provide an exact date for the council: he only stated, in 256, that the council took place ‘many years and much time past’.⁶² A majority of scholars has apparently viewed this rather ambiguous chronological specification as sufficient evidence to positively date the first known council of North Africa to the beginning of the third century,⁶³ or between 215 and 220.⁶⁴

Interestingly, scarcely any attention has been given to similar chronological statements that Cyprian also made.⁶⁵ The most enlightening example is a reference to the Council of Lambesis (contemporary Lambèse in Algeria). In a letter (*a dato* summer 252) to Cornelius of Rome (251-253), his fellow bishop, Cyprian issued a warning regarding the ‘old’ heretic

⁵⁸ Cyprian, *Epistula* 71.4.1 (CCSL 3C, 521): ‘*Quod quidem et Agrippinus bonae memoriae uir cum ceteris coepiscopis suis qui illo in tempore in prouincia Africa et Numidia ecclesiam domini gubernabant statuit.*’ See in this perspective also the commentary in Clarke, *Letters*, vol. 4, 205-11 and especially 196-8.

⁵⁹ Cyprian, *Epistula* 73.3.1 (CCSL 3C, 532): ‘*quando anni sint iam multi et longa aetas ex quo sub Agrippino bonae memoriae viro convenientes in unum episcopi plurimi.*’ See Clarke, *Letters*, vol. 4, 218-33.

⁶⁰ According to Fischer and Lumpe, *Die Synoden von den Anfängen bis zum Vorabend des Nicaenums*, 50-2, 154-5, this note gives us more information about the council. For instance, it makes clear that Cyprian’s predecessor was convening the council in Carthage. They are furthermore convinced that Agrippinus, as bishop of Carthage, enjoyed an honorary priority, but certainly not a juridical primacy.

⁶¹ Cyprian, *Epistula* 71.4.1 (CCSL 3C, 521): ‘*Agrippinus bonae memoriae vir,*’ and 73.3.1 (CCSL 3C, 532): ‘*Agrippino bonae memoriae viro.*’

⁶² Cyprian, *Epistula* 71.3.1 (CCSL 3C, 532): ‘*quando anni sint iam multi et longa aetas.*’

⁶³ See above, section ‘Historical status questionis’.

⁶⁴ Adam, *Das sogenannte Bußedikt des Papstes Kallistus*, 61, is even worried that the dating of the Agrippinian council in 213 stands ‘im Widerspruch zu seiner (i.e. Cyprian) Bemerkung von *anni iam multi et longa aetas.*’

⁶⁵ Cyprian, *Epistula* 59.10.1; 68.3.1; 69.13.2 (CCSL 3C, 353 ; 465 ; 490).

Privatus, former bishop of Colonia Lambesis, who ‘was severely condemned because of his numerous and serious offences by the verdict of 90 bishops and also by the letters of our predecessors Fabianus and Donatus.’⁶⁶ This passage sheds light on the issue of the dating of Agrippinus’s episcopate, because the time frame which Cyprian uses in relation to Privatus – ‘*multos [...] annos*’ – is similar to the statement, ‘*anni [...] multi et longa aetas*’, which he made with regard to Agrippinus and the Carthaginian council. The additional phrase ‘*et longa aetas*’ may indeed indicate a longer time period. But it can also simply be read as hyperbole, because Cyprian had a clear motive for exaggerating the antiquity of the North African tradition, as this would strengthen his party’s stance on (re-)baptizing heretics.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the plausibility of the two chronological descriptions is analogous. This probability at least nuances the confident chronology advanced by previous scholarship. Moreover, the connection between the two named bishops who censured Privatus establishes an absolute chronology for the Council of Lambesis. This in turn makes it possible to use Cyprian’s fairly precise statement on this council to determine the time frame between Cyprian and Agrippinus’s council.

We hardly know anything at all with certainty about Bishop Donatus of Carthage. It is highly probable that he was Cyprian’s immediate predecessor.⁶⁸ The sources are silent about the beginning of his term of office; however, if it is true that Cyprian succeeded him on the episcopal see, he must have died in 248 or 249. Fortunately, we have more historical evidence

⁶⁶ Cyprian, *Epistula* 59.10.1 (CCSL 3C, 353): ‘*Per Felicianum autem significavi tibi, frater, uenisse Carthaginem Priuatum ueterem haereticum in Lambesitana colonia ante multos fere annos ob multa et graua delicta nonaginta episcoporum sententia condemnatum, antecessorum etiam nostrorum, quod et uestram conscientiam non latet.*’ For the general context, see the commentary in Clarke, *Letters*, vol. 4, 233–64, esp. 251. For the questions concerning this specific passage, see Duval, ‘Densité et répartition’, 497–9. For details on the Council of Lambesis, see Fischer and Lumpe, *Die Synoden von den Anfängen bis zum Vorabend des Nicaenums*, 162–4 and Duval, ‘Sur les conciles’, 239–51, 243–5.

⁶⁷ Cf. *infra* note 111.

⁶⁸ See *The letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, vol. 3, G. W. Clarke (ed.), New York 1986, 243–4 and compare to Maier, *L’épiscopat*, 18; Fedalto, ‘Liste vescovili’, 430.

about his Roman colleague, Bishop Fabian. The so-called *Catalogus Liberianus*⁶⁹ and the *Liber pontificalis*⁷⁰ tell us that he led the Church of Rome between 236 and 250. This means that 236 is the *terminus post quem* for both the beginning of Donatus's episcopate and the date of the Council of Lambesis. In other words, if the Council of Lambesis took place during the episcopates of both Donatus and Fabian, it must have fallen between 236-248/249. According to the majority of scholars, Cyprian's statement '*multos fere annos*' implies that the council had already convened at the very beginning of Fabian's episcopate, that is between 236-240.⁷¹ If, therefore, the difference is calculated on the basis of Cyprian's letter to Cornelius in 252 and the earliest possible date of the Council of Lambesis (236), this interval would be 16 years. If, however, the conciliar meeting had taken place beforehand around 240, the time elapsed between the council and the letter would only be 12 years.⁷² When we apply these findings to Agrippinus's council in Carthage on the rebaptism of heretics, it is almost impossible to accept 200 as the year of the council, and quite difficult to agree with the majority position of 215-220. Cyprian's letter to Jubaianus on Agrippinus's council was sent in the year 256. If we deduct 'many years', i.e. 15 or even 20 years according to the date of the Council of Lambesis, this still brings us back only to 241 or 236.⁷³ Even if we do not read the double phrases 'many years' and 'a long time ago' as rhetorical tools, and take them to be historical references to a particularly large time interval, it still seems improbable that the ecclesiastical meeting that Agrippinus presided over would have taken place 35 to 40 years earlier.

⁶⁹ 'Catalogus Liberianus', in T. Mommsen (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII*, 2nd ed., Berolini 1981, 73–6, 75.

⁷⁰ *Liber Pontificalis XXI*, in L. Duchesne, *Le liber pontificalis*, Paris 1886, 148–9. For more information about Fabianus, see F. Scorza Barcellona, 'Fabiano, santo', *Enciclopedia dei Papi* 1 (2000), 265–8.

⁷¹ See Maier, *L'épiscopat*, 95; Fischer and Lumpe, *Die Synoden von den Anfängen bis zum Vorabend des Nicaenums*, 163–164, especially 164, note 84 with further references; Duval, 'Conciles africains', 244.

⁷² A. Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius*, Bd. II: *Die Chronologie*, Leipzig 1904, 316, note 5 is in favour of forty years. Clarke, *Letters*, vol. 3, 251 note 47 states that it is 'not likely to have occurred much more than a decade or so ago.'

⁷³ Similar conclusions are reached by A. Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage*, Cambridge 2010, 298–9. Harnack, *Geschichte*, Bd. II, 363, note 5 asserts: 'über c. 225 wird man nicht heruntergehen dürfen.'

A comment from Augustine, who also gave an indication of the date of Agrippinus's council, has either so far escaped scholarly attention, or has been dismissed by scholars as irrelevant because of the historical distance between Augustine and the council.⁷⁴ A closer look, however, reveals that Augustine's testimony is particularly relevant.

In his anti-Donatist treatise *De baptismo* (401), Augustine returned to the issue, and in this context reiterated the importance of Agrippinus's role in convening the council for the development of the North African baptismal tradition. He expressed his inability to understand Cyprian's approval of the rebaptism of heretics, because Cyprian did not have any grounds for this position, 'except a council gathered by Agrippinus a few years prior to him'.⁷⁵ In Augustine's estimation, only *pauci anni* separated Cyprian's term of office from the council that he was discussing. His remark about the date of Cyprian's source could easily be dismissed as rhetorical understatement, especially because this would make the practice of rebaptism look like a singular, recent, and isolated phenomenon, which could therefore be easily dismissed. However, a closer look at Augustine's terminology provides us with a far more precise definition of those "few years" than Cyprian's use of a similar time indication.

Although only a handful of the more than 30 times⁷⁶ that Augustine uses the time indication "*pauci anni*" are useful for our purposes, these occurrences offer a surprisingly accurate chronological specification. The best documented reference can be found in *Epistula* 176 (416), sent to Pope Innocent I (401–417) by the Council of Milevis. Augustine was one of the signatories of the letter, and he is believed to have been its primary author. The letter mentions a disciple of Pelagius, Caelestius, who spent some time in Carthage before the local

⁷⁴ For instance, see Audolent, 'Agrippinus', 1041 or Fischer and Lumpe, *Die Synoden von den Anfängen bis zum Vorabend des Nicaenums*, 51, note 178 and 154, note 22.

⁷⁵ Augustine, *De baptismo* 4.6.8 (CSEL 51, 230-2): '*non nisi in sola africa factum paucis ante se annis agrippini concilium repperiret.*'

⁷⁶ CAG observes 31 occurrences of *pauci anni* in 29 passages of Augustine's collected writings: *uera rel.* 12; *cat. rud.* 46; *c. ep. Parm.* 3,21; *pecc. mer.* 3,13; *un. bapt.* 29; *ciu.* 15,23; 16,10; 17,12; 18,45; 1,128; *exc. urb.* 7; *b. uid.* 16; *ep.* 111,7; 176,4; 197,4; 199,12; *Io. eu. tr.* 49,10; *en. Ps.* 36,3,9; 93,24; 104,6; *s.* 22,4; 101,4; 105,13; 127,1; 361,12; 396,1; *s. Denis* 24,5; *s. Dolbeau* 15,4; 21,16.

church took action against him, and this happened “a few years ago”⁷⁷. It is known that Caelestius left Rome together with Pelagius and arrived in North Africa around 409. He was accused there of heresy and condemned by a local synod. This condemnation was confirmed by the Carthaginian council of 411.⁷⁸ The interval between the council of 411 and the composition of the letter in 416, described as “*paucis annis*”, was thus precisely 5 years. *Sermo* 105 (?410/?411/?412⁷⁹), in which Augustine preaches about the Sack of Rome, refers to a similar time span. According to Augustine, Rome did not fall because the pagan gods were replaced by the Christian God. He gives an example to support his case: after the pagan gods were forsaken, Radagaisus and his Goths were defeated, even though Rome was no longer protected by the pagan gods. This defeat of the Goths, he reminds his audience, was not a distant fact, but “*pauci anni sunt*”. The invasion of Radagaisus and the Goths to which Augustine referred took place in late 405 or early 406,⁸⁰ a “few years”, that is six or at most seven years before the sermon was delivered. Three additional references are less precise, but are still illuminating. In *Epistula* 111, written in 409, Augustine refers to a kidnapping a “few years ago”: a niece of Bishop Severus of Sitifis in Numidia had fallen into the hands of the barbarians.⁸¹ Although we do not know when Severus’s term of office began and it is consequently not possible to determine a *terminus post quem*, the bishop died in 403.⁸² The “few years” mentioned in this context therefore mean at least six or probably a few more years. In his tract *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum* (composed

⁷⁷ Augustine, *Epistula* 176 (CSEL 44, 667).

⁷⁸ Marius Mercator, *Commonitorium aduersum haeresim Pelagii et Caelestii* 36 (ACO 5.1, 66).

⁷⁹ B. Fischer and H. J. Frede, *Kirchenschriftsteller: Verzeichnis und Sigel*, 4th edn, Freiburg 1995, 227 assigns *sermo* 105 to 410/411. P.-M. Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie augustinienne*, Turnhout 2000, 544 dates it 412.

⁸⁰ P. J. Heather, *The fall of the Roman Empire: a new history of Rome and the barbarians*, Oxford 2006, 194.

⁸¹ Augustine, *Epistula* 176 (CSEL 34.2, 654).

⁸² A. Mandouze, ‘Severus I’, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire 1: Prosopographie de l’Afrique chrétienne (303-533)*, Paris 1982, 1070–5.

between 411 and 413),⁸³ Augustine mentions the monk Jovinian, who lived in Rome “a few years ago”, and who was believed to advise even nuns of advanced age to marry.⁸⁴ Jovinian was active in the late fourth century in Rome. He was condemned by the Councils of Rome (390) and Milan (393), and he died around 405. Augustine’s comment on the fact that this monk lived “a few years ago” refers to a time span between the time of writing (411/413) and his death (c. 405), rather than to the entire period of Jovinian’s activities. Again, Augustine is referring to a period no longer than 6 to 12 years.⁸⁵ Finally, in *De urbis excidio Romae* (410 or 411),⁸⁶ Augustine recalls a vision that a faithful servant had about the destruction of Constantinople a “few years ago”, under the reign of Arcadius (395-408). The exact date of the vision cannot be reconstructed, so the “few years” here could mean anything between 3 and 16 years.

In sum, Augustine’s use of the terminology of “a few years” seems to be coherent. The two occurrences that can be determined precisely describe a period of 5-6 years, the others seem to refer to an interval of 5 to 10 years, though none⁸⁷ of the cases exceed a maximum of 16 years. Even if we take the significant temporal distance into account – an argument often used to discredit the accuracy of Augustine’s testimony⁸⁸ –, ‘*pauci anni*’ can hardly be understood to mean a period of a generation and a half or two generations. Augustine’s statement corroborates the interpretation of Cyprian’s ‘*multi anni*’ as 15 to at most 20 years, in the context of both the Council of Lambesis and Agrippinus’s episcopate. While it is not

⁸³ For this chronology see V. H. Drecoll, ‘*De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo paruulorum* (Über Folgen und Vergebung der Sünden und über die Kindertaufe)’, in *Augustin-Handbuch*, V. H. Drecoll (ed.), Tübingen 2014, 323-328, 323.

⁸⁴ Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo paruulorum* 3.7.13 (CSEL 60, 139).

⁸⁵ Y.-M. Duval, *L’affaire Jovinien: d’une crise de la société romaine à une crise de la pensée chrétienne à la fin du 4e et au début du 5e siècle*, Roma 2003, 35-37.

⁸⁶ Augustine, *De urbis excidio* 7 (CCSL 46, 258). For this chronology, see V. H. Drecoll, ‘Zur Chronologie der Werke’, in *Augustin-Handbuch*, V. H. Drecoll (ed.), Tübingen 2014, 250-253.

⁸⁷ The only exception might be the kidnapping case. This is, however, due to the lack of information to the beginning of Severus’ office, to be evaluated in the light of the other references.

⁸⁸ See Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan*, 49; Fischer and Lumpe, *Die Synoden von den Anfängen bis zum Vorabend des Nicaenums*, 51, note 148, 154, note 22.

conclusive, the evidence still points to a shorter interval between Agrippinus and Cyprian, and is pertinent to the dating of Agrippinus's council.

Yvette Duval (1931-2006) has proposed a further argument on the basis of the data presented above. According to Cyprian's statement, 'many bishops' of the two provinces of Africa and Numidia assembled for Agrippinus's council.⁸⁹ This is in accordance with Augustine, who wrote that 70 predecessors of Cyprian participated.⁹⁰ This number is quite acceptable when compared with the attested attendance of 90 at the Council of Lambesis which took place before Cyprian's time, around 236/240.⁹¹ The two Councils of Carthage in the spring and late summer of 256 over which Cyprian presided, gathered 'only' 71⁹² and 87⁹³ bishops, originating from three provinces, to sign the *sententia*. This means not only that the number of 70 bishops seems to be trustworthy, but also that the very high number of participating bishops from two provinces at the very beginning or the first quarter of the third century⁹⁴ appears somewhat implausible – and this calls into question the likelihood of dating Agrippinus's Council of Carthage to this time. Such a large number of bishops in 200-225 would point to a very widespread distribution of Christianity in the time of Tertullian in North Africa. But this is difficult to reconcile with the picture that emerges from Tertullian's writings and the other scarce sources from North African Christianity in this period.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Cyprian, *Epistula* 71.4.1 (CCSL 3C, 521); *Ibid.*, 73.3.1 (CCSL 3C, 532).

⁹⁰ Augustine, *De unico baptismo* 13.22 (CSEL 53, 21-2). It is quite obvious that Augustine's assertion '*de septuaginta praecessoribus Cypriani*' does not mean that 70 bishops preceded Cyprian on the *sedes* of Carthage, but rather is his calculation of the number of bishops that voted at the council under consideration. See A. Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius*, Bd. I: *Die Überlieferung und der Bestand*, Leipzig 1893, 687; Duval, 'Densité et répartition', 495.

⁹¹ Cyprian, *Epistula* 69.10.1 (CCSL 3C, 353). To the dating, circumstances and content see Clarke, *Letters*, vol. 4, 172–191.

⁹² *Ibid.* 73.1.2 (CCSL 3C, 530).

⁹³ *Sententiarum episcoporum numero LXXXVII*, in *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera: Sententiae episcoporum numero LXXXVII de haereticis baptizandis*, G. F. Diercks (ed.), CCSL 3E, Turnhout 2004. See also Fischer and Lumpe, *Die Synoden von den Anfängen bis zum Vorabend des Nicaenums*, 265–75, with commentary and further literature.

⁹⁴ See Duval, 'Densité et répartition', 495–7; 'Conciles africains', 241; and Y. Duval, *Les chrétientés d'Occident et leur évêque au IIIe siècle. Plebs in ecclesia constituta (Cyprien, Ep. 63)*, Paris 2005, 107–10.

⁹⁵ G. Schöllgen, *Ecclesia sordida? Zur Frage der sozialen Schichtung frühchristlicher Gemeinden am Beispiel Karthagos zur Zeit Tertullians*, Münster 1985, 294–9, accepts the number of 70 bishops as plausible for 220 without further discussion. Less optimistic about the dissemination of Christianity in North Africa at the

We have now largely exhausted the explicit source material for Agrippinus. Indirect, but inconclusive indications for the dating of the council are contained in Tertullian's most polemical work, *De pudicitia*, written around 220.⁹⁶ As has been mentioned, it is not possible to identify the opponent attacked in *De pudicitia* as Agrippinus on the basis of this work alone. Tertullian approached his adversary – often identified as Zephyrinus of Rome (199?-217?) or Calixtus I of Rome (217?-222?) – with rhetorical elegance, and does not reveal his name,⁹⁷ just as he treated another bishops on a previous occasion.⁹⁸ It is not even possible to presume on the basis of *De pudicitia* anything more than that the opponent was a bishop.⁹⁹

However, two passages provide some insight into Agrippinus's council. While Tertullian

time of Tertullian are V. Saxer, 'Das christliche Afrika (180-260)', in J.-M. Mayeur, L. Pietri and N. Brox (ed.), *Die Geschichte des Christentums*, Bd. I: *Die Zeit des Anfangs (bis 250)*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, 622–65, 622–41; Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 3–5. See also: D. E. Wilhite, *Ancient African Christianity: an introduction to a unique context and tradition*, London 2017, 79-107, with further bibliography.

⁹⁶ The dating of *De pudicitia* is controversial. For a classical chronology of Tertullian's writings, see Tertullianus, *Opera Montanistica*, E. Dekkers (ed.), CCSL 2, Turnhout 1954, 1627–8. A complete and radical reconsideration of this list is offered by Barnes, *Tertullian*, 30–56, which he revised at several points for the second edition of his study, 1985, 326-329. The updated chronology places *De pudicitia* around 212, and is the predominant dating under scholars. Cf. Rankin, *Tertullian*, xvii; W. Tabbernee, 'To Pardon or not to Pardon? North African Montanism and the Forgiveness of Sins', *Studia patristica* 36 (2001), 375–86, 376; *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire: the witness of Tertullian*, Q. S. F. Tertullianus and R. D. Sider (ed.), Washington, D.C. 2001, xi-xvii; G. D. Dunn, *Tertullian*, London 2004, 5-6; D. E. Wilhite, *Tertullian the African: An Anthropological Reading of Tertullian's Context and Identities*, Berlin/New York 2007, 170. A rather conservative alternative is offered by J.-C. Fredouille, *Tertullien et la conversion de la culture antique*, Paris 1972, 487–8. He situates *De pudicitia* after 217. Independently, Tränkle, '§ 474. Q. Septimius Florens Tertullianus', 498 suggests a date after 212. For a discussion of Barnes' methodology see T. Georges, *Kommentar zu frühchristlichen Apologeten; Vol. 11: Tertullian, 'Apologeticum'*, Freiburg 2011, 19-20. As Micaelli, 'Introduction', 15-38 emphasised, the crucial point of every dating attempt depends on the identification of the famous "*pontifex maximus, quod est episcopus episcoporum*" (*De pudicitia* 1.6, CCSL 2, 1281-82) either with Calixtus I, the bishop of Rome, or with a local, viz. Carthaginian bishop. If the bishop in question is Calixtus, then the treatise had to be written after 217/218. Otherwise, an earlier dating, as Barnes suggested, is well conceivable. R. E. Heine, 'The beginnings of Latin Christian literature', in F. M. Young (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, Cambridge/New York 2004, 131–41, 133 considers a late dating as a reasonable possibility. We have sympathies with the latter position, even if an early dating would further reduce the probability of the Agrippinian episcopacy during the times of Tertullian and thus strengthen our core argument.

⁹⁷ Tertullian, *De pudicitia* 1.6 (CCSL 2, 1281-82).

⁹⁸ *De pudicitia* is not the only work penned by Tertullian in which he does not call a bishop by name. He did the same with another Roman bishop, probably Victor I, whom he held responsible for the rescinding fellowship from the 'New Prophets' at Rome. See Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 1.5 in *Tertullianus: Opera Montanistica*, E. Dekkers (ed.), CCSL 2, Turnhout 1954, 1159-60. For the argumentation in favour of Victor, see A. Handl, 'Viktor I. (189?-199?) von Rom und die Entstehung des "monarchischen" Episkopats in Rom', *Sacris Erudiri* 55 (2016), 7–56, 42–6.

⁹⁹ Made obvious when he addresses his opponent in *De pudicitia* 1.6 (CCSL 2, 1281-82); 21.5 (CCSL 2, 1326) as '*apostolice*', in 13.7 (CCSL 2, 1306) as '*benedictus papa*', and in 22.1 (CCSL 2, 1328) at the passage in which he refers to 'your martyrs'.

mentions a ‘*concilio ecclesiarum*’ on the ‘canonical’ authority of the Shepherd of Hermas in the first of these passages,¹⁰⁰ a second note proves unambiguously that this council cannot be identified with that of Agrippinus. At the end of the work, Tertullian emphasizes that the heretics ‘here, with us’, i.e. with the ‘New Prophets’, receive the true baptism in the form of a rebaptism before they are welcomed in the community.¹⁰¹ The stress on ‘*apud nos*’ in *De pudicitia* highlights the contrast with his opponent’s custom,¹⁰² who seems not to have practiced rebaptism for converted heretics – although Tertullian thinks it would be better to do so. Since Tertullian’s exhortation would be irrelevant if Agrippinus’s council had already decided in favour of rebaptism (a decision which would be in complete agreement with Tertullian’s approach in the light of Cyprian’s and Augustine’s testimonies),¹⁰³ we must conclude that the first documented African council presided over by Agrippinus did not convene before the composition of *De pudicitia*, i.e. not prior to the year 220.

¹⁰⁰ *De pudicitia* 10.12 (CCSL 2, 1301) and see Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, 32-3. Tertullian’s *De ieiunio* associates the phenomenon ‘council’ with the ‘Greeks’, thus with the eastern realm of the empire. What is more, Tertullian does not mention that similar, viz. supra-regional meetings took place in Carthage or in North Africa. Finally, it remains unclear, whether the ‘*concilio ecclesiarum*’ refers to a local, regional, supra-regional, or even a non North African gathering. See Tertullian, *De ieiunio adversus psychicos* 13.6-8 in *Tertullianus: Opera Montanistica*, E. Dekkers (ed.), CCSL 2, Turnhout 1954, 1272 and cf. infra note 102.

¹⁰¹ Tertullian, *De pudicitia* 19.5; 21.16-7 (CCSL 2, 1320; 1328).

¹⁰² D. Powell, ‘Tertullianists and Cataphrygians’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 29 (1975), 33–54 and D. Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, Cambridge 1995, 41-51 demonstrated that Tertullian never described himself as out of communion or being a member of another ecclesial body than the “catholic” church. The claim, however, that the community can be defined at best as an “*ecclesiola in ecclesia*”, is controversially discussed, because Tertullian made no reference explicitly, nor mentioned “Montanist churches” or “Montanist clergy”. W. Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments: Ecclesiastical and Imperial Reactions to Montanism*, Leiden/Boston 2007, 66 and cf. D. E. Wilhite, *Ancient African Christianity*, 113-114. Following the explanations of van der L. Jan [‘The Plebs of the Psychici: Are the Psychici of *De Monogamia* Fellow-Catholics of Tertullian?’], in G. J. M. Bartelink (ed.), *Eulogia: mélanges offerts à Antoon A. R. Bastiaensen à l’occasion de son soixante-cinquième anniversaire*, Steenbrugis 1991, 353–63], D. E. Wilhite [‘The Spirit of Prophecy: Tertullian’s Pauline Pneumatology’, in T. D. Still and D. E. Wilhite (ed.), *Tertullian and Paul*, New York 2013, 45–70, here 46-50] refuses the suggestion that Tertullian belonged to any (sub)group or faction and suggests that “Tertullian was simply in good standing with his Carthaginian Christian community”. Moreover, one has also to note that there is no indication of councils held exclusively by the “New Prophets” in North Africa.

¹⁰³ See M. Labrousse, ‘Le baptême des hérétiques d’après Cyprien, Optat et Augustin: influence et divergences’, *Revue des Études Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 42 (1996), 223–42; MacGaw, *Le problème*, 134–59; E. Ferguson, *Baptism in the early church: history, theology, and liturgy in the first five centuries*, Grand Rapids 2009, 336–99; MacGaw, ‘Tradition et transmission. Augustin, Cyprien et la question du baptême dans le contexte du schisme donatiste’.

Given the obviously polemical nature of the Calixtus section in the *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, it is reasonable to be sceptical of previous endeavours to link this with a Carthaginian council in 220.¹⁰⁴ At least three arguments can be advanced against the presupposition that the second baptism (δεύτερος βάπτισμα) mentioned in the *Refutatio*¹⁰⁵ has any connections with Agrippinus's council. First, the claims in the *Refutatio* remain very vague, to such a degree that it is impossible to reconstruct the precise extent and objective of this second baptism, let alone to interpret it as a reference to the rebaptism of heretics. Second, the inner logic of the *Refutatio* actually runs counter to such an interpretation. Following the passage about Calixtus,¹⁰⁶ the author presents the Elcesaites,¹⁰⁷ a group that also administers a second baptism (of their own group members, not of converts), and for this reason they are depicted as lax about sin and the sinner.¹⁰⁸ The reference to the second baptism (but also to the forgiveness of sins), which occurs precisely in the concluding lines of the Calixtus section, is by no means coincidental, but rather illustrates the author's heresiological method, the *successio haereticorum*. The author's efforts to associate both heresies with each other is obvious: he uses keywords like 'second baptism' or 'forgiving' and no less than three times explicitly describes Calixtus as the forerunner of Alcibiades of Apamea, the promoter of Elchasai's teaching in Rome.¹⁰⁹ In the light of the sparse evidence, it is not possible to decide whether Calixtus's 'second baptism' is merely a *topos* from the author's anti-heretical toolbox, or whether it is a half-truth based on a true core.¹¹⁰ Finally, it is not clear why the author would discuss a development in the Calixtus section which took

¹⁰⁴ Recently in Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan*, 48; Fischer and Lumpe, *Die Synoden von den Anfängen bis zum Vorabend des Nicaenums*, 51, 154; MacGaw, *Le problème*, 134–5.

¹⁰⁵ *Refutatio* 9.12.26 (GCS 16,3, 251).

¹⁰⁶ *Refutatio* 9.11-2 (GCS 16,3, 245-251).

¹⁰⁷ *Refutatio* 9.13-7 (GCS 16,3, 251-255). See also C. Colpe, 'Die "elkesaitische Unternehmung" in Rom, ihre Hintergründe und ihre mögliche Einwirkung auf das Häresienbild des Bischofs Hippolyt', in E. Dassmann and J. Engemann (ed.), *Chartulae: Festschrift für Wolfgang Speyer*, Münster, Westfalen 1998, 57–69.

¹⁰⁸ *Refutatio* 9.13.4-5 and 9.15 (GCS 16,3, 252-254).

¹⁰⁹ *Refutatio* 9.13.1; 9.13.4-5 (GCS 16,3, 251-252).

¹¹⁰ See Handl, *Calixtus I*.

place far away in Carthage and had nothing to do with his actual episcopal opponent in Rome.¹¹¹

IV. Conclusion

What, then, can we know with certainty about the historical person Agrippinus? Our initial question has not received a satisfactory answer: in fact we know very little. Based on the available sources, what we do know is that Agrippinus was the first bishop of Carthage for whom we have certain historical evidence. Second, as bishop, he participated in a council that rejected the validity of heretical baptisms. Due to their limited and vague references, the sources do not allow any further definite conclusions.

The observations we have made in this article, however, reduce, even if they do not exclude, the likelihood of some commonly suggested assumptions about Agrippinus and his council. As far as this council is concerned, it is highly likely that the first Carthaginian council recorded with certainty did not convene prior to the composition of *De pudicitia*. If we follow the chronology of Tertullian's writing, the council, and therefore also Agrippinus's episcopate, cannot be situated before 213, or even before 220, depending on the dating of *De pudicitia*. A *terminus ante quem* arises from the start of Donatus's episcopal career. We know very little about Donatus, but it is possible (but not likely) that he became a bishop first around 247/248, shortly before Cyprian entered the scene. This leaves us with a period of about 34 years in which the council must theoretically have taken place – between 213 and 247. We have presented a number of arguments that the council gathered not around the turn of the century, nor in the first two decades of the third century, but rather in 230 or afterwards.

¹¹¹ Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan*, 48, for example, believes that the similarities between the *Refutatio* and *De pudicitia* can be explained by such a consideration. However, Döllinger, *Hippolytus und Kallistus*, 175–6 and A. d'Alès, *La théologie de Saint Hippolyte*, Paris 1906, 60–1 already pointed out, not without good reason, the difficulty of such a notion.

Our most important clues are Cyprian's and Augustine's corresponding time indications. Cyprian's statement 'numerous years and a long time ago', in addition to being rhetorical and thus tending to overstate the actual time period, probably does not mean a period longer than 25-30 years. We suspect that a shorter time span is likely, as a similar time specification in relation to the Council of Lambesis suggests. In the case of this council, the expression 'many years' only referred to a period of 12 to 16 years at most. Despite the fact that he was writing 150 years later, Augustine confirmed a maximum time span of 16 years by situating Agrippinus's council only 'a few years' prior to Cyprian's episcopate. Additionally, the 70 participating bishops, a high number for North Africa, is more likely to fit the 230s-40s. Evidence for gatherings of bishops of this magnitude has been found for the first time around Cyprian's period.

The fact that the council over which Agrippinus presided most likely took place around 235 does not categorically rule out the possibility that Agrippinus was already bishop of Carthage more than 15-20 years prior to the council, nor does it discount the possibility that he may have opposed Tertullian in the dispute about adultery described in *De pudicitia*. It is, however, very difficult either to prove or discount this assertion. All the more so because there is no indication in *De pudicitia* that implies any kind of connection with Agrippinus. Additionally, the late date of the Carthaginian council – around or after 235, as we have contended – reduces rather than increases the likelihood that the anonymous bishop was Agrippinus. Based on a thorough examination of the available source material, we feel compelled to state that it can no longer be maintained that the anonymous bishop attacked by Tertullian was Agrippinus.