

Religious transformation in Roman North Africa and Egypt:
The transition from Paganism to Christianity in Carthage,
Alexandria, and Hippo Regius under Roman influence.

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Abstract

The proposed research will investigate the religious transformation in three key cities of Roman North Africa and Egypt: Carthage, Hippo Regius and Alexandria. The research will focus on the transition from paganism and polytheism to Christianity under Roman influence. It will address the following questions:

1. How did Roman governance shape the religious transformation?
2. What role did local traditions and socio-political structures play in the adoption of Christianity?

These cities were chosen due to their dependence on Rome and their unique socio-political and cultural complexity during Christianisation. These specific regions offer insight into how Roman governance and African traditions interacted during the process.

Carthage served as the ecclesiastical seat when Christianity became established; Hippo Regius was the founding place of Bishop Augustine's church and theological contributions; and Alexandria witnessed the interchange of Hellenistic, Egyptian and Christian traditions (Burns and Jenson, 2014). Carthage and Hippo Regius, as "Romanised" regions, represent Latin-speaking provinces, whereas Alexandria reflects a multicultural hub with Greek and Egyptian influences (Haas, 1997). This comparative approach offers a dual focus on Roman imperial influence and local dynamics, contributing to a broader understanding of Christianisation across the regions cultural and social landscape.

The objective of this research is to assess the development of Christianity as a complex interaction between the Roman imperial authority and the local traditions, as well as analysing this regionally distinct process shaped by local traditions and socio-political structures. Key laws, such as Constantine's edict of Milan and Theodosius's decrees banning pagan practices in the late 4th century, exemplify Rome's imperial influence in shaping the religious transition. The research will partly challenge the traditional top-down narratives by proposing that Christianisation was not a unilateral imposition but a complex negotiation between the contrasting cultural dynamics.

This will provide an overall framework for the adaptation of the imperial faith in Carthage, Hippo Regius, and Alexandria. However, while Rome's policies were significant, much of the acceptance was still relied heavily on its interaction with local cultures, social structures, and intellectual settings in these regions. The proposed research will incorporate literary sources, archaeological evidence, such as inscriptions and church ruins to balance the traditional views of top-down Christianisation. This study will build on the foundational works of existing scholarship, including Ramsay MacMullen (1984) and Robin Lane Fox (1988). Both emphasise the role of imperial policy and power in facilitating the spread of Christianity, particularly through extensive measures such as laws against pagan practices, offering a refined perspective of regional diversity.

My proposed research will certainly give credit to Rome's influence on the matter, though it does challenge the notion of the top-down imposition. Instead, it illustrates a refined view that each region was shaped differently in its adoption to Christianity, influenced by local cultural traditions and socio-political dynamics.

Scholars Christopher Haas (1997) and David Frankfurter (1998) have examined the theological and intellectual interactions and how Egyptian practices were absorbed into Christian rituals. For my research, I propose building on Haas's (1997) and Frankfurter's (1998) insights into Alexandria's transition, which was influenced by Christianity's broader ability to adapt to multicultural settings. Comparing Alexandria's theological synthesis with the pastoral development in North Africa demonstrates the diversity of Christianisation across the Roman Empire.

The study's scope will span from the 3rd to 5th centuries CE from early conversions to the institutionalisation of Christianity. Through this lens, the dissertation will highlight the transformation of Christianity from an imperial faith to a religion adopted to local regions within Rome's vast empire.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In Late Antiquity, Christianity moved from being a marginal and often contested religion to one that increasingly shaped public life in the Roman world. In this dissertation, 'Christianisation' refers to the gradual process through which Christianity became increasingly established within the public, institutional and everyday life of Roman cities. It therefore involved more than people simply converting to Christianity and included changes in religious authority, sacred space, law, communal identity and everyday practice (Frankfurter, 2018, pp. 1-17).

This dissertation investigates how pagan civic religion was gradually displaced and reorganised as Christian public life expanded in Roman North Africa and Egypt. It is contended here that this transformation cannot be explained by imperial policy alone, and this study examines how imperial influence and local agency interacted to produce distinct methods of Christianisation in Carthage, Alexandria, and Hippo Regius between the third and fifth centuries CE. More specifically, it examines whether Christianisation should be understood primarily as the result of imperial legislation and patronage, or as a gradual process shaped through the interaction of local Christian communities, episcopal leadership and Roman authority. Rather than treating Christianisation as the simple outcome of imperial edicts and top down pressures, this study reframes it as an interaction between imperial authority from above and local action from below. This leads to the central argument which will expand on Christianisation as a two-way process.

Imperial governance mattered greatly. Legislation, patronage, and administrative enforcement altered what forms of worship were permitted and which religious institutions received imperial protection. From Constantine onwards, imperial involvement also increasingly shaped debates over Christian doctrine, although the definition of orthodoxy remained contested throughout much of the fourth century (Ayres, 2004; Hanson, 1988). However, these "permissions and pressures" did not operate mechanically. The practical reshaping of public religion depended on city-level decisions about space, time, authority, and identity. What buildings were reused or newly built, how festivals and processions were redirected, which leaders gained civic authority, and how Christian belonging was signalled in inscriptions, burial, and urban routines. The dissertation therefore asks not only what changed, but how that change was made durable in everyday urban life.

To address this, the study pursues four linked aims set out below:

- 1) to identify measurable signs of religious transformation in each city (in law, space, institutions, and public identity);
- 2) to explain why the same imperial framework produced different local pathways;
- 3) to assess the relative weight of imperial action and local leadership in driving change;
- 4) and finally, to integrate textual and material evidence so that Christianisation is not reduced to a purely legal or doctrinal narrative.

Carthage represents a Latin-speaking North African hub where councils, clerical authority, and elite patronage helped institutionalise Christianity. Alexandria provides a contrasting multilingual metropolis in which religious plurality, civic associations, and highly visible sacred topography produced a different dynamic. Hippo Regius offers a different scale and a different evidential lens, linked to Augustine's episcopate, it allows the dissertation to examine Christianisation as parish routine, preaching, arbitration, charity, and burial, through which Christian norms became socially central in town and hinterland.

Methodological approach and key concepts

To keep the analysis comparable, the dissertation uses a consistent indicator framework. Across each city, it tracks how change became visible through laws and edicts, architecture and landscape, language and administration; privileges and offices; funding and property; traditions and calendar; local leaders; space decisions; and identity signals. The evidence base is intentionally mixed. Methodologically, the research integrates textual sources (imperial legislation, ecclesiastical histories, councils and canons, sermons and letters) with material culture (church architecture, funerary landscapes, inscriptions, and documentary traces of administration). It is also important to recognise that assessing change in Late Antique cities can be difficult because the surviving evidence is uneven between the cities. Humphries shows that written and archaeological evidence can present different views of urban change, while the amount of surviving material also varies between sites (Humphries, 2019, pp. 10–12). Because of this, textual and material evidence need to be considered together, while also keeping in mind that some differences between the cities may reflect the evidence that survives.

In terms of scope and timeframe, this study focuses on Roman North Africa and Egypt from the third to the fifth centuries CE, because this is the period in which Christianity moves from a legally insecure minority presence to a religion capable of organising public institutions and reshaping civic life. The third century is used as the starting point because it represents a period in which civic cult remained the default public religion and Christian communities could face empire-wide tests of loyalty, before toleration and public privilege reshaped the terms of religious participation. The end point is intentionally uneven: for Africa, the Vandal capture of Carthage (439) marks a structural change in political authority that alters church property and episcopal security, whereas Alexandria remains within the Eastern empire, providing a comparative counterpoint. With regards to geographical focus, “North Africa” here refers principally to the Roman provinces centred on the cities of Carthage and Hippo Regius, while “Egypt” is represented through Alexandria.

‘Paganism’ is a contested modern umbrella label, but it remains widely used in scholarship as a convenient term for non-Christian polytheistic religious practices in the Roman world. Humphries also points out that the term can hide the variety of religious practices and identities that existed within Roman society (Humphries, 2018, p. 62). In this study it refers primarily to temple-centred public rites, sacrifices, festivals and priesthoods rather than a single coherent religion (Salzman, 2002, pp. 270–271, n. 7). Building on scholarship that treats Christianisation as a change in public life, this study uses ‘Christian public life’ to mean Christianity operating openly as an urban institution through churches as public spaces, organised charity, discipline, and recognised civic authority. ‘Christianisation’ is therefore used here to describe the gradual shift in a city’s spaces, calendar, institutions, and visible identity towards Christian norms, rather than simply counting how many individuals converted (Markus, 1990, pp. 1–17; Cameron, 2012, pp. 1–14; Leone, 2013, pp. 1–12).

To give further definitional clarity, ‘Roman influence’ refers to the imperial reshaping of religious conditions through law, patronage, and enforcement, while “local agency” refers to the city-level negotiation of those conditions through the choices of leaders and communities. In the context of the third to fifth centuries, however, “Roman” cannot be treated simply as a synonym for pagan religion or direct imperial control. Roman identity also rested on law, citizenship, civic participation, education, language and attachment to imperial institutions. This is important because Christians could reject sacrifice to the traditional gods while still presenting themselves as loyal Roman subjects and drawing upon Roman political and literary culture.

Christianisation therefore did not involve a straightforward rejection of Roman identity, but a redefinition of what Roman loyalty and public religion could mean. “Roman influence” in this study therefore describes not only imperial intervention, but also the wider political and cultural framework within which Christian and civic identities were contested, adapted and combined.

Rational for a case study approach: why Carthage, Alexandria and Hippo Regius?

This section justifies the selection of Carthage, Alexandria, and Hippo Regius as the dissertation’s three case studies. They share the same broad imperial turning points but differ in civic culture and social composition and each offers a different but complementary body of sources through which religious transformation can be measured.

Carthage is selected as the strongest case for institutional and council-driven Christianisation in Latin North Africa. By the mid 3rd century Christianity was firmly established in Carthage and other Tunisian towns, supported by early martyr and literary visibility and by a regional episcopal network attested by the council of Carthage in 256 (Abun-Nasr, 2026). This proves significant as Carthage starts the 4th-5th century transition from a different baseline than the others.

The author Tertullian was active in Carthage around the late second and early third centuries and he played an important role in the development of Latin Christian theology and vocabulary, becoming one of the earliest major Christian authors to write extensively in Latin (Houghton, 2016, pp. 5, 7). His output, alongside other African Christian writing, suggests a church large and confident enough for sustained argument and teaching. The martyrdom of Perpetua in 203 and the circulation and church reading of her passion helped mould early Christianity as a shared public identity in the city (Houghton, 2016, p. 5; *Passio Perpetuae* 1.1–6).

Carthage is especially rich in archaeology and epigraphy, providing tangible evidence for assessing the visibility and spread of Christianity (Ennabli, 1991, pp.24-35). In the three-city design, Carthage provides a strong baseline for tracing how imperial change was stabilised locally through councils, patronage, and civic-scale institution building, against which Alexandria’s metropolitan dynamics and Hippo’s parish routine can be compared.

Hippo Regius has been chosen because it captures Christianisation in a setting that is neither an imperial metropolis nor a provincial council-capital. Hippo was an ancient coastal settlement and a Roman civic community that developed from *municipium* to *colonia*, giving a clear example of how Roman civic structures developed within an older North African setting (Mrozewicz, 2013, pp. 209–212).

Unlike Alexandria, where the archaeological evidence is uneven and narrative flashpoints dominate, Hippo provides a strong textual window onto local practice through Augustine, bishop from 396 to 430 CE. He left a vast body of sermons and letters that illuminate how Christian norms were established through preaching, pastoral discipline, charity, and dispute settlement (O’Donnell, 2005, pp. 91-100, 147-169). These texts are especially valuable because they show Christianisation operating through repeated acts of persuasion, discipline and institutional regulation rather than through legislation alone.

This makes Hippo particularly valuable for a two-way model of Christianisation. Augustine’s sermons and letters provide an unusually rich access to local practice and show that Christianisation required constant local negotiation, not just laws from above. As a harbour town controlling a substantial hinterland, Hippo was closely connected to the surrounding region, providing a useful setting for examining Christianisation beyond the urban centre itself

(Saddington, 2008, p.21; Warmington and Wilson, 2015). Augustine's sermons and letters repeatedly show him dealing with people arriving from the wider region, including landowners, clergy, litigants, and the poor, so that Christianisation can be analysed as a regional process of persuasion, welfare, and governance rather than a purely urban phenomenon.

To balance the Latin African evidence from Carthage and Hippo, Alexandria provides an Eastern, multilingual urban setting. Here Christianisation is captured in a city famous for its intellectual life and where Christianity developed in sustained interaction with Greek education philosophical culture. Alexandria also offers a clear way to track Christianisation through contested sacred space. A well-known marker is the destruction of the Serapeum in 391, which illustrates how shifts in imperial policy could be translated locally into changes in the city's religious landscape (Dijkstra, 2020, pp. 286–305). This city is particularly useful for the dissertation two-way framework because the evidence shows that imperial influence operated through local power structures, rather than overriding them directly. Haas argues that many of the Alexandrian ethnic groups competed for social dominance and cultural control, but their rivalry often produced violence and made worse when imperial intervention tipped the balance toward one side (Haas, 1997). The resulting conflicts are unusually well documented and expose the city's leadership structures and communal boundaries, allowing historians to analyse Alexandria as a case study in multicultural urban dynamics. In the three-city design, Alexandria therefore functions as the clearest case for testing Christianisation as a public, city scale process where sacred space, authority, and civic order are contested.

Top-down and ground-up approaches

This dissertation adopts a two-way framework because 'Christianisation' is best understood as a gradual reorganisation of public religion. Indeed, the same imperial conditions did not produce the same outcomes in each case study. A purely "top-down" account rightly emphasises the role of the Roman state at the centre of analysis by its legislation, patronage and administrative enforcement altered what forms of worship could be practised openly, which institutions could own property and organise publicly, and which Christian positions were treated legitimate. A framework centred solely on imperial initiatives risks overlooking how these changes affected the practical realities of civic life on the ground and how these changes were negotiated. MacMullen's approach remains useful here because it treats Christianisation as a historical process that depended on social mechanisms and practical motivations, rather than assuming a simple rise in piety or a single dramatic conversion moment (MacMullen, 1984). He questions what made people switch in everyday life, focusing on the inner workings of social groups such as influence, authority, material support and the reputation of Christian power. But it is a recognition that even if laws change, people still need social and practical reasons to join and remain within a faith.

A further criticism of a purely top-down model is that it cannot explain the uneven, city-specific character of Christianisation. Even under shared imperial turning points, the transition took different speeds and forms depending on local institutions, sacred geographies, and community structures. Lane Fox's emphasis on the coexistence of pagan and Christian practices in everyday civic life helps clarify why Christianisation was not a clean rupture. Older rituals and social habits could persist, overlap, or be redirected rather than instantly abolished (Lane Fox, 1986). Markus likewise frames late antique change as a transformation in the organisation of public and social life, in which Christian identity became embedded through institutions and habits, not simply declared through legislation (Markus, 1990, pp. 107-136). This is crucial for the present dissertation because it shifts the question from "what did the emperor decree?" to "how did cities actually reconfigure their public religion?". These studies

support a basic methodological premise: laws can change what is possible, but cities change through the choices of local actors working within those legal and cultural conditions.

The “ground-up”, or local agency, side of the two-way model explains religious transformation by shifting attention from imperial decisions alone to the processes through which those decisions were translated into everyday practice. Local agency refers here to observable urban actors and mechanisms that can be studied. This included bishops and clergy implementing discipline and charity, local officials mediating enforcements and public order, households adopting or resisting new moral and ritual norms; elites funding building and shaping civic respectability; and monks and other groups taking part in crowds and processions. Haas’s study of Alexandria shows why these local dynamics matter. He argues that rivalry between different communities in a multicultural city could lead to instability and violence, while imperial intervention could make these conflicts worse by strengthening one side and disrupting existing balances (Haas, 1997, pp. 278–315). This shows how the same wider imperial framework could produce different results depending on the local situation. Local leadership, crowd mobilisation and disputes over sacred space therefore helped mediate how imperial policy worked in practice. Frankfurter’s study of Egypt supports this argument from a different direction. He shows that Christianisation developed within local settings through the adaptation of existing practices and social sites rather than being imposed in the same way everywhere (Frankfurter, 2018, pp. 15, 24–31). Together, these approaches support the use of local agency as an important part of Christianisation rather than treating religious change as a mechanical result of imperial preference.

To keep this two-way framework analytically testable, the dissertation operationalises it through consistent set of indicators that capture both imperial conditions and local translate. On the imperial side, laws and edicts, privileges and offices, funding and property, and administrative enforcement establish the ‘permissions and pressures’ under which religious life could be practiced and regulated. On the local side, traditions and calendar, local leadership, space decisions, and identity signals show how those conditions were enacted in practice.

Local communities helped translate religious change into civic practice by reorganising festivals and commemorative time, reusing or abandoning traditional sacred spaces, mobilising believers around Christian institutions, and making Christian identity increasingly visible within the urban environment. The same broad imperial framework is held constant, while Carthage, Alexandria, and Hippo Regius allow the analysis to test how different civic structures and profiles produced distinct local pathways to Christian public life. The next section therefore turns to the sources and material evidence used to trace these indicators, and the limitations that shape what can be claimed from each type of evidence.

Key Sources

This dissertation relies on a mixed evidence base because the transition from pagan civic religion to Christian public life is visible in different ways across the regions. Christianisation reorganises public religion that becomes visible in multiple registers: legal status, institutional authority, sacred space, commemorative practice and everyday administration. In North Africa, religious transformation is most often traced through the built environment and epigraphic evidence, whereas in Egypt it is more clearly visible through the abundance of documentary papyri and administrative records. The aim of this section is therefore to clarify which sources are used, what each can show, and how their limits are managed through triangulation. In practice, this means comparing different types of evidence against each other rather than relying on one source alone. Legal and literary texts can show how religious change was

described or intended, while archaeology, inscriptions and documentary evidence can show how far those changes were visible in practice. Where the evidence does not fully agree, these differences are treated as part of the analysis rather than assuming that one type of source gives the complete picture.

Legal and administrative material is drawn upon heavily in this work in order to establish the imperial “permissions and pressures” that shaped what could be done quickly. Laws and rescripts are treated as the language of governance showing how the state intended to regulate worship and property as well as an institutional tool available to Christian leaders, rather than as a record of automatic compliance.

For the Egyptian context, the dissertation relies heavily on documentary papyri, which captures everyday practice rather than only formal policy in Alexandria. Luijendijk’s (2008) study of papyri from the Great Persecution proves important here because it shows how documentary texts can register both official enforcement and Christian responses.

The late nineteenth-century discovery of the Oxyrhynchus papyri greatly expanded the available evidence for everyday life in Roman Imperial era and late antique Egypt. Oxyrhynchus is situated in Middle Egypt, approximately 400 kilometres south of Alexandria, and its surviving documents should therefore not be treated as direct evidence for conditions within the capital itself. Nevertheless, its location within the wider networks of Roman Egypt makes the collection valuable for understanding the practical and intellectual connections that linked provincial communities with Alexandria. Although the papyri include biblical, theological and other literary texts, much of the collection consists of administrative and personal material, including tax records, legal documents, receipts and private correspondence (Grenfell and Hunt, 1898, pp. 62-239). The evidence therefore cannot reconstruct Alexandrian Christianity directly, but it provides a valuable comparison for how Christian ideas, texts and institutional practices developed across Alexandria and the wider Egyptian provinces. Whereas the North African material often reveals Christianisation through monuments, inscriptions and changes to the urban environment, the Egyptian papyri preserve the routine administrative traces of religious transformation.

Ecclesiastical narrative sources form another important body of evidence utilised in this dissertation because they preserve Christian interpretations of persecution, conversion, episcopal authority, and religious conflict. Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History is important for the earlier part of the dissertation because it provides one of the major surviving Christian narratives of the Church from its origins to the age of Constantine, including the persecutions before imperial favour (Eusebius, 1989). However, Eusebius must be read critically, since he presents the survival and eventual imperial recognition of Christianity as evidence of divine providence. His account is, therefore, not a neutral record of religious change, but a Christian interpretation that organises events around persecution, endurance and eventual victory (Eusebius, HE 1.1-4; 10.1-4; Cameron and Hall, 1999).

For the Carthage case study, Cyprian’s letters are particularly valuable because they reveal the organisation and authority of the North African Church before Constantine. The writings provide evidence for episcopal leadership and correspondence between Christian communities, showing that forms of local Christian authority were already developing before Christianity received public support from the Roman state (Cyprian, Ep. 55.6-8; Ep.67.1-5). Texts such as the Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs, the Passion of Perpetua and Felicity, the Passion of Cyprian, and later Donatist martyr stories show how martyrdom became part of Christian identity and communal memory in the region (Musurillo, 1972; Tilley, 1996). In the North African context,

martyr memory was especially important because both Nicaean and Donatist communities appealed to the legacy of persecution to legitimise their own claims to be the true Church. Overall, ecclesiastical narrative sources can often be valuable by virtue of their biases: they show how Christian writers wanted the events of persecution, conversion and conflict to be understood and remembered.

The dissertation also uses African conciliar and canonical evidence including council canons, conference acts and the ecclesiastical rulings produced by bishops. They are especially important because the churches in North Africa held frequent councils and made collective episcopal decisions together as a body of church leaders (Merdinger, 1997). This is then reflected in the later collection known as the Code of Canons of the African Church, associated with Carthage in 418-419 CE, which gathered and reaffirmed earlier African canons (Munier, 1974). Put simply, imperial legislation tells us what the emperors ordered, but the conciliar evidence shows what bishops tried to regulate in practice. For the dissertation, these sources clarify the bishop's role in actively shaping Christian life through rules about clergy, baptism, discipline, church property, schism, appeals and relations with rival Christian groups.

For Hippo, the dissertation uses Augustine's sermons and letters as its strongest window onto local practice, because they show a bishop responding to the everyday problems of his community. His sermons reveal the repeated concerns of episcopal teaching, including moral discipline, religious habits, biblical instruction and the correction of practices that bishops considered improper. Alongside the sermons, Augustine's letters are valuable because they show him responding to specific disputes, individuals, officials and rival Christian groups. They are especially important for understanding the Donatist controversy and the attempt to define and defend Catholic authority against other Christian claims in North Africa (Augustine, 1994; 1995; 2001; 2003; Tilley, 1997).

Finally, this study uses archaeological, epigraphic, and built environment evidence to trace the material visibility of Christianisation within North Africa. The archaeology shows how Christianisation involved a reorganisation of public and sacred space, making Christianity become a part of the visible landscape of North Africa. Damos-el-Karita is a useful example for the Carthage case study as it illustrates Christian space on a large urban scale. Dolenz's excavation report presents it as one of the most important Christian pilgrimage complexes in North Africa (Dolenz, 2001). Funerary inscriptions, in particular, show how Christian names, symbols and commemorative formulae became embedded in burial settings and other public displays, allowing individuals and communities to express their Christian identity in visible and lasting forms (Ennabli, 1991).

The dissertation proceeds in six chapters. Chapter 2 establishes the wider imperial context from the third to the fifth centuries, tracing the movement from periods of persecution and legal insecurity to toleration and the increasing public authority of Christianity. Chapter 3 turns to Carthage, examining how Christianisation developed in a major North African urban centre. Chapter 4 considers Alexandria as a contrasting eastern and multilingual metropolis, where Christianisation rises through the religious plurality. Chapter 5 focuses on Hippo Regius, using Augustine's sermons and letters to examine Christianisation at the level of local pastoral practice. Chapter 6 then compares the three case studies through the dissertation's indicator framework, assessing how laws, institutions, sacred space and leadership developed differently in each city. The conclusion draws these findings together and argues the process of Christianisation under Roman influence and local development as a negotiated transformation produced through the interaction of imperial permissions and city level agency.

Chapter 2: The Wider Imperial Context

This chapter sets the shared context for Carthage, Alexandria, and Hippo Regius by tracing how imperial politics and law reshaped public religion between c. 235 and 439 CE. As previously noted, I employ a consistent set of indicators for comparative purposes, including laws and edicts, architecture and landscape, language and administration, privileges and offices, funding and property, traditions and calendar, local leaders, space decisions, and identity signals. These will be applied to later chapters to measure the pace, form and extent of Christianisation, and the imperial and local drivers in each city. In order to provide finer grained analysis, a series of key chronological phases (235–305; 306–337; 379–392; 429–439 CE) are employed. This helps organise the chapter around major empire wide changes and their impacts on Carthage, Alexandria, and Hippo Regius. Then examining how those imperial conditions played out on the ground and what this sets up for each of the case studies. Defining the permissions and pressures under which each city negotiated its own path from pagan to Christian public life.

235–305 CE

Across the later third century CE, the religious character of cities in the Roman Empire remained visibly and institutionally rooted in traditional cult. This was not simply the survival of isolated pagan practices, but the result of centuries of accumulated temples, priesthoods, festivals, sacrifices and imperial and local rituals that continued to organise civic space and public time (Leone, 2013, pp. 15–33; Haas, 1997, pp. 1–20). In 250 CE, Decius issued an empire-wide order requiring inhabitants to perform public sacrifice to the Roman gods, with compliance recorded through certificates known as *libelli*, many of which survive from Egypt (Hall, 2006, p. 470; Schubert, 2016, p. 172). For Christians, the requirement created a serious conflict with their rejection of sacrifice to the traditional gods. For Christians who refused to sacrifice, non-compliance could lead to punishment, imprisonment and in some cases, death. The universal requirement therefore placed Christian communities under severe pressure. Under Valerian, two edicts in 257 and 258 were issued to further target Christians, whilst maintaining the Romans traditional faith. The first edict restricted Christian assemblies and access to cemeteries, while bishops and deacons were ordered to perform sacrifice or face exile, as was recorded from Dionysius of Alexandria's report, preserved by Eusebius (Eusebius, HE 7.10-7.11). The measures hardened, with the second edict targeting the clergy and assemblies. This ultimately brought the execution of the African bishop Cyprian of Carthage in 258 CE, a memory that would shape North African Christianity and debates (Eusebius, HE 7.10–11; Possidius, 2000: xv–xvi).

Using the set indicators, we can see that “pagan” religious calendars, traditional civic festivals and imperial celebrations continued to organise public life, while the Christian liturgical calendar had not yet displaced established practices (Leone, 2013, pp. 11–12). In terms of spatial organisation, Alexandria's established urban layout remained important. The Via Canopica continued to provide the principal route for civic and religious processions, while later Christian authorities adapted existing urban spaces rather than fundamentally redesigning the city (Haas, 1997, pp. 81–88, 206–214). Christianity, nevertheless, had an established institutional presence by the late third century, including churches and smaller congregations, even though it had not yet received the imperial patronage that followed Constantine (Haas, 1997, pp. 207–208).

This framework prepares the ground for the different urban trajectories examined in the case studies. In Carthage, imperial toleration and patronage created new opportunities for Christian institutions, but religious change was also shaped locally through episcopal councils, ecclesiastical regulation, elite support and the construction of basilicas. In Alexandria, the continued prominence of major traditional cult sites, including the Serapeum, meant that growing imperial support for Christianity altered an already contested religious landscape and intensified struggles over authority and sacred space. Hippo Regius offers a different perspective, revealing how Christianisation was negotiated through the everyday work of bishops and congregations, including preaching, charity, dispute settlement, commemoration and burial. These cities therefore did not follow a single model of change. Each translated wider imperial developments through its own institutions, communities and local conflicts.

303–337 CE

The period between 311–313 CE also saw the removal of legal barriers and fear initially held prior to this period, due to the legal toleration. During this period, Galerius issued the Edict of Toleration, formally halting the persecutions and allowing Christians to exist and assemble again. Only two years later, Licinius' letter marked a significant shift in imperial policy by granting Christian's freedom of worship and requiring the restoration of confiscated Christian property and places of assembly. These measures did not establish Christianity as an official state religion, but they transformed its legal position by permitting worship and requiring the restoration of confiscated property.

To ensure a consistent comparative framework, Chapters 3–5 analyse each city through the same set of indicators. I begin with funding and property, because legal restitution and new endowments are often the earliest conditions for visible Christian institutions. Due to property restoration, churches can again be legally used and begin the long process of repair, rebuilding and endowment, that later shows up archaeologically and epigraphically. Furthermore, bishops and clergy can act openly as recognised community leaders, which brings the following set of indicators, privileges and offices.

Constantine's early correspondence shows both the movement of African clergy across the western Empire and the extension of new privileges to the church supported by the imperial court. In 314 CE, for example, he ordered Caecilian and representatives of the opposing African party to travel with members of their clergy to the Council of Arles, demonstrating how an internal African dispute had become subject to imperial organisation and interregional episcopal judgement (Constantine, Letter to Aelafius). In a separate letter to the proconsul Anulinus, Constantine ordered that clergy serving the Church over which Caecilian presided should be exempted from compulsory civic services, so that they could devote themselves to religious duties (Eusebius, HE 10.7.1–2). These measures did not benefit all Christians equally, but strengthened the institutions and leadership recognised by the emperor.

Turning to language and administration, with the corporate life legal, Christian communities kept and circulated official letters, lists and administrative notices. This would be especially important for Egypt, where later papyri preserve how the Church acted as an institution, so Christianisation shows up as routine administration. These legal changes did not produce the same results everywhere. These developments established the different starting conditions explored in the subsequent case study chapters on Carthage, Alexandria and Hippo Regius.

The decades between Constantine's support for Christianity and the legislation introduced under Theodosius I were not simply a quiet gap between two major turning points. During this

period, imperial patronage strengthened the position of the Church, but Christianity remained divided over doctrine and leadership. The Arian controversy in particular shows that imperial support did not produce immediate unity, since emperors continued to intervene in disputes over which form of Christianity should receive official backing. A full account of these debates would take the discussion too far from the purpose of this chapter. They still need to be acknowledged, however, because they explain why the move towards a more clearly defined imperial orthodoxy at the end of the fourth century was gradual rather than automatic.

379–392 CE

A more decisive shift took place between 379 and 392, when imperial policy began to promote Nicene Christianity more consistently and place greater restrictions on public pagan cult. This phase matters because Christianity was no longer simply tolerated or favoured; one particular form of Christian belief was increasingly given official support. The First Council of Constantinople in 381 reinforced the authority of the Nicene settlement, although disputes over doctrine did not disappear. In the years that followed, imperial legislation drew sharper boundaries between Nicene Christians and rival groups that were increasingly described as heretical. Roman influence therefore moved beyond toleration and patronage towards the active direction of religious policy. At the same time, growing restrictions on public sacrifice and temple-centred worship began to affect the organisation of civic life, particularly the use of sacred space, public ritual and religious authority.

‘Architecture and landscape’ provide the clearest early signals of this shift, because new basilicas, altered sacred routes, and selective temple reuse are visible consequences of Nicene preference. As Christianity became increasingly associated with imperial legitimacy, it becomes politically and financially easier to build Christian buildings. Raising funds, securing sites and building basilicas in prominent places, although this still depended upon local conditions and could remain contested. This resulted in a shift in urban focal points as churches and shrines became more important public nodes. Christian processions also helped connect religious buildings with wider urban routes and provided a visible way of expressing religious authority and community identity (Brubaker and Wickham, 2021, pp. 146–149). This provides another way of showing how changes in religious authority could also become visible within the urban landscape. This is the clearest way to show that law becomes landscape. This legal climate also reshaped who held authority in cities. The bishops increasingly gained recognised public roles through privileges, judicial functions, and council governance. This meant the Church could function as a real public institution, running charities, enforcing discipline and providing resolution for disputes. In this phase ‘identity signals’ become easier to read because Nicene Christianity privileged status makes openly presenting as a Christian less risky and more socially accepted.

At Bulla Regia, for example, funerary mosaics use crosses, chi-rho, alpha and omega, while inscriptions commonly include the formula in pace (Fenwick et al. 2023, p.125). Now to identify how these indicators affected each city from 380 to 392. In Carthage, the Nicene preference creates the conditions for a more regulated, institutionally confident church. This phase prepares Carthage’s later pattern of a respectable civic Christianity, expressed through canons, donors and reshaping the martyr cemetery landscape. In Alexandria, Nicene preference matters because it lands in a city with major cult landmarks and intense communal politics. The pressure on public cult is more likely to generate high visibility conflicts over space and symbols. The same imperial shift tends to work less through spectacle and more through capacity within Hippo Regius. It strengthens bishops as local authorities, makes church charity more viable, and supports steady habit change at parish level. This phase sets up Hippo’s later

pattern, which is Christianisation through routine, preaching, arbitration, welfare, burial, rather than a single dramatic urban confrontation.

429-439 CE

The period 429-439 marked a structural break for North Africa. The arrival of the Vandals changed not only the political conditions under which African Christianity operated, but also the confessional balance of the region. Under Gaiseric, the Vandals crossed into Africa in 429 and advanced eastwards. Hippo Regius was besieged during Augustine's final illness, and although the city did not immediately fall during the siege itself, it later became an important centre of Vandal power. The capture of Carthage in 439 then shifted the region's political centre away from western Roman administration (Merrills and Miles, 2010, pp. 27–56, 109–140). The Vandals were themselves Christians but followed a Homoian theology that Nicene writers commonly described as "Arian". Their rule therefore introduced new tensions with the established Nicene episcopate, while Donatist communities, despite earlier imperial repression, had not disappeared (Whelan, 2014, pp. 504–521).

The result was not a straightforward conflict between Christianity and paganism, but a struggle between competing Christian institutions over property, episcopal authority and access to political protection. This matters for the dissertation because it changes the 'imperial weather' in Africa. This pivot applies to Carthage and Hippo, while Alexandria remains outside the Vandal sphere, continuing under eastern Roman control (Fournier, 2017; Conant, 2022). In this final turning point for African Christianisation, church property stops being a stable platform for growth and becomes a contested asset of rule. Under Roman preference funding and property would usually track institutional expansion (buildings, clergy support, charity, burial space). After the capture of Carthage, church property became a lever of rule rather than a stable base for growth, as key churches (including St Restituta) were transferred to the regime's clergy and confiscations likely extended to the church's landed estates (Mawdsley, 2016, pp. 79–81; Hydatius, Chron. 110). Without secure control of property, the church could not reliably fund clergy, charity, repairs, burial or infrastructure.

Hydatius reports that Gaiseric expelled the bishop and clergy of Carthage and handed the churches to the Arians (Hydatius, Chron. 110, in Burgess. 1993 p. 95). This is a direct link between conquest, clergy removal, and transfer of church assets. So, in this case when the ownership or access becomes unstable, Christianisation can become fragmented forcing communities to rely more on local strategies (patrons, informal worship, saints' cult and burial networks) to maintain continuity. In essence, imperial pressure creates constraints, but local practices decide continuity.

This phase also redefined who had control over the existing basilicas and cathedrals. Hydatius explicitly describes churches being handed to Arians after 439 CE (Hydatius, Chron. 110 in Burgess. 1993). This changes the Christianisation process because the most visible public expression of Christianity, cathedral worship, preaching, and clerical authority can now be channelled through the confession backed by the new regime. Contemporary scholarship notes that Gaiseric's early policies included prohibitions on Nicene meetings in Carthage, the confiscation of some ecclesiastical properties, and the exile of clerics, while the bishop Quodvultdeus and his clergy were banished after the conquest (Giovan do Nascimento and Magalhães de Oliveira, 2021, p. 202; González Salinero, 1996, p. 447). Crucially, this does not mean that individual Christian sects collapsed: Whelan emphasises that evidence for widespread church destruction or abandonment is limited and that churches remained in use, so the period is best read as confessional contest (Whelan, 2018, pp. 8–9).

Having established the shared turning points and the indicators used to track change, the dissertation now moves from imperial conditions to city-level evidence. Chapters 3–5 apply this framework to Carthage, Alexandria, and Hippo Regius, before Chapter 6 draws the comparative synthesis.

Chapter 3: Carthage

Carthage provides the dissertation's clearest example of institutional Christianisation in Latin North Africa. This was a city where Christian authority became organised through bishops, councils and public memory, making it useful for testing how local structures translated imperial change into Christian public life. The writings and episcopal activity of Cyprian, together with the mid-third century councils, show that North African Christianity possessed structures of leadership, discipline and regional communication before imperial patronage made Christianity publicly secure (Cyprian, Ep. 55; Cyprian, *Sententiae episcoporum*; Burns and Jensen, 2014). At the same time, martyr memory gave a powerful sense of sacred history for the Christian community, visible through surrounding figures such as Perpetua, Felicity and Cyprian (Musurillo, 1972; Tilley, 1996). This became especially important when later Nicaean and Donatist communities competed over which group represented the true African Church (Tilley, 1997).

Christianisation in Carthage was not just a transition from pagan to Christian but involved internal conflicts within the Christian communities. The chapter will also move from written texts to examine how Christianisation became visible in the built environment. Damous-el-Karita is the strongest site example that reveals Christian space operating at an urban scale, while funerary inscriptions show Christian identity becoming publicly legible in burial and commemoration (Dolenz, 2001). Carthage therefore shows Christianisation not as a single imperial event, but as a long process in which imperial support, local episcopal authority, contested Christian identity and material transformation combined to reshape public life.

Christianisation in the third century CE

Before examining Carthage's Christian institutions, it is necessary to establish the civic and religious landscape that Christianity entered and later transformed. Carthage was one of the most significant urban centres of Roman North Africa (Bockmann et al., 2018, p. 177). Its position on the Tunisian coast gave it strong Mediterranean connections, including its proximity to Italy via Sicily (Hunt, 2009, p. 137). Before Christian dominance, traditional civic religion in Carthage was deeply embedded in the structures of the city. Pagan worship was not simply a matter of private belief, but was expressed through temples, sacrifices, priesthoods, festivals and public ceremonies that affected the urban landscape (Rives, 1995). Christianisation, therefore, involved not only the reuse or decline of older sacred spaces, but also the gradual reshaping of the city's calendar and communal system.

Public religion was also connected to civic authority as it gave local elites the opportunity to display status through funding buildings, ceremonies and civic benefactions. This means that the transformation from pagan civic religion to Christian public life involved more than a change in personal belief. It affected the way public space, authority and communal identity were organised. Sacrifice is especially important here because it was one of the clearest ways in which religious loyalty became publicly visible. To take part in sacrifice was not only to perform a religious act, but also to participate in the civic order of the city and the wider Roman world. This helps explain why Christian refusal to sacrifice could be treated as socially disruptive before Christianity became legally secure and publicly privileged. Christian refusal was therefore not simply a matter of private belief, since sacrifice formed part of the wider civic and imperial religious order. This makes the later rise of Christian life more significant, because Christianisation gradually changed what counted as acceptable public worship.

Although Carthage was a Roman city at that time, it was still deeply layered in cultural memory of older Punic and local African traditions. This remained within Roman religious forms. The cult of Tanit, which was identified in Roman form with Juno Caelestis, is an example of this continuity and adaptation. It also shows how older local traditions could continue within Roman religious language and institutions (Rives, 1995). It was a layered urban space in which Roman civic religion, local African memory and older Punic traditions could overlap. Christianisation therefore entered a city with an already complex sacred landscape.

For this dissertation, the importance of this background is that Christianisation in Carthage should be understood as a reorganisation of public life rather than as a simple replacement. Imperial laws could alter the legal status of Christianity including what forms of worship were permitted or restricted. However, the law alone could not by themselves inspire a practical transformation of the city as much of that depended on how older religious spaces, rituals and identities were challenged, reused or replaced. Archaeological approaches to late antique North Africa, especially Leone's work on the end of pagan urban traditions, show that religious change must be studied through the material city as well as through texts (Leone, 2013).

The importance of Carthage lies in the fact that before imperial patronage gave Christianity legal protection and greater public legitimacy, Carthage already had an organised and articulate Christian community. The importance of Carthage lies in the fact that before imperial patronage gave Christianity legal protection and greater public legitimacy, Carthage already had an organised and articulate Christian community. Indeed, the evidence shows that by the third century, the city already had Christian writers, bishops, disputes, councils and systems of discipline. This makes Carthage a valuable case study for the dissertation's two-way model, because imperial favour later strengthened a Christian community that already possessed local structures of authority.

Tertullian was one of the most important early Latin Christian writers and an influential theologian and polemicist (Lössl, 2018, pp. 94–95). His written works are useful for showing that Christianity in Carthage was already intellectually active before Constantine. He was writing in the late second and early third century, before Christianity had imperial support. He illustrates Christians in Carthage during this period as already defending their beliefs, criticising aspects of pagan civic life and setting themselves apart from traditional civic religion. His testimony should be used carefully, since his later association with Montanism complicates his position and means that he cannot simply be treated as a straightforward representative of later Nicaean authority, although his works reveal the confidence and visibility of Christian debate in early Carthage (Houghton, 2016, p. 5; Lössl, 2018, pp. 94–95).

Cyprian provides even stronger evidence for early Christian organisation. The value of the writings of Cyprian is heightened by the fact that they were composed in times of crisis, notably during the Decian and Valerian persecutions, rather than in the safety of a Christian empire. This is because his letters show how the system of episcopal governance worked during a period of crisis. They illustrate the internal functions of the Church and portray him as a leader in a concrete community facing practical issues (Cyprian, 1984–1989). This is valuable for our purposes since it highlights the importance of the episcopacy prior to the intervention of imperial patronage. Together, Tertullian and Cyprian represent two stages in the early development of Christianity in Carthage: Tertullian reflects the emergence of a confident Christian intellectual voice, while Cyprian reveals the growth of episcopal structures capable of organising and governing the community.

The Decian persecution was a significant moment of testing public religious loyalty as the requirement of sacrifice placed Christians under pressure because refusal could bring punishment. The lapsed controversy emerged after the persecution, when some Christians sacrificed or obtained certificates of sacrifice in order to avoid punishment (Cyprian, *De lapsis*; Burns and Jensen, 2014). These Christians were known as the lapsed, and their possible return to the Church created a major disciplinary problem. Because sacrifice was a public act of loyalty to the Roman gods, Christian participation in it raised serious questions about apostasy, repentance and whether the person could return to full membership of the Christian community. The lapsed controversy shows the Carthaginian Church actively regulating discipline and belonging before Christianity had imperial support. Cyprian's response was disciplinary rather than simply harsh, because he did not reject restoration entirely. He argued against immediate reinstatement without confession and penance, insisting that restoration had to be regulated through proper Church order (Anderson, 2025, pp. 490–491). The controversy also exposed tension between different forms of authority. Some confessors and clergy wanted to restore the lapsed more quickly, while Cyprian insisted that reconciliation required episcopal approval. The confessors had considerable prestige because they had suffered for the faith, and the lapsed sought them out for help in gaining readmission to the Christian community (Anderson, 2025, pp. 489–491). Cyprian respected the confessors but rejected the idea that their authority could override Church discipline. It also anticipates later North African conflicts, especially Donatism, where purity, legitimacy and the identity of the true Church became central issues (Cyprian, Ep. 55; Cyprian, *De lapsis*; Burns and Jensen, 2014).

While Cyprian's letters show episcopal authority at the level of the local community, the mid-third-century councils show that Carthage was also part of a wider African episcopal network. The strongest example is the Council of Carthage in 256 where the main issue was the baptism of heretics, also called the rebaptism controversy. This was preserved in the *Sententiae episcoporum*, which records the judgements of 87 bishops from Africa, Numidia and Mauretania on the matter (Cyprian, *Sententiae episcoporum*; Dunn, 2006). The issue was whether baptism performed outside the recognised Church should be accepted as valid, or whether converts from heretical or schismatic groups required baptism again. Cyprian and the African bishops generally argued that baptism outside the Church was not valid.

Such a position was controversial because the Roman bishop Stephen disagreed with the African position. This was not only a technical argument about ritual detail but instead raised wider questions about the boundaries of the Church, the authority of bishops and who had the right to define legitimate Christian practice. The evidence proves beneficial for showing Christianisation as institution building. The importance of the council is reflected in Carthage functioning as a regional centre. African bishops were already using councils to regulate discipline, baptism and legitimacy before imperial patronage made Christianity publicly assured. This further supports the two-way model of imperial laws changing the conditions later and the local bishops already possessing systems of regulation and authority with the Church (Cyprian, *Sententiae episcoporum*; Dunn, 2006).

Martyrdom

It was important not only for the Christians to suffer persecution but also for the definition of the Christian community through the memory of the martyrs. The martyrs were described as the epitome of courage, faithfulness and the loyalty of the Christian community to God. Some of the most notable martyrs within Carthage were Perpetua, Felicity and Cyprian, all of whom

became essential to the memory of the Christian community before Christianity gained favour from the imperial court (Musurillo, 1972; Tilley, 1996).

Some of the earliest texts to discuss the life and deaths of North African Christians illustrate how deeply entrenched martyr memory was within the Christian identity prior to the time of Constantine. The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs, for instance, tells of the trials that the North Africans endured at Carthage. The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs provides some of the earliest evidence for Latin Christianity in North Africa, recording the trial of Christians at Carthage in 180 and providing the earliest dated Latin reference to books of the New Testament (Houghton, 2016, pp. 3–4).

The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity provide a stronger Carthage-centred example of martyr memory. The execution of Perpetua within Carthage's arena in 203 CE is presented through an account that also includes her own prison narrative. Her story is especially powerful because it shows a young Christian woman from a high-status background resisting family pressure, especially from her father, while choosing loyalty to God over social and household expectations. Felicity, who was enslaved and pregnant, also faced imprisonment and martyrdom with Perpetua, making the narrative important across differences of gender and status. Their story became one of the most famous early Christian martyr narratives presenting the process of witness involving prison, visions, family pressure, courage and public execution. Together, these martyr narratives turned persecution into communal memory. They gave Christians examples of faithfulness and created moral examples through which Carthaginian Christians could understand suffering as loyalty rather than defeat (Musurillo, 1972; Heffernan, 2012; Burns and Jensen, 2014).

In the previous section, Cyprian's letters showed him as a bishop managing discipline and disputes, but his execution in 258 under Valerian made him a model of faithful episcopal witness. Cyprian's death and the places associated with it, such as the Basilica Mappalia and the location where the bishop met his fate, became a part of the sacred geography of the city. The sermons of Saint Augustine about the feasts of the Cyprian further support how important Cyprian's memory remained for the Christian communities in Carthage (Musurillo, 1972; Augustine, Sermon 308A; Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalmos 32.2).

At times when there were conflicts between Nicæan and Donatists over the ownership of Christian community in North Africa, the memory of martyrs was used to prove their legitimacy. Weidmann describes Donatism as a North African ecclesiastical movement which, after the Diocletianic persecution, claimed to represent the true Church (Weidmann, 2024). Donatist communities could present themselves as the heirs of the martyrs, while accusing their Nicæan opponents of being compromised by those who had weakened under persecution. Both Nicæan and Donatists valued martyrs, but Donatists placed special emphasis on martyrdom as a sign of true Christian identity.

Later religious writers, especially Augustine, challenged this. Augustine argued that suffering alone did not make someone a martyr; the cause mattered. In a recent piece, Ployd observes that Augustine used the argument *non poena sed causa*, "not the punishment, but the cause" against Donatists who styled themselves as the "church of the martyrs" (Ployd, 2023, pp. 83–108; see also Tilley, 1996). Persecution could have frightened Christians or made the community feel weak, but instead figures like Perpetua, Felicity, the Scillitan martyrs and Cyprian became examples of faithful Christians. Their deaths were remembered as proof that loyalty to God was more important than fear, family pressure, social status or Roman authority. This links back to the dissertation's wider argument that Christianity grew even before the

empire supported it. Instead, the local memories of persecution had already shaped Christian identity.

Christianity in Carthage in a new era of Imperial patronage

Having shown how persecution and martyr memory shaped Christian identity, this section turns to the imperial changes that altered Christianity's public position. Once the imperial court transferred its favour to Christianity, it altered the framework in which adherents operated by giving Christian institutions greater legal protection, public recognition, and access to resources. For Carthage, this mattered because the local Church and its bishop became increasingly connected within imperial administration.

The imperial change of the early fourth century must be understood against the background of the Great Persecution, when Christian worship, scriptures and clergy had been placed under direct pressure (Lactantius, *De mort. pers.* 13–15; Barnes, 1981). Galerius' edict of 311, which survives in Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, marked a major change in allowing Christians to exist and assemble after years of persecution (Lactantius, *De mort. pers.* 34).

Given that Galerius had been part of the persecuting imperial system, his edict of toleration appears less like a sudden change of sympathy and more like a pragmatic retreat intended to restore stability and order (Lactantius, *De mort. pers.* 34; Barnes, 2002). The measures of 311 CE were, therefore, a turning point, but it was still limited. It did not yet give Christianity the same level of public privilege associated with the patronage that would be provided by Constantine.

This initial edict of toleration was followed by the 313 settlement conventionally known as the Edict of Milan. Issued by Constantine and Licinius, this granted freedom of worship and the restoration of confiscated Christian property (Lactantius, *De mort. pers.* 48; Eusebius, *HE* 10.5). The significance of these imperial measures was that they transformed the public conditions of Christian life. Christianity moved from being persecuted and under pressure to becoming a legally recognised religion with property, protection and growing public visibility.

When this empire wide religious shift is viewed from Carthage, it is important to consider that Constantine's favour did not remain abstract. His favour reached Carthage directly through African officials, letters, money, property and the recognition of Caecilian as bishop of Carthage. In this case, Imperial favour was first visible through the restoration of church property. Constantine ordered Anulinus to restore property formerly belonging to the churches, including buildings, gardens and other possessions (Eusebius, *HE* 10.5.15–17). This essentially granted the material space Christians needed for worship.

Eusebius preserves a letter from Constantine ordering a large sum to be paid directly to Caecilian bishop of Carthage in aid of financing the ministers of the church. This made the bishop of Carthage a direct and recognised recipient of imperial support (Eusebius, *HE* 10.6.1–3). Constantine's letter to Anulinus also exempted clergy under Caecilian from public duties, so that they would not be drawn away from divine services and could devote themselves to their religious duties (Eusebius, *HE* 10.7.1–2). The key point for our analysis is that Caecilian's now stood at the centre of property, finance and clerical privilege, making Christian leadership more visible in public life.

However, much of Constantine's support also created problems as not everyone accepted Caecilian's authority. Constantine's later letter summoning the Roman hearing shows the

bishops authority was contested by other African bishops, making Carthaginian Christianity politically charged from the beginning (Eusebius, HE 10.5.18–20). With consideration that the Church already possessed the structures of Christianity in the city before Constantine (Cyprian, Ep. 55; Cyprian, *Sententiae episcoporum*; Dunn, 2006). Christianisation in Carthage therefore depended on the interaction between imperial policy and local Christian institutions, rather than on imperial law alone (Barnes, 1981; Drake, 2000).

The Donatist dispute

Imperial favour therefore raised the stakes of Christian authority. As the Church gained public recognition, property and legal standing and as bishops and councils became increasingly important, disputes over who represented the true Church became more urgent and politically significant. However, this did not create unity and Donatism shows how Christianisation created internal struggles over authority. This means Christianisation in Carthage must be understood not only as the decline of paganism, but also as a struggle within Christianity over purity, authority and the identity of the true Church (Eusebius, HE 10.5–7; Tilley, 1997).

The Donatist dispute emerged in the aftermath of the Diocletianic or Great Persecution. During persecution, some clergy were accused of cooperating with Roman authorities by handing over scriptures or church property. Those accused were called *traditores*, meaning those who had “handed over” sacred things (Wilhite, 2017). In North Africa, where martyrdom and resistance to persecution were central to Christian identity, such accusations carried serious weight. Hence the controversy centred on whether clergy associated with betrayal could still hold office, which is why the dispute became focused on Caecilian, who succeeded Mensurius as bishop of Carthage.

Caecilian's ordination, performed by Felix of Aptunga, was deemed invalid by his opponents. The core accusation that Felix had been a *traditor* eventually led to a rival episcopal line in Carthage (Wilhite, 2017, pp. 195–198). Once Caecilian's position was challenged, the emperor became involved in church judgment and councils. Constantine wrote to Miltiades, bishop of Rome, instructing a hearing to be arranged for Caecilian and his accusers. The said hearing in 313 judged in favour of Caecilian causing the Donatist side to remain dissatisfied. Constantine then summoned a wider western council at Arles in 314, who also judged against the Donatist side (Eusebius, HE 10.5.18–24; Wilhite, 2017). The council's canon on *traditores* was especially important because it ruled that clergy proved to have handed over Scriptures or sacred vessels should be removed from office, but that ordinations they had performed were not automatically invalid (Council of Arles, canon 13). These events show that Christianisation was not only about belief or conversion, but it also became an administrative and legal process, where bishops, councils and emperors became involved in defining which Christian group counted as legitimate.

After Constantine, the issue became even more significant because the Church recognised by imperial authority could claim property, legal protection, clergy exemptions, and public status. Donatism therefore shows that Christianisation in Carthage was not simply a transition from paganism to Christianity, but a contested struggle over which version of Christianity could claim to be the true Church (Frend, 1952; Tilley, 1997; Wilhite, 2017).

Bishops and councils also show that Christianisation in Carthage was an institutional and administrative process. Carthage was not only a local Christian community, but a major episcopal centre whose councils helped organise church life across North Africa. These gatherings allowed bishops to make collective decisions about discipline, ordination, baptism,

clergy behaviour, appeals, schism, and relations with rival Christian groups (Merdinger, 1997). The importance of this conciliar tradition is reflected in the later Code of Canons of the African Church, associated with Carthage in 418–419 CE, which gathered and reaffirmed earlier African canons. It also involved offices, rules, procedures, and regional episcopal networks.

The later Nicaean response to Donatism developed through African leaders such as Aurelius of Carthage and Augustine of Hippo. Aurelius helped make Carthage a centre of Christian organisation, using councils to coordinate episcopal action and strengthen church discipline across North Africa (Merdinger, 1997). Augustine, meanwhile, became a major intellectual voice against Donatism. He did not deny the importance of holiness or martyrdom, but he rejected the Donatist claim that the validity of the Church depended on the purity of every individual minister. In works such as *Contra litteras Petiliani*, Augustine argued that sacramental authority came from Christ rather than from the moral perfection of the bishop or priest. This quite directly challenged Donatist arguments about *traditores* and invalid ordination. He also argued that suffering alone did not make someone a true martyr, since the cause of suffering mattered. The conflict therefore became a long-term struggle over authority, unity, sacraments, and Christian memory.

The Conference of Carthage in 411 provides a useful endpoint for this section because it shows the long-term importance of the Donatist conflict. Convened under imperial authority and overseen by the imperial official Marcellinus, the conference brought Nicaean and Donatist bishops together to determine which community should be recognised as the legitimate Church in North Africa. However, the judgement went against the Donatists and in favour of the Nicaean side, marking a major legal and imperial defeat for the movement (Tilley, 1991, pp. 7–19; Weidmann, 2018). This did not mean that Donatism disappeared immediately, but it changed the public position of the dispute. By 411, the question was no longer whether Christianity had a place in African civic life, but which Christian body would be legally recognised. Carthage therefore shows that Christianisation was not simply the replacement of paganism. It was also a struggle over authority within Christianity itself. Bishops and councils gave the Church structure, while Donatism exposed the contested nature of Christian legitimacy.

Material traces of Christianisation in Carthage

Having examined bishops, councils, Donatist conflict and imperial support, this section turns to the material evidence for Christianisation in Carthage. Buildings, cemeteries, basilicas, martyr shrines, inscriptions, and commemorative spaces reveal how Christian identity was expressed through the organisation of public and everyday space. This means Christianisation can be studied not only as a legal, theological, or institutional process, but also in terms of urban and peri-urban transformation. In this sense, the built environment helps show how Christianity became embedded in Carthage itself, while also reminding us that material visibility does not necessarily mean instant or complete conversion (Leone, 2013).

Christian buildings changed how religious space operated in Carthage, but not through an immediate replacement of pagan monuments. Earlier civic religion had been closely connected to temples, sacrifices, public festivals, elite benefaction, and the identity of the city itself. In Late Antiquity, churches, basilicas, cemeteries, and martyr sites gradually created new centres of worship, memory, and communal gathering. These spaces made Christianity increasingly visible in the urban landscape, while older pagan spaces lost some of their public centrality over time. This means Christianisation should be understood not only through the number of

churches constructed, but through the changing ways people moved through, used, and perceived the city (Leone, 2013; Lamare, 2025).

Damous-el-Karita provides one of the clearest archaeological examples for Christianisation in Carthage because it shows Christian worship and memory operating at a large urban scale. The site was not simply a small private meeting place, but a major ecclesiastical complex that included a basilica church, annex buildings, funerary spaces, and a memoria connected with saintly commemoration and pilgrimage. Dolenz's excavations of 1996–1997 are especially important because they show how the basilica was connected to wider architectural spaces, including a hall building and a subterranean rotunda or memoria (Dolenz, 2000, p. 147). Dolenz's abstract describes the site as one of the most important Christian pilgrimage complexes in North Africa and later calls the rotunda/memoria the spiritual centre of the largest known pilgrimage complex so far discovered in Carthage (Dolenz, 2001). Damos-el-Karita therefore provides physical evidence for the kind of public Christian life that imperial favour and ecclesiastical organisation helped make more visible in Carthage (Dolenz, 2000; Dolenz, 2001).

Martyr memory also shaped the sacred geography of Carthage. Christian buildings were not only spaces for worship, but also places where burial, prayer, commemoration, and feast-day gathering could overlap. Sites associated with martyrs gave Christian identity a physical location within the city, turning memory into sacred space. Cyprian is the clearest example, since Augustine's sermons show that his memory was celebrated at specific sites in Carthage, including the Basilica Mappalia over his tomb and the "table" of the martyr (Augustine, Sermon 308A). Damos-el-Karita suggests a wider version of the same process, where a memoria, funerary spaces, and pilgrimage-related movement made Christian commemoration part of the built environment (Dolenz, 2001). The importance of such sites lies in showing that Christianisation worked through ritual practice and remembered places as well as through law.

Funerary space provides another way to see Christianisation materially. Burial evidence shows that Christian identity was expressed not only through bishops, councils and imperial letters, but also through death, memory and family commemoration. Ennabli's catalogue of Christian funerary inscriptions from Carthage, including material from both inside and outside the city walls, is therefore important for understanding how Christian identity became visible in the funerary landscape (Ennabli, 1991). Potthoff also shows that these cemeteries were not simply places for burial but were also connected with commemoration and religious practice. Burial near saints and martyrs, as well as practices carried out at graves, helped connect Christian ideas about the dead with the physical use of funerary space (Potthoff, 2000; Potthoff, 2017, pp. 146–159).

The archaeological evidence should not be read as proof of an immediate or total Christian takeover of Carthage. Instead, it points to a gradual and uneven process in which Christian buildings, burial spaces, and commemorative sites were added to an existing urban fabric. Some older pagan spaces declined, changed function, or were incorporated into later patterns of urban development, while earlier architectural materials could also be reused in new building contexts. This means that Christianisation was not simply a matter of replacing pagan monuments with churches. It involved continuity, adaptation, and the reworking of older spaces and materials as Christianity became more visible in the city.

The built environment, therefore, supports this study's wider argument that Christianisation was both imperial and local. However, the form Christianisation took within Carthage depended on local practice. Communities built, used, worshipped, buried and remembered within these spaces, turning the wider conditions created by imperial recognition into visible

urban change. Sites such as Damous-el-Karita, together with funerary inscriptions and Christian burial landscapes, show how Christian identity became visible through worship, memory and spatial organisation (Leone, 2013, pp. 21–24, 67, 202; Dolenz, 2000, pp. 147–159; Ennabli, 1991, pp. 179–180). Archaeology therefore reveals not only the wider conditions created by imperial support, but also the local acts through which Christianity became embedded in the physical landscape of Carthage. This leads directly into the next section, where inscriptions provide closer evidence for how Christian identity was expressed in death and commemoration.

Commemoration and funerary epigraphy

After considering archaeology and the built environment, epigraphy provides another way to trace Christianisation in Carthage. While buildings and burial spaces show how Christianity became visible in the urban landscape, funerary inscriptions reveal how Christian identity was expressed through written commemoration. They preserve more personal acts of remembrance, showing how Christian belief appeared in death, family memory, and the public marking of the dead.

Ennabli's corpus is central because it provides a broad body of Christian funerary inscriptions from Carthage, rather than relying on a single isolated example. Her 1991 volume is especially useful because it focuses on Christian funerary inscriptions from Carthage both inside and outside the city walls. This provides the opportunity to discuss Christian identity across Carthage as a broader phenomenon and not attached to just one basilica, cemetery or monument. The repeated appearance of Christian names, formulas, symbols and commemorative language reveal broader habits of Christian identity. Ennabli's corpus therefore helps demonstrate that Christianisation was not just an institutional process controlled from above, but also a local and social process expressed through how people remembered the dead (Ennabli, 1991; Ennabli, 1997).

Christian funerary inscriptions often expressed identity through formulas of peace, rest and hope. A common example is the phrase *in pace*, meaning "in peace", while African funerary language could also include phrases such as *in pace vixit*, *spes in Deo*, and *in Deo vivas*. These formulas framed death through a Christian vocabulary of peace with God, hope beyond death, and belonging within the community of the faithful. This language matters because Christian identity was not only expressed through churches, councils, or episcopal writings, but also through family remembrance and burial practice. In Carthage, funerary language therefore shows how Christianity became embedded in ordinary acts of memory, where the dead were commemorated through formulas such as *fidelis in pace*, *in pace vixit* and *vixit in pace*, which expressed Christian identity and the idea of living 'in peace', alongside details such as the deceased's age and date of deposition (Ennabli, 1991, p. 32; Arbabzadah, 2010, pp. 165–166).

The value of funerary inscriptions is that they preserve the names and memories of Christians who rarely appear in literary sources. While texts often focus on bishops, theologians, emperors, and major figures such as Cyprian, Augustine, Caecilian, and Donatus, inscriptions give access to less visible members of the Christian community. They can record names, family relationships, age at death, social status, commemorators, and sometimes offices or roles. They reveal that Christianity had entered family memory, death rituals, and everyday commemorative habits (Ennabli, 1991; Leone, 2013).

Funerary inscriptions did not function only as written records; they could also communicate Christian identity through visual signs. When symbols appeared, they helped identify individual

burials as Christian and made belief visible within the commemorative landscape. These signs included Christian symbols such as Christograms and palm branches. For example, one Carthage funerary inscription catalogued by Ennabli preserves Christian symbolic decoration (Ennabli, 1991, p. 297, no. 494). Another funerary inscription from Damous-el-Karita preserves a chi-rho with an alpha to the left, while Gatier reconstructs a corresponding omega on the damaged right side (Gatier, 2001, pp. 63–66). Alongside for vixit in pace, visual signs helped make burial a recognisable expression of Christian identity (Ennabli, 1991, p. 32). Epigraphy therefore shows Christianisation through both language and image, making belief visible in ordinary funerary practice.

Funerary inscriptions also helped turn burial areas into Christian spaces of memory. They were not detached texts, but physical markers placed in cemeteries, basilicas, burial areas and commemorative complexes. Ennabli's evidence includes Christian funerary material from both inside and outside the city walls, which is important because burial within the city marked a change from earlier Roman practice, where the dead were normally buried outside the urban boundary, often along roads (Ennabli, 1991). This meant that inscriptions helped locate Christian identity within the landscape, marking where the dead were remembered and where Christian belief was publicly expressed (Ennabli, 1991; Dolenz, 2001; Leone, 2013).

However, epigraphic evidence must be used carefully because inscriptions record acts of commemoration, not the full religious life of the city. Christian epitaphs show where Christian identity became visible, but they cannot measure the exact level of conversion or prove that non-Christian practice disappeared immediately (Leone, 2013, pp. 83–84, 119). Their survival is also uneven and depends on what was excavated, recorded and preserved. This is particularly important at Carthage, where the number of published epitaphs represents only part of the material originally found (Ardeleanu, 2023, pp. 107–109). In Carthage, Christian inscriptions are also limited because they do not always show whether the deceased or their family saw themselves as Nicæan or Donatist. The distinction between the two groups was not always clear in the material evidence, and even inscriptions could sometimes be difficult to identify with one side or the other (Evers, 2011, pp. 178, 194). This also raises the possibility that these differences were not always as important to ordinary Christians as they were to bishops and Church leaders involved in wider religious disputes. Epigraphy is therefore most useful for tracing visible habits of Christian remembrance rather than for producing a complete map of belief.

Epigraphy therefore shows Christianisation working at the level of family memory, burial, and personal identity. Funerary inscriptions made Christian belonging visible through commemorative language, symbols, and the location of the dead within Christian burial spaces. By the time Carthage entered the Vandal period, Christian identity was already strongly visible in the city's material and funerary landscape.

Summary and epilogue

The Vandal capture of Carthage in 439 provides a useful endpoint for this chapter because it marks the end of the Roman imperial framework that had shaped Christianisation in the city. Under Geiseric, the Vandals took Carthage on 19 October 439, turning one of Roman North Africa's most important cities into the centre of Vandal power. For this dissertation, the importance of 439 is not that Christianity ended in Carthage, but that the political conditions of Christian life changed. After 439, Carthage entered a different political and religious setting. The Vandals were themselves Christians, but they followed Homoian/Arian Christianity rather than the Nicene Christianity represented by many Roman African bishops. This created new tensions

over church authority, property and religious identity. However, the capture itself should not be reduced simply to an anti-Christian persecution. Fournier (2017) argues that contemporary sources for the Vandal conquest of 429–439 described devastation and the normal horrors of war but did not present the conquest itself primarily as a religious persecution. The Vandal capture is therefore best used as a political endpoint for this chapter as it closes the Roman phase of Carthage's Christianisation.

Chapter 4: Alexandria

Alexandria provides the second case study for this dissertation because it allows Christianisation to be examined in a very different urban setting from Carthage. With the first case study, we observed the development of Christian identity through bishops, councils, Donatist conflict, martyr memory and the growth of Christian sacred space. Alexandria, however, presents a different pattern. Alexandria was a Greek speaking administrative centre of Roman Egypt with a much older and more visible tradition of pagan cult and philosophy (Bowman, 2012; Haas, 1997; Watts, 2006). This means that the decline of ancient religion in Alexandria and the rise of Christianity must be studied through different tensions.

After Rome annexed Egypt in 30 BCE, Alexandria remained central to the political and administrative structure of Roman Egypt (Bowman, 2012). The city became the seat of the Roman prefect, intensifying the Roman influence by forming the political framework in which later religious change took place. Yet Alexandria was also a city with its older religious landscape which remained highly visible through major cult sites such as the Serapeum, alongside Greek philosophy and intellectual culture that shaped its identity (Haas, 1997; Watts, 2006). Christianisation in Alexandria was therefore not only a matter of imperial law or church organisation. It involved struggles over sacred space, learning, civic authority and public identity. This is why Alexandria becomes particularly useful for testing the wider argument of this dissertation.

Here the process was more visibly tied to urban confrontation. Alexandria saw the destruction and reworking of temples, the growing authority of the bishop, and conflicts involving Christians, pagans, Jews, and monks all showing that Christianisation could be unstable and contested (Dijkstra, 2020). The bishop of Alexandria became a major public figure, not just a spiritual leader, and disputes over religion often overlapped with questions of who truly held civic power to define Alexandria (Haas, 1997; Barnes, 1993). Christianisation is, therefore, shown as an urban struggle over key themes of authority, sacred space and intellectual identity. Shaped by Roman imperial policy but carried out through local agency. This chapter will argue that the decline of ancient religion in Alexandria was especially visible through the weakening of public temple cult, the transformation of sacred space and the increasing power of Christian leadership within the city.

Religious and intellectual context

Before Christian dominance, Alexandria was already a deeply layered civic, religious, and intellectual city whose identity had been long shaped by Greek civic culture, Egyptian religious traditions, Roman imperial power and philosophical learning. This is important because Christianity did not enter an empty or declining religious landscape. Christianisation was taking place within a city where sacred space and intellectual prestige were already strongly developed, whereas Carthage shows Christianisation through bishops, councils, Donatist conflict, martyr memory, and funerary identity. Alexandria became part of the Roman Empire after the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra in 30 BC. Although it was no longer the royal capital of the Ptolemies, it continued to be a major centre of commerce and culture under the control of the Roman prefect assigned by the Imperial household. This gave Alexandria a distinctive political setting. Roman authority was visible through administration, taxation, military presence, and the economic importance of Egypt to the empire. Egypt's wheat surplus was shipped to Rome, and Roman taxation made the province central to imperial systems of extraction and control. Alexandria was therefore not only a cultural city, but also a city tied closely to the political and economic interests of Rome (Bagnall, 2021; Venit, 2012).

The religious landscape of Alexandria was equally complex. Greek and Egyptian traditions existed alongside one another, and in some cases were deliberately combined. The cult of Serapis is especially important because it represented a Greco-Egyptian religious identity. The Serapeum, the great sanctuary of Serapis, was one of Alexandria's most important pagan cult sites and one of the most famous sanctuaries of antiquity. Its significance was not only religious, but also civic and symbolic. It represented the prestige of the older sacred landscape and the ability of Alexandrian religion to combine Greek and Egyptian elements. This makes the later destruction and reworking of the Serapeum especially important, because it was not the loss of a minor shrine, but the transformation of a major symbol of Alexandrian pagan identity (McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes, 2004).

Alexandrian religion also included the worship of Isis and other Egyptian deities, alongside Greek cults and the Roman imperial cult. Roman rule did not simply abolish older religious traditions. Imperial power instead was inserted into existing temple culture, and the cult of the emperors was introduced into Egyptian temples. This shows that religious change was already a process of adaptation and layering rather than simple replacement before Christian dominance. Older cults continued to matter, but they operated within a Roman political framework (Bagnall, 2021).

Alexandria had an important Jewish history, but the Jewish community's position changed over time. Bagnall notes that the Jewish community of Egypt was seriously disrupted after the Jewish revolt of 115-117 CE, but they still remained part of Alexandria's late-antique social and religious landscape as Haas notes (Bagnall, 2021, pp. 102–106; Haas, 1997, pp. 99–109). Alexandria was also an intellectual city. The temples and cults were not the city's only claim to fame; its prestige was also connected to its schools, philosophy and learned pagan traditions. This matters because Christianisation in Alexandria was not only a conflict over sacrifice or sacred buildings. It was also a contest over education, cultural authority, and the meaning of classical learning. In his study Watts shows that Alexandria's schools and intellectual culture interacted with Christianity in locally specific ways, meaning that the city's Christianisation cannot be reduced to a general one-way process on the Empires part (Watts, 2006).

Thus, reviewing Alexandria's religious landscape, it is apparent that it was not defined by one tradition, but by a dense mixture of Greek, Egyptian, Roman, Jewish, and philosophical cultures. This makes the later Christianisation of the city crucial. Christianity was not simply replacing a supposedly weak paganism. It was entering and reordering an already complex sacred and intellectual city, where temples, schools, communities, and imperial authority all shaped public life.

Alexandrian teachers

Before Constantine, Alexandrian Christianity was already developing through teaching, episcopal organisation and communal identity. Unlike Carthage, where the pre-Constantinian picture is strongly shaped by martyr memory and Cyprianic episcopal authority. Alexandria's early Christian identity was especially tied to learning, biblical interpretation and the relationship between Christian teaching and Greek intellectual culture.

Clement of Alexandria was a Christian teacher and writer, with surviving works that show early Alexandrian Christianity having an educated voice. This is vital for Alexandria because the city already had a strong intellectual reputation and therefore nurtured Christian intellectual culture before imperial influence. Active in the late second and early third century, his works suggest that Christian identity in Alexandria was not only formed through worship or separation from

pagan cult, but also through argument, interpretation and engagement with Greek learning (Clement, *Stromata*; Chadwick, 1967, pp. 168–181). Chadwick argues that Clement sought to show that Christianity was compatible with serious engagement with Greek literature and philosophy, and that these traditions could have a proper place within the Church. It also notes that he argued against Gnostics, against anti-intellectual Christians, and against cultured critics who saw Christianity as hostile to civilisation (Chadwick, 1967, pp. 168–181).

Origen is another the central figure for showing the strength of pre-Constantinian Alexandrian Christian learning. Active in Alexandria in the early third century, he was not simply a preacher or local teacher, but one of the most important biblical scholars and theologians of the early Church (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.3; Trigg, 1998). His commentaries, homilies and textual scholarship, especially the Hexapla, show that Alexandrian Christians were not passively waiting for imperial support before developing serious intellectual traditions (Heine, 2010). They were already creating a learned Christian identity that could compete within the city's intellectual cultural before Constantine.

This helped add prestige to Christianity by presenting it as a serious intellectual and religious truth claim. The importance of this point is to illustrate that Christians in this time, prior to imperial support, were not just forming communities of worship or surviving persecution. They were producing teachers, interpreters and writer who could argue inside the educated centre of Alexandria, which is already flourishing in its Greek learning.

Bishops also play a crucial role in providing the Christian community structure and authority. Clement and Origen show Christian learning, teaching, biblical interpretation and scholarship. Whereas Demetrius and Dionysius show bishops, discipline, church leadership and authority. Demetrius is especially interesting figure because of his conflict with Origen. Eusebius presents Demetrius as initially supporting Origen's teaching but later opposing him after Origen was ordained priest by bishops outside Egypt (Eusebius, *HE* 6.8.3-5, 6.23.4). This reveals a tension between intellectual authority and institutional control. Origen had prestige as a teacher and biblical scholar, but Demetrius represented the bishop's growing authority to regulate teaching and discipline. The conflict therefore also reflected a wider question of episcopal authority, particularly over who could preach, teach and exercise clerical office within the Alexandrian Church (Stewart-Sykes, 2004, pp. 427–428).

The later careers of Heraclas and Dionysius also show that Alexandrian scholarship and episcopal authority increasingly overlapped, since both were associated with Christian teaching before becoming leading bishops (Eusebius, *HE* 6.26, 6.29). Dionysius later strengthens this picture, showing the bishop as theologian, correspondent and crisis leader during persecution and controversy (Eusebius, *HE* 6.35, 6.40–46).

Martyrs, memory and Christian education in Alexandria

Early Alexandrian Christian identity was shaped by more than intellectual activity; it was also shaped by persecution. Stories of endurance and martyrdom before imperial favour lasted as a shared memory for the Christian community. Eusebius connects the Severan persecution with Alexandria, including the martyrdom of Origen's father Leonides and figures such as Potamiaena, while also showing that persecution disrupted Christian teaching due to the teachers being driven away (Eusebius, *HE* 6.1-6.5). Eusebius provides a detail literary narrative of martyrdom, which can be compared with the details from papyri from Roman Egypt. Luijendijk's analysis shows how persecution operated through everyday administrative procedures, proving a provincial comparison for Alexandria rather than direct evidence for the

city itself. Her work adds a further perspective, showing how persecution affected Christian communities through official pressure, property confiscation, written orders and everyday resistance (Luijendijk, 2008).

This disruption is particularly important in Alexandria because Christian teaching had become one of the main ways in which the community developed its identity. Persecution did not only threaten worship or the physical safety of believers; it also placed the transmission of Christian knowledge at risk. Eusebius explains that established teachers had been driven away during the persecution, leaving Origen to take on responsibility for instruction while still young (Eusebius, HE 6.3). His account suggests that Christian teaching did not continue under secure or stable conditions. Instead, it depended upon individuals who were willing to continue instructing others despite the risks involved.

Clement's departure from Alexandria may also belong to this wider context, although the evidence should be treated carefully. Eusebius does not directly state that Clement left solely because of the Severan persecution, so we cannot be completely sure if he was formally expelled or if teaching tradition has temporarily ceased. However, the disappearance of established teachers from Alexandria does suggest that persecution disturbed existing patterns of Christian instruction. Origen's emergence, therefore, shows how the community responded to this disruption by adapting rather than allowing teaching to disappear altogether. This is important because persecution threatened one of the features that made Alexandrian Christianity distinctive.

The city's Christian community had developed a strong tradition of biblical interpretation, theological debate and instruction. If its teachers were removed, then the continuation of these traditions between generations was also threatened. Origen's teaching under these conditions therefore represented more than the continuation of individual scholarship. It helped preserve a form of Christian learning that could have been weakened by political pressure. Persecution did not interrupt an otherwise separate story of Alexandrian Christian scholarship; it became part of that story.

The survival of teaching also contributed to the development of a shared communal identity. Christians could look back on persecution not only through the deaths of martyrs such as Leonides and Potamiaena, but also through the continued survival of instruction and biblical learning. The memory of persecution therefore combined suffering with endurance. It presented the Alexandrian community as one that had been tested but had still maintained its traditions and produced new leaders. This helped give Christian learning a deeper communal importance, since teaching could be understood as part of the community's survival rather than simply an intellectual activity.

Luijendijk's papyri add further depth to this picture because they show that persecution was experienced through administrative procedures as well as dramatic acts of martyrdom. The confiscation of Christian property and the use of written orders demonstrate how imperial policy was translated into local action (Luijendijk, 2008). This is significant for the wider argument of this dissertation because it shows the interaction between state authority and local Christian experience. Persecution was imposed through official structures, but Christians responded within their own local circumstances. Some complied, some resisted and others attempted to protect their property or communities. The evidence therefore reveals a more complicated picture than a simple opposition between persecutors and martyrs.

This also helps to distinguish Alexandria from Carthage. In Carthage, martyr memory became closely connected with figures such as Perpetua, Cyprian and, later, Donatist arguments concerning purity, betrayal and the identity of the true Church. In Alexandria, persecution memory was more closely connected with teaching, exegesis and the continuation of Christian intellectual life. This does not mean that martyrdom was less important in Alexandria. Rather, it was remembered within a different local Christian setting. The suffering of figures such as Leonides and Potamiaena existed alongside the memory of Origen's teaching and the survival of Christian instruction.

Overall, persecution played an important role in shaping early Alexandrian Christian identity. It created memories of martyrdom and endurance, but it also affected the practical organisation of teaching and the transmission of Christian knowledge. Eusebius presents a community whose intellectual life continued despite the removal of established teachers, while the papyri examined by Luijendijk show how persecution operated through property, documents and everyday administration. Together, these sources show that Alexandrian Christianity developed through both learned activity and experiences of pressure. Its identity before Constantine was therefore not only intellectual or institutional but also shaped by the memory of survival under persecution.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that Christianity in Alexandria was already well established before Constantine, although it was not yet a unified or publicly dominant religion. Clement and Origen show that Christian teaching had become an important part of the city's intellectual life, while the careers of Demetrius, Heraclas and Dionysius show the growing importance of episcopal organisation and authority (van den Hoek, 1997, pp. 59–87; Eusebius, *HE* 6.3, 6.6, 6.23, 6.29, 6.35). The dispute between Demetrius and Origen also shows that these different forms of authority could come into conflict, particularly as episcopal leadership became more formalised (Corke-Webster, 2013, pp. 133–135). Persecution added another part to this development. Egyptian papyri from the Great Persecution show that imperial measures could reach Christian communities through property confiscation and local administration, rather than only through martyrdom (Luijendijk, 2008, pp. 343–345). Christianisation in Alexandria therefore did not begin with Constantine. Imperial support later changed the legal and political position of a community whose teaching, leadership and communal identity had already developed locally.

Christianity in Alexandria in the early to mid-fourth century

Imperial support did not bring immediate unity to Alexandrian Christianity. Instead, it changed the scale and consequences of disagreements that had previously been managed within the Church. The dispute associated with Arius began as a local conflict within the Alexandrian clergy but soon drew in bishops across the eastern empire and eventually the emperor himself. It therefore exposes an important tension within Christianisation. Christianity had acquired legal security and imperial favour, yet Christians still disagreed over who possessed the authority to define correct belief. The controversy was theological, but it was also a contest over episcopal control, clerical independence and the emperor's place within the Church.

The dispute probably began between 318 and 323 CE, when Arius, a presbyter associated with the church of Baucalis, challenged Bishop Alexander of Alexandria. At its centre was the relationship between God the Father and the Son. Arius sought to preserve the absolute uniqueness of the Father, arguing that the Son, although pre-eminent over creation and the agent through whom the world was made, did not possess the same eternal existence as the Father. The surviving statements attributed to him include the claim that 'there was when he

was not', language which Alexander regarded as placing Christ within the created order (Arius, Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, in Stevenson and Frend, 1987, pp. 324–325; Williams, 2001, pp. 48–82). It would, nevertheless, be misleading to reduce the dispute to Arius simply denying Christ's divinity. The deeper argument concerned what kind of divinity could be attributed to the son and whether he shared the father's eternal being. As Ayres argues, the controversy brought several existing theological traditions into conflict rather than dividing an already settled orthodoxy from a clearly defined heresy (Ayres, 2004, pp. 15–20).

Alexander condemned Arius through an Alexandrian synod and presented the bishop as the guardian of the Church's faith. Arius, however, appealed to influential bishops outside Egypt, particularly Eusebius of Nicomedia, and circulated letters defending his position. A dispute within one city was therefore transformed into an empire-wide episcopal conflict. This shows that the developing Church did not operate through a simple chain of command. Bishops held considerable local authority, but clergy and rival bishops could use wider networks to challenge them. Galvão-Sobrinho argues that controversies of this kind encouraged a more assertive model of episcopal leadership, as bishops mobilised congregations, correspondence and councils to establish themselves as authentic representatives of Christian truth (Galvão-Sobrinho, 2013). The controversy was therefore partly about theology, but it was also about who could speak for the Christian community.

Constantine initially treated the quarrel as an unnecessary dispute over words. In a letter to Alexander and Arius, preserved by Eusebius, he urged reconciliation because their division threatened the peace of the Church (Eusebius, VC 2.64–72). This suggests that imperial intervention was initially driven less by a detailed theological commitment than by the desire for concord. When reconciliation failed, Constantine summoned the Council of Nicaea in 325. The council condemned Arius and declared the son *homoousios*, 'of the same substance', with the father. Arius and several supporters were exiled, while imperial authority gave practical force to the bishops' judgement (Eusebius, VC 3.6–14; Ayres, 2004, pp. 85–104). Nicaea therefore marked a significant development in Church–state relations. Constantine did not personally create doctrine, but he supplied the setting, resources and coercive power through which one conciliar decision could be made effective across the empire.

The settlement was far less final than later accounts implied. Arius was later recalled from exile, while many eastern bishops remained uneasy with the language of *homoousios*. After Alexander's death in 328 CE, Athanasius became bishop of Alexandria and resisted attempts to restore Arius to communion. His defence of doctrine increasingly became inseparable from the defence of his own episcopal authority. Athanasius portrayed his opponents as a single 'Arian' party and himself as the defender of both Nicaea and the authentic Alexandrian Church. Modern scholarship has shown that this was a highly polemical construction. Those labelled 'Arian' did not all share Arius' theology, while opposition to Athanasius could also arise from disputes over his election, the Melitian schism and his exercise of power in Egypt (Gwynn, 2007; Gwynn, 2012, pp. 18–43). The theological conflict was real, but Athanasius' writings should not be read as neutral descriptions of two coherent sides.

Athanasius' repeated removals and returns reveal the limits of imperial control. He was sent to Trier by Constantine in 335 and later expelled again under Constantius II yet retained substantial support in Alexandria and among Egyptian clergy and ascetics. Emperors could enforce exile, recognise rival bishops and influence control of church buildings, but they could not simply create local acceptance. Athanasius' ability to recover his position depended upon Egyptian support as well as changing imperial politics (Barnes, 1993, pp. 17–33; Gwynn, 2012, pp. 34–58). Imperial intervention changed who possessed legal backing, but local

congregations and ecclesiastical networks determined how far those decisions worked in practice. Alexandria was therefore not merely a passive recipient of imperial religious policy. Its bishops, clergy and Christian population could support, resist or reshape imperial decisions.

The Arian–Nicene conflict consequently demonstrates that Christianisation was not the straightforward replacement of paganism by a united Church. Once Christianity gained imperial recognition, internal boundaries became more politically important because the state could now privilege one form of Christianity over another. The result was a two-way process: emperors attempted to secure unity through councils and coercion, while Alexandrian bishops and communities shaped the practical outcome. Christian public authority grew through the conflict, but unity remained contested and unstable. Rather than ending religious disagreement, imperial support raised its political and institutional stakes.

Conflict and Christianity in late fourth century Alexandria

By the late fourth century, Christianisation in Alexandria had moved beyond disputes over doctrine and the control of churches. It increasingly affected the physical and ceremonial life of the city itself. The clearest example is the destruction of the Serapeum in 391 or early 392 CE. This was not simply the demolition of an old building after pagan religion had naturally faded away. The Serapeum remained one of Alexandria's most important sacred sites, connected with the cult of Serapis and with the city's Ptolemaic past. Its position above the Rhakotis district and its monumental scale made it a visible expression of the older religious order. Attacking it therefore had significance beyond the immediate suppression of one cult. It challenged an established centre of sacred authority and altered how religious power was represented within the Alexandrian landscape (Haas, 1997, pp. 159–168; McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes, 2004, pp. 73–121).

The legal background to this event is important, although imperial legislation should not be treated as a direct instruction to destroy the Serapeum. In February 391 CE, Theodosius I issued a law prohibiting sacrifice, entry into sanctuaries and the veneration of cult images. A second law, addressed specifically to Evagrius, the Augustal Prefect, and Romanus, the comes Aegypti, extended these restrictions to Egypt in June of the same year (CTh 16.10.10–11; Pharr, 1952). These measures removed the legal protection that had allowed traditional cult to continue publicly.

Recent work by Wilkinson has suggested that Rome and Alexandria may previously have possessed exemptions from some of the restrictions operating elsewhere in the empire. If this is accepted, the legislation of 391 CE represented a particularly serious change for Alexandria, rather than the mere repetition of a long-standing ban (Wilkinson, 2025, pp. 162–196). Even so, the laws prohibited cult practices; they did not explicitly command the general destruction of temples. This distinction matters because later Christian historians sometimes blurred the difference between imperial law and local action.

Socrates Scholasticus claimed that Theophilus requested and received an imperial order to demolish the temples of Alexandria, placing the bishop in charge of its implementation (Socrates, HE 5.16). However, no surviving law gives Theophilus such powers. Dijkstra, therefore, argues that Socrates' account cannot be accepted as a straightforward description of the event. The legislation created an increasingly hostile legal environment for public pagan worship, but the decision to turn that pressure into a physical attack on Alexandrian sacred space depended upon local initiative (Dijkstra, 2020, pp. 286–305).

The precise sequence of events is difficult to reconstruct because the main accounts were written by authors with strong religious commitments. Rufinus and Sozomen place the beginning of the conflict at a building that had been placed under Christian control, it being described as either a temple of Dionysus or a site associated with Mithras. During its conversion or renovation, a collection of cult objects was uncovered. Theophilus had these objects carried through the city and displayed for public ridicule. Among them were images associated with fertility rituals, which Christian writers presented as evidence of the obscenity and irrationality of the traditional cults (Rufinus, HE 11.22–23; Sozomen, HE 7.15).

The action was not merely the disposal of unwanted religious material. It turned the objects into a public spectacle and deliberately reversed their meaning: things that had once received ritual respect were made into evidence of pagan humiliation. The display provoked violence. According to Rufinus and Sozomen, a group of Alexandrian pagans retaliated against Christians before occupying the Serapeum, where the confrontation continued. Socrates gives a different order, placing the destruction of the temple before the main outbreak of violence. All three accounts divide the population sharply into Christians and pagans, but these labels probably simplify a more complicated urban conflict.

Those involved included clergy, philosophers, students, civic inhabitants, soldiers and officials whose loyalties cannot always be reduced to religious identity alone. Dijkstra warns that the language of hostile religious crowds in the surviving sources can conceal smaller networks, local leadership and the circumstances that allowed individuals to become involved in collective violence (Dijkstra, 2020, pp. 286–305). The conflict should, therefore, not be imagined as the whole Christian population spontaneously rising against every pagan inhabitant of Alexandria. It was a particular confrontation that expanded because organised groups, religious leaders and public authorities all became involved.

Theophilus, nevertheless, played a central role in escalating the symbolic struggle. By publicly exposing cult objects the act undermined the honour of Alexandrian pagans before any demolition took place. It also asserted the bishop's ability to decide what could remain sacred within the city. Once the Serapeum was dismantled, its cult statue became the focus of Christian accounts of victory. Rufinus describes a soldier striking the statue of Serapis with an axe before its body was cut apart, dragged through different areas and burnt. Other objects were broken up, displayed for mockery or converted into practical items. Socrates states that metal images were melted down and made into utensils for church use, while one was preserved specifically so that the former religion could continue to be ridiculed (Rufinus, HE 11.23; Socrates, HE 5.16).

These actions had a meaning beyond ordinary destruction. The statue of Serapis was treated almost like the defeated body of a political enemy. Its dismemberment was performed publicly so that inhabitants could see that the god had failed to defend either his image or his sanctuary. Christian writers emphasised this point because some Alexandrians were reportedly afraid that destroying the statue would bring catastrophe upon the city. When no disaster followed, the absence of punishment was interpreted as evidence that Serapis had no real power. Kristensen comments that responses to pagan statues ranged from destruction and mutilation to reuse, reinterpretation and deliberate preservation.

The aim was not always to make the older religious world disappear completely. In some cases, displaying its remains as defeated objects communicated Christian authority more effectively than removing every trace of it (Kristensen, 2009, pp. 158–175). The episode also reveals how far the Alexandrian bishop's authority had expanded. Theophilus was no longer concerned only

with worship, teaching or the discipline of clergy. He could mobilise supporters, influence officials and intervene directly in the use of urban property. The participation or acquiescence of the Augustal Prefect, military authorities and local soldiers also gave the destruction a degree of public force. Yet this does not mean that the bishop merely carried out a plan devised by Theodosius.

Hahn argues that no surviving imperial edict authorised the broad destruction of Alexandrian temples. Instead, Theophilus appears to have used the legal and political climate created by imperial policy to pursue a more aggressive local programme. The central government weakened the legitimacy of traditional cult, but the bishop determined how far that change was pushed within Alexandria (Hahn, 2015, pp. 379–404). This distinction demonstrates the two-way nature of Christianisation. The legislation of 391 CE altered the legal status of sacrifice and temple worship from above. It reduced the ability of pagan communities to defend their rituals through recognised public institutions.

From below, however, Theophilus and his supporters translated those restrictions into the occupation, dismantling and reinterpretation of sacred space. Local officials then either assisted the process or failed to prevent it. Imperial law was, therefore, important not because it mechanically caused the destruction, but because it created an imbalance of legitimacy. Christian activists could plausibly present themselves as acting in accordance with the emperor's religious direction, even when their actions went beyond the surviving wording of his laws (Hahn, 2015, pp. 391–394; Shean, 2021, pp. 149–170).

The destruction of the Serapeum should not, however, be presented as the moment when paganism completely disappeared from Alexandria. Pagan intellectuals, teachers and religious traditions survived beyond 391 CE, while archaeological evidence suggests that not every statue at the site was deliberately destroyed. Some objects were damaged, others were removed or reused, and some appear simply to have been left behind. Christian responses to the older material landscape were therefore less uniform than the triumphal accounts suggest (Kristensen, 2009, pp. 163–166). The incident severely damaged the public and institutional position of traditional cult, but it did not instantly erase private belief, philosophy or cultural attachment to the classical past. The importance of the Serapeum therefore lies in the reorganisation of public religion rather than in a simple claim that Christianity had defeated paganism once and for all.

A major cult could no longer rely upon the legal protection, civic recognition and monumental security it had previously possessed. At the same time, the Alexandrian bishop had emerged as a figure capable of directing public action and reshaping the urban landscape. The event brought together the main registers of Christianisation examined in this dissertation: imperial law changed the status of traditional worship; episcopal authority directed its local application; violence altered sacred space; and the remains of pagan religion were reinterpreted as monuments to Christian victory. The destruction was therefore both a genuine rupture in Alexandrian public religion and the product of a longer, contested process in which imperial policy, local leadership and urban crowds interacted.

Hypatia

The murder of Hypatia in 415 CE provides a further example of how Christianisation altered the balance of public authority in Alexandria. When Cyril succeeded Theophilus as bishop in 412, his position was already more than a purely religious office. Socrates describes the Alexandrian

episcopate as having moved beyond its 'sacerdotal functions' into secular affairs, although his criticism must be read alongside his wider hostility towards Cyril (Socrates, HE 7.7). Cyril's early episcopate was marked by confrontations with Novatian Christians, parts of the Jewish population and Orestes, the Augustal Prefect. These were not simply separate outbreaks of religious intolerance. Together they concerned the growing overlap between episcopal authority and the authority of the emperor's representative in the city (Haas, 1997, pp. 295–316; Wessel, 2004, pp. 17–20, 32–35).

Hypatia became involved in this struggle because she occupied an influential position within Alexandrian civic life. She was a Neoplatonic philosopher and teacher whose pupil's included members of the imperial and provincial elite. Her circle was not exclusively pagan: Synesius of Cyrene, who later became a Christian bishop, remained deeply respectful of her. Hypatia should, therefore, not be reduced to the final representative of 'pagan science' standing against Christianity. Her importance lay partly in her ability to connect philosophical learning with elite political networks. Socrates states that she met frequently with Orestes, and rumours consequently accused her of preventing reconciliation between the prefect and Cyril (Socrates, HE 7.15; Dzielska, 1995, pp. 66–90; Watts, 2017, pp. 88–112).

In March 415 CE, a Christian crowd led by a church reader named Peter seized Hypatia, took her to the Caesareum and murdered her before burning her remains. Socrates does not state that Cyril ordered the killing, and there is no firm evidence that he did. Nevertheless, he writes that the murder brought disgrace upon Cyril and the Alexandrian Church (Socrates, HE 7.15). This distinction is important. Cyril's direct responsibility cannot be demonstrated, but the violence developed within a political culture in which his supporters had already acted aggressively against opponents. The murderers appear to have treated Hypatia not merely as a philosopher of another religion, but as an obstacle within the struggle for influence over the city (Haas, 1997, pp. 309–316; Watts, 2017, pp. 113–121).

Hypatia's death therefore complicates any claim that Alexandrian Christianisation was simply the peaceful growth of episcopal leadership. The bishop's expanding public role could provide organisation and authority, but it could also weaken the boundary between religious mobilisation and civic coercion. At the same time, the event was not a straightforward clash between Christianity and classical learning, since educated Christians continued to engage with Greek philosophy. What was increasingly threatened was the political independence that had allowed figures such as Hypatia to mediate between different sections of Alexandrian society. Her murder reveals a darker aspect of the reorganisation of public religion: as episcopal authority became more deeply embedded in urban government, opponents could be represented not only as religious outsiders, but as threats to the Christian order of the city.

Monasticism

The growth of monasticism gave Egyptian Christianity a form of authority that did not depend entirely upon the city, the bishop or imperial patronage. From the fourth century, the desert became a new Christian landscape in which holiness could be demonstrated through withdrawal, fasting, prayer and control of the body. Yet monks were not simply escaping society. Their reputation attracted visitors, correspondence, donations and requests for spiritual advice, meaning that the desert remained closely connected to villages and cities. Monasticism therefore widened the social reach of Christianisation while creating a source of prestige that existed partly outside normal ecclesiastical office (Goehring, 1999).

Antony became the most influential expression of this ideal, largely through Athanasius' *Life of Antony*. The work presents Antony as defeating demons, advising visitors and gaining recognition even from emperors. More importantly for Athanasius, Antony is shown travelling to Alexandria to oppose the Arians and support the Church's approved doctrine (Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 69–71, 81). The text should, therefore, not be read as a neutral biography. Athanasius shaped Antony into an ideal monk whose personal holiness confirmed Nicene orthodoxy and strengthened the position of the Alexandrian bishop. As Brakke argues, episcopal leadership attempted to draw the authority of ascetic figures into a broader project of unifying the Egyptian Church (Brakke, 1998). However, the need to construct this relationship also reveals that monastic authority was powerful enough to require negotiation rather than simple control.

Egyptian monasticism was also far more varied than the familiar image of the solitary hermit suggests. In Upper Egypt, Pachomius developed communities based upon common worship, labour, discipline and shared resources. The Pachomian *koinonia* turned asceticism into a structured collective life, with officials, separate houses, common rules and organised systems for receiving and distributing goods (Pachomian *Koinonia* 1; Rousseau, 1999). This represented a different route to Christian institution-building from the Alexandrian episcopate, but it addressed similar questions of obedience, property and communal order. The monastery was therefore not the opposite of an institution. It was a new kind of institution that attempted to organise the whole of everyday life around Christian discipline.

Monasticism also helped Christianity take on a more recognisably Egyptian character. The desert, Nile Valley and rural settlement became part of a sacred geography populated by monks, holy places and stories of spiritual struggle. This should not be overstated as an early form of Egyptian nationalism, since monastic communities were diverse and remained connected to the wider Roman Christian world. Nevertheless, their authority was rooted in Egyptian places and local networks rather than only in Alexandria's Greek intellectual culture or imperial institutions. Monastic traditions could therefore connect the Alexandrian Church with Christians beyond the capital, including communities in which Coptic became increasingly important as a religious and literary language (Goehring, 1999; Rousseau, 1999).

Monasticism consequently strengthened Egyptian Christian identity without becoming fully subordinate to the bishops. Bishops could present monks as models of orthodoxy and use their influence to extend connections into rural society, while monks gained protection and a wider audience through episcopal relationships. At the same time, their spiritual reputation allowed them to criticise clerics or intervene independently in religious disputes. The relationship was therefore reciprocal and sometimes tense. Egyptian Christianisation developed not only through legislation, councils and urban conflict, but also through communities that made discipline, poverty and the desert central sources of Christian authority.

Christian structures and material culture in Alexandria

The archaeology of Alexandria provides an important check on the dramatic narratives preserved by Christian writers. Literary sources often present the city through moments of confrontation, such as the destruction of the Serapeum or the murder of Hypatia, whereas the surviving material record suggests a less complete and more uneven transformation. The evidence is difficult to reconstruct because much of the ancient city lies beneath modern Alexandria, while later building, stone reuse and changes to the coastline have removed or obscured large areas of the late antique landscape (McKenzie, 2007). Archaeological silence must, therefore, be treated cautiously. The absence of a surviving church does not prove that

one never existed, but neither should literary claims of Christian victory automatically be accepted as descriptions of total physical change.

The Serapeum illustrates this problem clearly. Archaeological investigation confirms major destruction and the dismantling of the sanctuary, yet it does not provide evidence for the immediate construction of a large church across its main enclosure (McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes, 2004, p. 108). The site was therefore stripped of its former cultic authority without necessarily being replaced at once by an equally monumental Christian building. This suggests that Christianisation could operate through interruption and altered memory as much as through direct architectural replacement. A ruined or reused temple still communicated that the old cult had lost public protection, even when parts of its structure remained visible.

Christian topography was also shaped by competition within Christianity. Churches such as the Caesareum, Theonas and Dionysius became associated with struggles between rival bishops and congregations. Possession of these buildings mattered because they offered more than space for worship: they gave a claimant visibility, access to congregations and a physical presence within the city. The conversion of the Caesareum from an imperial cult complex into a major church is known mainly through literary evidence, which again shows the limits of the surviving archaeology. Even so, the changing use of the structure demonstrates how Christian institutions could appropriate existing sites of political prestige rather than constructing an entirely separate city (Haas, 1997; McKenzie, 2007).

Kom el-Dikka provides a different perspective. Excavations reveal that fourth-century rebuilding replaced earlier elite houses with an imperial bath complex and, later, an odeum and a substantial group of auditoria (Majcherek, 1995, pp. 133–150; Majcherek, 2010, pp. 471–484). This was not a landscape in which classical civic life had simply disappeared. Public bathing, education and Greek intellectual culture continued within a city that was becoming increasingly Christian. Some architectural forms within the auditoria even resembled church arrangements, although the absence of altars prevents their identification as churches.

The evidence points towards adaptation and overlaps rather than a clean division between a pagan past and a Christian present. Alexandria's material record therefore supports the wider argument that Christianisation reorganised public religion without immediately erasing the older city. Temples lost protection, churches occupied politically meaningful locations, and existing buildings were adapted to new forms of authority. At the same time, baths, schools, streets and older monuments continued to structure everyday life. Archaeology reveals Christianisation not as the sudden construction of a completely Christian city, but as a gradual reworking of an inherited urban landscape.

Summary

Alexandria demonstrates that Christianisation was not a single conversion of the city, nor the straightforward result of imperial legislation. Christianity had already developed a recognisable intellectual and institutional presence before Constantine through teaching, biblical scholarship, episcopal leadership and memories of persecution. This earlier foundation matters because it shows that imperial favour strengthened an existing Christian community rather than creating one from nothing (Eusebius, HE 6.3–6.5, 6.8, 6.23; Haas, 1997).

After Constantine, however, the conditions of religious authority changed significantly. The controversy surrounding Arius and the career of Athanasius show how theological

disagreement became tied to councils, imperial intervention and rival claims to episcopal legitimacy. Emperors could exile bishops and support doctrinal settlements, but they could not impose lasting unity without cooperation from local clergy and congregations (Ayres, 2004; Gwynn, 2007). Alexandria therefore supports this dissertation's two-way model: power moved from the imperial centre, but its effects depended upon how it was received, resisted and reshaped within the city and the wider Egyptian Church.

By the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Christian authority was also becoming visible in Alexandria's public spaces. The destruction of the Serapeum weakened the institutional position of traditional cult, while the conflicts surrounding Cyril and Hypatia reveal how episcopal leadership had entered civic politics and crowd mobilisation (Dijkstra, 2020; Watts, 2017). Yet neither event proves that pagan culture or Greek learning simply disappeared. The archaeological evidence instead suggests adaptation, reuse and overlap within an inherited urban landscape (McKenzie, 2007). Monasticism widened this transformation beyond Alexandria. Egyptian monks created forms of authority grounded in ascetic discipline, rural networks and the sacred landscape of the desert. Their relationship with bishops could be cooperative, but it was never entirely controlled from the city (Brakke, 1998; Goehring, 1999).

Overall, Alexandria presents a different pattern from Carthage. Its Christianisation was shaped less by regional councils and more by theological controversy, intellectual prestige, monastic authority and struggles over sacred and civic space. The result was not complete religious uniformity, but a decisive reordering of which institutions and individuals could define the city's public religious identity.

Chapter 5: Hippo Regius

Hippo Regius provides the final case study for this dissertation because it offers a more local view of Christianisation than either Carthage or Alexandria. Its main value lies in the unusually detailed evidence provided by Augustine, who served as a priest at Hippo from 391 and as its bishop from 395 or 396 until his death in 430 CE (Brown, 2000, pp. 182–185; Lancel, 2002, pp. 149–154). Located close to modern Annaba in north-eastern Algeria, Hippo was a prosperous port city with connections to the agricultural communities of Numidia. Although Augustine's influence extended across North Africa and the wider Roman world, Hippo remained the centre of his episcopal responsibilities. His sermons and letters provide evidence not only for his theological ideas, but also for the practical work of a late antique bishop. They show him preaching to local congregations, settling disputes, organising charity, supervising clergy and attempting to influence the behaviour of ordinary Christians.

This evidence changes the emphasis of the case study. The main question is no longer only how Christianity gained legal recognition or public authority but shifts to the more difficult question of how Christian life was organised and enforced locally. Augustine's preaching makes clear that becoming Christian involved more than attending church or accepting Christian teaching. He expected religion to shape how people used wealth, treated the poor, celebrated martyrs and approached marriage. The fact that he returned to these subjects suggests that episcopal teaching was not always followed and that Christian identity had to be continually explained, encouraged and sometimes imposed.

Augustine's writings must still be approached carefully. They present Hippo through the concerns of a bishop who was trying to reform his congregation, rather than offering a neutral description of the city's population. His criticism of a particular practice does not necessarily show how widespread it was. However, the distance between Augustine's expectations and the behaviour he condemned is itself valuable evidence. This suggests that Christianisation was not simply imposed from above. Bishops could set expectations and try to correct behaviour, but local Christians still had a significant role in deciding how far those expectations were accepted in everyday life. Christianisation at Hippo was, therefore, negotiated, uneven and sometimes coercive. Hippo Regius therefore acts as the dissertation's micro-level case study. Roman legislation and imperial authority remained important, particularly in the conflict with Donatism, but their local effects depended upon Augustine's preaching, discipline, charity and use of episcopal power. Hippo shows Christianisation as the gradual and contested reorganisation of everyday religious life.

Hippo Regius in context

To understand the context in which Augustine operated, Hippo Regius must first be approached as a Roman African city with its own established structures and dynamics. It was not merely the backdrop to Augustine's episcopate, but a functioning urban centre shaped by earlier political, social and cultural developments. Its relative scale, smaller than Carthage or Alexandria, makes it particularly valuable for examining how Christianisation unfolded beyond the major metropolitan centres, within a regional city where local conditions played a more visible role.

Ancient Hippo was situated near modern Annaba in north-eastern Algeria, on the western side of a bay and close to the mouth of the River Ubus. Its harbour gave the city access to maritime routes, while its extensive territory connected it to the productive countryside beyond the urban centre. The title Regius points to an earlier association with the Numidian kings and probably indicates that the settlement had once served as a royal residence (Warmington and Wilson,

2015). Hippo's later Roman identity was therefore built upon an older North African setting rather than being created from nothing.

Hippo Regius was not simply Augustine's later episcopal city, but an already developed Roman civic centre. It became a municipium under Augustus and was probably promoted to colonial status by the late first century CE. Its forum, market, baths, theatre and domestic quarter show a city organised around the normal structures of Roman municipal life (Warmington and Wilson, 2015). The forum, in particular, mattered as a space of civic representation and local identity, while the market, baths and theatre shaped commerce, leisure and social hierarchy.

Hippo also controlled a substantial hinterland, extending at least 40 kilometres to the south-west, where Punic was still spoken in parts of the rural population during Augustine's lifetime (Warmington and Wilson, 2015; Augustine, Ep. 209). Christianity therefore entered a city already shaped by Roman public life but still connected to a culturally varied North African territory. These civic spaces also give a sense of the social world Augustine later entered. Hippo's population cannot be reconstructed completely, but its houses, monuments, port setting and rural territory suggest a community made up of municipal elites, landowners, traders, craftsmen, poorer inhabitants and people coming in from the surrounding countryside (Warmington and Wilson, 2015; Augustine, Ep. 209). Lepelley rightly challenges the idea that late Roman African cities were already in complete decline, instead showing that municipal life still mattered in Late Antiquity (Lepelley, 1979). Augustine's authority, therefore, developed within these existing urban relationships, rather than outside them.

Hippo was also already a divided Christian city when Augustine entered its church. Valerius was the bishop when Augustine arrived, and Possidius explains that Augustine was ordained because Valerius needed help with the growing demands of the local Church, especially preaching (Possidius, Vita Augustini 5; Brown, 2000, pp. 182–185; Lancel, 2002, pp. 149–154). The city also had an organised Donatist presence. Augustine's Letter 33 is addressed directly to Proculeianus, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, and shows the two communities existing within the same urban environment (Augustine, Ep. 33.1–6). Possidius also describes Nicaean, Donatists and Manichaeans being involved in public religious debate at Hippo (Possidius, Vita Augustini 6). Christianisation here, therefore, meant competition over which Church represented Christianity, not simply whether the city would become Christian.

Consequently, Hippo was not isolated from the wider Roman and African Church. It was connected to Roman law, African episcopal networks and decisions made at Carthage, but these wider structures still had to work through local relationships. Augustine's role was to turn legal and ecclesiastical authority into preaching, negotiation, discipline and practical assistance within the city itself (Brown, 2000, pp. 182–185; Lancel, 2002, pp. 149–154; Merdinger, 1997). Hippo is important demonstrating how the wider Roman world was experienced locally, through civic institutions, urban hierarchy and a divided Christian population.

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine's arrival at Hippo is important because it allows Christianisation to be studied through the work of one bishop in a local Roman African city. He was ordained as a priest at Hippo in 391 CE, despite not having travelled there with the intention of taking on clerical office. After his ordination, he established a monastery connected with the church (Possidius, Vita Augustini 4; Brown, 2000, pp. 182–185; Lancel, 2002, pp. 149–154). Possidius presents this ordination as partly connected to the needs of Valerius, the existing bishop, who required

assistance with the demands of the local church, especially preaching (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 5). Augustine later became bishop and remained bishop of Hippo until his death in 430 CE. Hippo therefore provides nearly forty years of evidence for how episcopal authority worked in practice, rather than only in theory.

This section does not need to treat Augustine as a full biographical subject. His importance for this chapter lies less in the details of his personal life and more in what his career shows about Christian authority on the ground. Augustine's sermons and letters reveal the everyday work of a bishop. This involved preaching to congregations, correcting behaviour, organising clergy, responding to disputes, managing charity, dealing with Donatists and corresponding with other bishops or officials. This makes Hippo different from Carthage and Alexandria. Carthage is especially useful for councils, episcopal networks and Donatist conflict at a regional level, while Alexandria shows Christianisation through theological controversy, sacred space and urban violence. Hippo, by contrast, brings the analysis down to the level of routine pastoral labour.

Augustine's authority was therefore practical as well as theological. He did not simply write doctrine from a distance. He had to speak repeatedly to a local congregation and persuade people to adopt Christian habits in ordinary life. His sermons show him addressing moral behaviour, feast days, charity, discipline and the habits of Christians who did not always live according to episcopal expectations. Letter 29 is a useful example because Augustine describes his attempt to reform drunken celebrations connected with the feast of the former bishop Leontius, showing that Christian practice at Hippo still required correction, persuasion and negotiation (Augustine, Ep. 29.2–11). This kind of evidence is valuable because it demonstrates that the process of Christianisation cannot be regarded as "completed" (which is perhaps an unhelpful notion in any case) simply because a city had a bishop or because Christianity had imperial support. This also shows a limit to Augustine's authority. He could condemn these practices and argue against them, but lasting change depended on the congregation accepting his teaching and changing its own behaviour.

His letters also show that episcopal authority operated through wider relationships. Augustine corresponded with other bishops, clergy, lay people and officials, and his anti-Donatist work drew him into questions of law, coercion and church unity. Letters 93 and 185 are especially important for showing his changing defence of imperial pressure against Donatists, while still framing the issue as the correction and recovery of separated Christians rather than simply punishment (Augustine, Ep. 93; Ep. 185; Brown, 2000, pp. 225–243). This matters for the dissertation because it shows the two-way character of Christianisation. Imperial law could create opportunities for Catholic authority, but Augustine still had to translate that authority into local action through preaching, argument, discipline and pastoral care. The organisation of the clergy also formed part of this process. Sermons 355 and 356 show Augustine explaining the life and property of Hippo's clergy, which suggests that episcopal authority included the management of clerical behaviour and public trust (Augustine, Sermon. 355–356). The bishop had to make Christian leadership visible and credible within the city. This was especially important in a divided Christian environment, where Nicæan and Donatists both claimed to represent the true Church. Augustine's role was not simply to lead an already unified Christian population, but to build a faith based authority in a city where Christian identity itself remained contested.

Augustine's importance for this chapter therefore lies not simply in his theology, but in the way his sermons and letters reveal Christianisation as pastoral labour inside a Roman African city. His episcopal authority worked through the pulpit, correspondence, councils, legal appeals and everyday intervention. This shows that Christianisation at Hippo was a slow moral and

social process. Wider imperial and ecclesiastical structures mattered, but they became effective locally only when figures such as Augustine taught, organised and negotiated within the community.

Christian identity and habits in Hippo

Augustine's preaching is one of the strongest types of evidence for Christianisation at Hippo. Augustine was not just defending doctrine or arguing against the Donatists. He was also trying to influence how ordinary Christians behaved in daily life. This matters because the process of Christianisation was not one that led to some simplistic "completed" state, regardless of whether people identified themselves as Christians and attended church. Augustine's sermons show that Christian identity had to be taught, repeated and corrected over time. He dealt with issues such as worship, charity, anger, wealth, drunkenness, popular customs and attitudes towards schism. This shows that Christianisation in Hippo was also a moral and social process, not just a legal or institutional one.

The sermons are useful because they give access to Augustine's repeated pastoral concerns. They do not show exactly what every Christian in Hippo believed, since they mainly reflect what Augustine thought needed correction. However, this is also what makes them valuable as evidence. If he regularly preached about drunkenness, charity, moral discipline or behaviour at Christian festivals, then these were likely real concerns within the community rather than abstract theological issues. His preaching therefore shows the gap between official Christian identity and lived Christian practice. Hippo could have churches, clergy and a bishop, while still containing Christians whose everyday habits did not yet match episcopal expectations. Augustine's repeated criticism can therefore be read not only as evidence of episcopal authority but also as evidence of its limits. If these practices continued to require correction, ordinary Christians clearly retained some control over how Christianity was lived in practice.

Catechesis was also part of this everyday process of Christianisation. Augustine's *De catechizandis rudibus* was written for Deogratias, a deacon at Carthage, who had asked him for advice on how to teach beginners in the Christian faith (Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus* 1.1–2.3). Augustine did not assume that everyone approaching the Church had already undergone a sincere internal conversion. Therefore, his recommendations for the converts included first discovering their motives as well as a broad narrative of scriptural history (Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus* 3.5; 5.9). Catechumens did not just receive a Christian label. They had to learn the story of salvation, understand basic doctrine and be encouraged towards a different way of life. This is important because entering the Church did not automatically mean that belief and behaviour had already changed. Christian identity had to be taught and developed, suggesting that institutional membership and personal conviction were not always the same thing.

Augustine also often linked Christian identity with changed behaviour. It was not enough for people to reject pagan worship or avoid Donatist separation. They also had to live differently in their everyday relationships. This included how they used money, how they treated the poor, how they behaved at festivals and how they controlled their bodies and emotions. Brown's work on wealth and Christianity is useful here because it shows that late antique Christian leaders were not simply rejecting wealth altogether, but trying to redirect it towards charity, church support and care for the poor (Brown, 2012). In Hippo, this meant that Christianisation affected social behaviour as well as belief. Wealth and charity therefore became important areas where Christian teaching tried to reshape older ideas about status, patronage and public respectability. Brown's emphasis on the Christian redirection of wealth is convincing, although

the evidence from Hippo also shows that this depended heavily on local participation. Augustine could encourage giving, but the Church still relied on ordinary Christians choosing to provide the resources that made this charity possible (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 23-24).

One of the clearest examples is Augustine's Letter 22 to Aurelius of Carthage. In this letter, Augustine complains about feasting and drunkenness in cemeteries and at the memorials of the martyrs. This is useful evidence because it shows that Christianisation did not simply remove older popular habits. Some customs continued inside Christian spaces and had to be corrected from within. Augustine does not present this as a problem he can solve by himself. He asks Aurelius to use his authority, and refers to the need for conciliar authority, because the practice was too widespread to be corrected by one local bishop alone (Augustine, Ep. 22.1-6). This section therefore shows a different side of episcopal authority from the previous discussion of Augustine's office. His authority was not only exercised through letters, councils or legal arguments, but also through routine teaching and correction. Augustine tried to turn Christianity into a set of habits. Hippo as a case study reveals Christianisation to be not as one moment of conversion, but as a slow attempt to reshape everyday conduct.

Donatism, social networks and Imperial law

Although the wider development of Donatism has already been discussed in the chapter on Carthage, Hippo shows what the conflict looked like at a local level. Augustine's letters make clear that Donatism was not a distant theological argument, but an established Christian community with its own bishop, clergy and congregation in the city (Augustine, Ep. 33). Tilley's study of the wider Donatist social and religious world also shows that Donatism functioned as a developed Christian tradition rather than simply as an isolated protest movement (Tilley, 1997, pp.141-161). The main issue was therefore not whether Hippo was Christian, but which church could claim to represent true Christianity. Nicaean and Donatists were competing for the same local population, which made the conflict a question of authority, unity and belonging as much as doctrine (Tilley, 1997, pp.162-180). Tilley's treatment of Donatism as an established Christian tradition is particularly convincing at Hippo. The presence of its own bishop, clergy and congregation suggests that Donatist identity was not simply opposition to Nicaean authority, but a religious allegiance which many local Christians regarded as legitimate.

Augustine proposed either meeting Proculianus directly or setting out their arguments in writing so that they could be read to both congregations. He also described husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and servants who shared the same household but worshipped in different churches. Members of each community could even approach the rival bishop for help with disputes over property. The schism therefore cut across ordinary social relationships rather than separating Nicaean and Donatists into two isolated groups. This gives local believers a more active role in the conflict than a purely episcopal account would suggest. Religious allegiance was being negotiated within families, households and local relationships and could not simply be decided by either Nicaean or Donatist bishops.

At Hippo, church allegiance divided the altar more clearly than it divided the household (Augustine, Ep. 33; Ebbeler, 2012, pp. 151-189). Augustine continued to use letters as a way of attempting to correct Donatist clergy. According to Ebbeler (2012, pp. 151-189), these letters were intended to encourage the recipient to recognise their religious error and return to Christian unity. However, this method was not always successful, as Donatist recipients could refuse to answer Augustine or reject his arguments. In Letter 89, written to Festus in 406 CE, Augustine explains that people under Festus' influence within the region of Hippo continued to be Donatists, even after Festus had previously written to them. Augustine therefore asked him

to send a trusted servant or friend, who could first meet with Augustine before approaching the Donatists (Augustine, Ep. 89). This implies that religious change depended not only on the teaching of bishops, but also on the influence of landowners, patrons and other locally powerful individuals. Even the combined influence of bishop and landowner therefore did not guarantee religious compliance.

By this period, Augustine had also begun to accept imperial pressure against Donatism. Within Letter 93, written to Vincentius in 408 CE, Augustine explains that he had originally believed nobody should be forced into Christian unity. Instead, he believed Donatists should be persuaded through teaching and discussion. However, Augustine states that his position changed after other bishops showed him examples of communities that had entered the Catholic Church after imperial laws had been used against them (Augustine, Ep. 93.17). He believed that some people remained Donatists because of family tradition, local pressure or fear of other Donatists, rather than because they had properly considered the Catholic argument.

Augustine did not claim that coercion alone could create genuine Christian belief. Instead, he suggested that legal pressure could remove individuals from their established habits and encourage them to listen to Catholic teaching. He compared the use of coercion to the restraint of a person suffering from illness, who may resist treatment even though the treatment was believed to be for their own benefit. In effect, Augustine viewed imperial pressure as a form of correction rather than persecution. However, the Donatists were still being forced towards the Catholic Church, meaning that this process remained coercive despite Augustine's description of it as an act of care (Brown, 1964, pp. 107–116; Merdinger, 1997). Imperial pressure could therefore make remaining Donatist more difficult and could encourage outward conformity, but it could not directly control what individuals believed. Augustine's own need to combine coercion with teaching and persuasion suggests that he recognised this distinction.

The clearest example of Roman law operating within Hippo is found in Letter 133, written to the imperial official Marcellinus in 412 CE. Augustine refers to Circumcellions and Donatist clergy from the district of Hippo who had been brought to trial. According to the investigation, several confessed to involvement in the death of the Catholic presbyter Restitutus and the attack on another presbyter named Innocentius, who had been beaten, blinded in one eye and had a finger cut off (Augustine, Ep. 133.1). However, Augustine also states that the confessions were obtained by beating the defendants with rods. The evidence therefore needs to be treated carefully, as it was produced through Roman judicial punishment.

Augustine asked Marcellinus not to execute or mutilate those convicted, but he did not oppose punishment. He accepted legal restraint and suggested that the convicted men should be directed towards useful labour rather than executed (Augustine, Ep. 133.1–3). His concern was that punishment should correct the offenders rather than repeat the injuries they had caused. In effect, Augustine accepted imperial intervention while trying to control how severe was its implementation. His opposition to execution should not be viewed as religious tolerance, as he still supported the restriction of Donatist activity through Roman law.

Letter 139 shows how imperial justice was then used within Augustine's pastoral work. He asked for the trial records to be read in the church at Hippo and throughout the diocese so that the local population could hear the evidence against the Donatists (Augustine, Ep. 139.1). The same letter states that the Donatist bishop Macrobius had reopened churches and gathered congregations after some had closed through fear of official action (Augustine, Ep. 139.2). This suggests that imperial pressure weakened Donatist organisation but did not immediately

remove local support. Donatism in Hippo therefore shows the connection between Roman power and local episcopal authority. Augustine began with letters and discussion, but increasingly accepted legal pressure when persuasion failed to achieve Catholic unity. At the same time, he attempted to influence how officials applied the law. Imperial law gave the Catholic Church the means to act against a rival Christian community, while Augustine's decisions shaped how that power was applied locally.

Charity, care for the poor and property

Following the use of imperial law against Donatism, Augustine's authority within Hippo can also be seen through charity and the management of local social problems. Possidius describes Augustine distributing church funds to the poor, hearing disputes, interceding with officials and using church property to assist captives and other people in need (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 19–24). Christianisation at Hippo also involved placing areas of social responsibility under episcopal authority. Although he did not write a neutral account, his purpose was partly to present Augustine as an ideal bishop who was disciplined, merciful and devoted to the needs of his congregation (Hermanowicz, 2018, pp. 30–36). So, much of his descriptions of the bishop should be treated carefully rather than accepted as a complete picture of Augustine's episcopate.

Even with this limitation, the practical detail in chapters 19–24 remains valuable because it shows the types of responsibilities that were expected from a late antique bishop. According to Possidius, Augustine used income from church property and the offerings of believers to support the poor, while the same funds also supported Augustine and those living within his clerical household (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 23). Possidius points out that when the church funds had been exhausted, Augustine informed the congregation that he had nothing left to give to the poor and on other occasions, reminded them when the church treasury had been neglected (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 24). This suggests that charity at Hippo depended upon the continued willingness of local Christians to give.

According to Possidius, the care of the church buildings and property was entrusted to capable members of the clergy, who kept records of income and expenditure and presented the accounts to Augustine at the end of each year (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 24). Possidius also provides an example of a leading man from Hippo who transferred his property to the Church but later asked for the documents to be returned to his son while offering one hundred gold pieces to the poor. Augustine returned the documents but refused the money (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 24).

Another role which increased Augustine's authority within Hippo was his involvement in settling local disputes. According to Possidius, Augustine heard cases brought to him by Christians and people from other religious groups, sometimes spending several hours or most of the day dealing with them (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 19). When possible, he used the case to instruct both sides in Christian teaching and remind them of how they were expected to live (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 19). This suggests that ordinary disputes could also become part of Augustine's pastoral work. Augustine's authority also allowed him to communicate with Roman officials on behalf of people who required assistance. Augustine's authority also allowed him to communicate with Roman officials on behalf of people facing punishment. In Letter 153, Augustine wrote to Macedonius, the Vicar of Africa, defending the role of bishops in interceding on behalf of the guilty and arguing that mercy should aim at correcting the offender rather than simply leaving wrongdoing unpunished (Augustine, Ep. 153.1–3). In effect, Augustine could act

as a connection between members of the local population and the wider imperial administration.

Possidius also provides an example of church property being used to support captives and other people in need. According to his account, Augustine ordered sacred vessels belonging to the Church to be broken and melted down so that their value could be distributed to captives and the poor (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 24). However, Possidius points out that some people disagreed with this decision, showing that the correct use of church property was not agreed upon by everyone. Charity within Hippo was therefore more than the personal generosity of individual Christians. The management of church income, property, disputes and requests for assistance allowed Augustine to become involved in several areas of local life. Therefore, Christianisation at Hippo involved the Church taking on greater responsibility for local welfare and social problems, with the bishop becoming central to how this support was organised.

Christian presence in the topography of Hippo

The growing authority of the Church within Hippo can also be seen through the changing use of the city's physical space. Christianisation was not only taking place through preaching, law and the growing role of the bishop, but also through the places where people worshipped, were baptised and remembered the dead. These churches and other Christian spaces consequently became a more visible part of the city and provided another way of looking at Christianisation beyond Augustine's letters and sermons. However, these developed within an existing Roman city rather than replacing it completely, and the archaeological evidence does not always make it clear which buildings belonged to Augustine or other Christian communities.

Christian buildings developed within a city that still contained many of its earlier Roman civic spaces. The forum, theatre, aqueduct and two large bath complexes continued to form part of Hippo's urban landscape into Late Antiquity (Ardeleanu, 2019, p. 402). The restoration of the macellum between 364 and 367 CE also shows that older public buildings were still being maintained during the fourth century (Ardeleanu, 2019, pp. 402–403). At the same time, Christian spaces were becoming more established, with references to three basilicas, at least four martyr memorials and two monasteries within Hippo (Ardeleanu, 2019, p. 403). This suggests that Christianisation developed alongside the existing Roman city rather than simply replacing it.

The clearest archaeological evidence for this Christian presence comes from the area traditionally described as Hippo's Christian quarter. Erwan Marec first uncovered a recognisable baptistery in 1926, before returning to excavate the same area in 1947 (Laporte, 2015, pp. 109–112). These excavations revealed a large church surrounded by several other buildings, which appeared to have developed through different stages. Marec later identified the main church as the Basilica Pacis, or Basilica of Peace, which he believed was Augustine's main episcopal church. Even without accepting this identification, the complex provides clear evidence for an organised Christian space where worship, baptism and other church activities could take place.

However, the identification of this church as Augustine's own cathedral cannot be accepted with certainty. Later scholars questioned Marec's argument, with Marrou suggesting that the building may instead have belonged to the Donatist community of Hippo, possibly being used by bishops such as Proculianus or Macrobius (Laporte, 2015, pp. 112–116). Laporte has since proposed a different location for the Basilica of Peace, based upon Christian remains discovered around the former Borgeaud property, including architectural fragments,

inscriptions and episcopal burials (Laporte, 2015, pp. 117–122). However, this identification also remains uncertain. The debate therefore shows the difficulty of connecting surviving buildings directly with Augustine and reflects the presence of competing Christian communities within the same city. The uncertainty is also important because a Christian building does not by itself tell us which Christian community controlled it. Christianisation of urban space could therefore remain contested even after that space had become recognisably Christian.

Christianisation also changed where the dead were buried and how they were remembered within Hippo. Ardeleanu shows that from the late fourth century, new burial areas began to appear within the city, including burials inside the excavated Christian Basilica (Ardeleanu, 2019, pp. 405–408, 412–422). Some graves were placed within the different aisles of the church and close to important areas of worship. However, burial was not limited to churches, as other graves continued to appear elsewhere across the city. This shows that Christian burial practices were becoming more connected with religious spaces, while older patterns of burial did not disappear completely.

The religious importance of these spaces was also strengthened through the presence of martyr relics. Augustine's Sermon 318 was delivered at Hippo when relics of the martyr Stephen were placed within a shrine or memorial in the city (Augustine, Sermon 318.1). Augustine explained to the congregation that the place and the occasion were to be remembered through their devotion. The relics therefore gave Christians another location where they could gather and remember the martyr. This shows that sacred space was created not only through church buildings, but also through the religious practices that took place inside them.

The archaeological and textual evidence, in combination, indicates that Christian sacred space became increasingly important within Hippo without completely replacing the Roman city around it. Churches, burial areas and martyr memorials provided new places for Christian worship and commemoration, while older parts of the city continued to exist alongside them. The uncertainty surrounding the Basilica of Peace also shows that these spaces could be contested between different Christian communities. Christianisation therefore changed the religious landscape of Hippo gradually rather than through the complete replacement of its earlier Roman character.

Epigraphic and visual testimony of Christian affiliation

The material remains from Hippo provide another way of examining how far Christianity had entered everyday life within the city. While the previous section focused mainly on churches and sacred spaces, smaller forms of evidence such as inscriptions, crosses and decorated monuments can show how Christian identity was presented more directly. This is useful because Augustine's writings mainly show the Church from the viewpoint of a bishop, whereas material evidence provides another way of looking at how Christianity was expressed within the city.

One of the clearest forms of material evidence comes from the surviving inscriptions found across Hippo. From the late fourth century, shorter Christian formulas became increasingly common, particularly *fidelis* and *in pace*, while *amen* was also used less frequently (Ardeleanu, 2019, p. 410). These words identified the dead through their Christian faith and became part of how individuals were publicly remembered. However, older forms did not completely disappear, with some earlier funerary language continuing into later periods. This suggests that

Christian identity became more visible within inscriptions but developed alongside older Roman traditions rather than immediately replacing them.

Christian identity was also made more visible through the symbols and decoration placed on monuments. A stone cross from Hippo's Christian quarter carried the words *cruce salvatoris*, while other surviving funerary monuments included different forms of crosses and staurograms, sometimes alongside the alpha and omega (Ardeleanu, 2019, pp. 409, 434–435). Mosaic graves also continued to use geometric, floral and animal designs alongside Christian symbols (Ardeleanu, 2019, p. 410). This shows that Christian material culture did not require a completely new artistic style. Instead, familiar decorative traditions from Roman North Africa were adapted by incorporating recognisable Christian symbols.

The archaeology also suggests that older ways of remembering the dead continued within a Christian setting. Funerary tables, or mensae, were placed over graves and could be used during commemorative meals or for pouring liquids. At Hippo, one surviving example contained carefully made perforations and a basin which allowed liquids to be poured into the grave (Ardeleanu, 2024, p. 154). Augustine's Letter 29 also shows that eating and drinking remained part of Christian commemorative celebrations at Hippo, although he strongly criticised the excessive drinking that took place inside churches (Augustine, Ep. 29.2–11). This suggests that Christianisation did not simply remove older practices but could involve existing customs being continued and gradually changed by church leaders.

Unfortunately, the surviving material evidence does not provide a complete picture of religious life at Hippo. Some inscriptions and objects were found in their original position, while others had been moved or reused, making their original context more difficult to understand (Ardeleanu, 2019, pp. 401–402). This means that a Christian inscription or symbol cannot always tell us exactly where it was originally displayed or who used it. Material evidence can therefore show that Christianity was becoming more visible within Hippo, but it cannot show how completely the population had converted or whether older religious practices had disappeared.

The material evidence therefore supports a picture of Christianisation at Hippo as gradual rather than complete. Christian inscriptions and symbols became more visible, showing that Christianity was increasingly used to express identity and remember the dead. At the same time, older styles and commemorative practices continued to be used within Christian settings. In effect, becoming Christian did not mean that every part of the city's Roman culture disappeared. Instead, some existing traditions continued but were given new meanings or gradually changed under the influence of the Church.

Hippo Regius in the age of Vandal conquest

The final years of Augustine's episcopate took place during a major political crisis as Vandal and Alan forces entered Roman North Africa. Possidius describes towns being attacked, populations being displaced and churches losing clergy as the invasion moved through the African provinces (Possidius, Vita Augustini 28). His description is strongly hostile towards the invaders and though it should not be treated as a neutral account, it still shows the disruption that the invasion caused to the Christian communities around Hippo.

This created a very different situation from the one Augustine had faced during most of his episcopate, as the Roman political order which had supported Catholic authority was now itself under increasing pressure. The crisis eventually reached Hippo itself when the city was placed

under siege. Possidius states that Count Boniface defended Hippo with his forces, while Possidius and other bishops from neighbouring areas also took refuge within the city (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 28). The siege continued for almost fourteen months, although Augustine only lived through its first few months. Even during the wider invasion, Augustine argued that bishops and clergy should not simply abandon their congregations if people remained who still depended upon them for baptism, reconciliation and other church services (Augustine, Ep. 228). This shows that episcopal authority was still understood as a practical responsibility during a period when normal political and social conditions were breaking down.

It was during the siege that Augustine became seriously ill and eventually died in 430. According to Possidius, he developed a fever during the third month of the siege and spent his final period increasingly withdrawn in prayer (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 29, 31). He had copies of the penitential Psalms placed where he could read them and, during the final ten days, asked not to be disturbed except for medical care and food (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 31). Possidius presents these final days in a strongly religious way, fitting his wider image of Augustine as an ideal bishop. However, Augustine's death still marked the end of nearly forty years in which Christianisation at Hippo can be followed through his preaching, letters and direct involvement within the local Church.

Augustine's death provides a useful endpoint for this case study, although it did not mark the end of Christianity or Christianisation at Hippo itself. The Church and the city continued beyond his lifetime, while the material evidence discussed earlier also extends into the period after his death. Instead, 430 CE marks the end of the unusually detailed evidence provided by Augustine's own episcopate and came at a point when the political conditions of Roman Africa were changing rapidly. Hippo therefore ends the Roman part of this case study with Christian institutions already firmly established, but still facing competition, changing practices and political uncertainty. Christianisation had advanced considerably, but it had not reached a clear or final point.

Chapter 6: Comparative Analysis: Imperial Frameworks and Local Pathways of Christianisation

This chapter brings the three case studies together to compare the different pathways that emerged. The aim here is not to repeat what happened in each city but to explain why similar imperial changes produced different local outcomes and to test the dissertations two-way model of imperial influence and local agency. The comparison focuses on imperial intervention, local leadership, institutions, sacred space and religious conflict. In Carthage, Christianisation is especially visible through bishops, councils and Church organisation. Alexandria shows a different pattern through theological conflict, powerful bishops and disputes over sacred space. Hippo Regius provides a more local view, where Augustine's sermons and letters show Christianisation through preaching, discipline, charity and everyday church life. These differences suggest that imperial legislation and patronage changed the conditions in which Christianity developed, but local traditions, institutions and leaders shaped how those changes worked in practice. The comparison must also consider the uneven evidence for each city. Carthage is particularly strong in conciliar, archaeological and funerary evidence, Alexandria in narrative and theological sources, and Hippo in Augustine's sermons and letters. Some differences may therefore reflect what survives as well as genuine historical variation.

Local conditions before imperial change

The three cities did not enter the fourth century from the same religious or institutional starting point, and Carthage already possessed a particularly developed Christian structure. Tertullian shows that the city already had a strong Christian intellectual voice by the late second and early third centuries, while Cyprian provides clearer evidence for the growing authority of the bishop (Burns and Jensen, 2014, p. 387). By the middle of the third century, this organisation had also developed beyond the local church, with the Council of Carthage in 256 bringing together bishops from across Africa, Numidia and Mauretania (Cyprian, *Sententiae episcoporum*, proem.). Christian communities were also having to deal with questions about discipline and who could remain part of the church, especially during the controversy over those who had lapsed. The stories and memories of martyrs such as Perpetua, Felicity and Cyprian also played an important role in shaping Christian identity in the city.

Alexandria had a very different starting point because Christianity developed within a much larger and more religiously and intellectually diverse metropolis. Alexandria remained an important administrative and economic centre of Roman Egypt, with strong pagan, Jewish alongside the developing Christian community (Haas, 1997, pp. 128-173). Figures such as Clement and Origen helped develop Christian teaching and biblical scholarship in the city. At the same time, bishops such as Demetrius and Dionysius show that the Church was becoming more organised and its leadership more established (Eusebius, *HE* 6.6; 6.19; 6.23; 6.40). Christianity was therefore developing alongside older religious and intellectual traditions rather than simply replacing them. This helps clarify why Christianisation in Alexandria became closely connected with arguments over doctrine, episcopal authority and the control of sacred space.

Hippo Regius provides a different starting point again, as it was a smaller Roman African city with strong links to its surrounding countryside. Other than being a coastal port and a Roman civic centre, Roman civic life was well established through its forum, market and municipal government (Warmington and Wilson, 2015). It is also important to note that Hippo already contained Nicaean and Donatist communities when Augustine arrived in 391 (Stump and

Meconi, 2014, p. 5). Letter 33 shows division between Nicæan and Donatist Christians. Addressing Proculianus, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, Augustine describes Christian households divided between the two churches and proposes a formal discussion between them (Augustine, *Ep.* 33.1–6). That is to say that Augustine did not arrive in a religiously empty or unified Christian city. Instead, he entered a community with varying Christian groups that had already competed for authority and pastoral influence over local believers. The issue therefore was not simply the conversion and spread of Christianity but also which Christian group could claim the main authority locally. This helps explain why Christianisation at Hippo becomes especially visible through local competition, preaching, discipline and pastoral work. The starting point therefore mattered. Imperial favour amplified institutions and conflicts that were already locally rooted.

Imperial influence and intervention

Although the three cities developed differently, they were all affected by the same wider changes in Roman religious policy during the fourth century. The early part of the fourth century brought major changes in their legal position. Christians had experienced periods of persecution and confiscation before Constantine they then move to being legally recognised and increasingly supported by emperors. Under Constantine this support could include restoration of Church property, financial assistance and with privileges and exemptions for clergy. The later emperors went further by supporting forms of Christianity, becoming involved in doctrinal disputes, restricting some pagan practices and using imperial law against groups regarded as heretical or schismatic. This gave Christian leaders new opportunities and forms of authority, but it did not determine exactly how these changes would develop at a local level. In Carthage, imperial support can be seen particularly clearly through the dispute surrounding Caecilian and the beginning of the Donatist controversy.

As already shown, the Church in Carthage was well organised before Constantine, meaning that imperial support was strengthening an institution that already existed rather than creating one from the beginning. Constantine recognised Caecilian and provided financial support to the Church, while clergy were also given exemptions from certain civic duties (Eusebius, *HE* 10.6–7). This gave the recognised Church greater access to money, property and legal support. However, it also made the conflict with the Donatists more important because questions over which group represented the legitimate Church became connected with imperial recognition. Constantine's intervention and the Council of Arles in 314 did not remove Donatist opposition. Imperial support therefore strengthened the Church in Carthage, but it did not create religious unity and in some ways made the existing division more serious.

Alexandria shows more clearly that imperial involvement did not always settle local religious disputes. The disagreement between Arius and Alexander grew beyond the city and eventually became an imperial issue, with Constantine becoming involved and calling the Council of Nicaea in 325. This shows how imperial authority could be used to attempt to impose wider Christian unity. However, the later career of Athanasius also shows the limits of this authority. He was repeatedly removed from Alexandria and later returned, while different emperors supported different sides of these theological disputes. Imperial involvement could therefore influence which bishops held power, but it could not easily remove local opposition. This can also be seen later in the destruction of the Serapeum in 391 or early 392. Imperial laws had increasingly restricted pagan worship, but there was no direct imperial order to destroy the Serapeum. Instead, Theophilus and local Christians acted within the new legal situation. Alexandria consequently shows how imperial policy could place strong pressure on religious life, while the outcome still depended heavily on local action.

At Hippo, imperial influence can be seen more clearly through the way wider laws were used in local disputes between Nicaean and Donatists. Augustine's letters show how imperial policy could affect local clergy, religious communities and the officials responsible for enforcing the law. Augustine had originally been cautious about using coercion against the Donatists but later became more willing to accept imperial pressure if he believed that it could bring people back into Christian unity (Augustine, Ep. 93). At the same time, he did not simply support harsh punishment. In Letter 133, Augustine wrote to Marcellinus asking that those responsible for violence should not be executed, even though he still wanted them to be punished (Augustine, Ep. 133). This shows that imperial law still depended on bishops and officials deciding how it should be used in practice.

At Hippo, imperial pressure was therefore important, but Augustine also had a role in shaping how that pressure was applied within the local community. The comparison shows that imperial intervention mattered in all three cities, but it did not have the same effect in each one. In Carthage, imperial support strengthened an already organised Church, although it also made the conflict with the Donatists more important. In Alexandria, emperors became closely involved in theological disputes and in the changing position of pagan worship, but local bishops and communities still had a major influence over what happened. At Hippo, imperial policy was more visible through local disputes, punishment and the way Augustine worked with officials. This shows that the empire could change the legal and political position of different religious groups, but it could not fully control how these changes developed within each city. Much therefore depended on local bishops and communities using imperial power in different ways.

Bishops and local Christian authority

Although imperial policy changed the position of Christianity, much of its effect depended on local bishops and Christian communities. Although emperors provided legal recognition along with the privileges and coercive powers that helped run the church. They did not run individual churches or communities themselves as that power rested on the bishops and clergy. Their role was more than simply religious teaching, much of their responsibility involved church discipline, disputes, property and longstanding relationships with officials and rival Christian groups. However, this did not look the same in Carthage, Alexandria and Hippo. The main difference was not simply that bishops became more powerful, but the kind of authority they developed and how they used it within each city. The bishop therefore became important in all three cities, although the way this authority developed depended on the local situation.

In Carthage, Christian leadership was especially connected with the bishop and the wider network of North African churches. Cyprian provides an early example of this before Constantine, as his role as bishop involved questions over discipline, the treatment of those who had lapsed and disputes over baptism. These issues were also discussed through councils rather than being decided by one bishop alone. The Council of Carthage in 256 shows this wider form of authority, with bishops from across North Africa meeting to discuss the question of baptism (Cyprian, *Sententiae episcoporum*, proem.). This pattern continued into the fourth and fifth centuries, when Carthage remained an important centre for wider Church disputes. The Conference of Carthage in 411 again brought together Nicaean and Donatist bishops to argue over which group represented the legitimate Church (Tilley, 1991, pp. 7–19). Although an imperial official oversaw the conference, the African bishops remained central to the dispute. Christian leadership in Carthage therefore worked through wider episcopal networks as well as the authority of individual bishops.

Alexandria developed a different form of Christian leadership, where the bishop could become a much more visible figure within the religious and political life of the city. Demetrius and Origen are useful examples of showing that episcopal authority was already being defined before Constantine. Their conflict shows tension between episcopal control and intellectual authority. Origen had been allowed to preach in Palestine while still a layman and was later ordained as a presbyter by bishops there, which caused further disagreement with Demetrius over his position (Eusebius, *HE* 6.19.16–19; 6.23.4). In the fourth century, Athanasius provides a clearer example of how powerful the bishop of Alexandria could become. His repeated exiles and returns show that imperial decisions did not necessarily remove his influence within Alexandria. Theophilus later became involved in the conflict surrounding the Serapeum, while Cyril's disputes with the Novatians and Orestes show how episcopal authority could overlap with wider civic affairs (Socrates, *HE* 5.16; 7.7; 7.13). However, this authority was still regularly challenged. Episcopal authority in Alexandria could therefore become very powerful, but it was never without opposition.

At Hippo, Augustine provides the clearest example of how episcopal authority could operate through the everyday life of a local community. Unlike Alexandria, we have an abundance of evidence about the ordinary work of a bishop. Augustine's sermons illustrate his teachings, where he also establishes the correct behaviour expected from Christians, including attitudes towards charity, drunkenness, sexuality, wealth, anger and religious practice (Augustine, *Ep.* 29; *Serm.* 335D). *De catechizandis rudibus* also shows his involvement in teaching those who were being introduced to Christianity and in deciding how the faith should be explained to them (Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus* 1.1–2). His letters show another side of this authority, particularly through his communication with Roman officials and his involvement in local disputes. In Letter 153, Augustine defends the role of bishops in interceding for those facing punishment and argues that punishment should also aim at correcting the offender (Augustine, *Ep.* 153.1–3). Possidius also presents Augustine dealing with disputes, Church finances, property and support for the poor and captives (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 19, 23–24). Christian leadership at Hippo was therefore closely connected with the everyday management of the local church and its wider community. Bishops were therefore not simply recipients of imperial power, but intermediaries who translated wider political change into local Christian authority.

Sacred space and the Christian city

Christianisation was not only visible through bishops and imperial legislation, but also through changes in the physical landscape. Churches, burial areas, shrines and places of commemoration gave Christianity a more permanent and visible place within the city. It can therefore be argued that sacred space provides one of the clearest ways of seeing how wider imperial changes were translated into local practice. Imperial patronage made it easier for Christian institutions to own property, build and organise worship, but imperial policy did not prescribe exactly what Christianisation would look like in every city.

In Carthage, this process is especially visible through Christian buildings, burial and martyr commemoration. As already seen, Damous-el-Karita shows Christian worship operating on a substantial physical scale, with the basilica and surrounding structures forming part of a wider ecclesiastical and funerary complex (Dolenz, 2000, pp.147-159; Leone, 2013, p.202). However, the importance of these spaces was not simply their size or architecture. Burial and the memory of martyrs also gave Christian identity a more permanent place within the landscape. Funerary inscriptions show individuals and families using Christian language and symbols when remembering the dead, while burial near saints and martyrs connected Christian belief

with specific locations (Ennabli, 1991, pp. 32, 179-180; Potthoff, 2017, pp. 146-159) what this suggests is that Christianisation in Carthage was becoming embedded through repeated local acts of worship, burial and commemoration, rather than being created through imperial support alone.

Alexandria presents a more contested form of spatial Christianisation. The clearest example is the destruction of the Serapeum in 391 or early 392, which had been one of the city's most important traditional religious sites (Dijkstra, 2015, pp. 31-35). This was a visible sign that the balance of religious power within the city had changed. It would be too simple, however, to treat this as the direct implementation of imperial policy. Instead, imperial restrictions changed the legal environment which Theophilus and local Christians acted within, helping to shape the actual outcome (Dijkstra, 2015, pp. 31-35). Thus, Alexandria shows more clearly how imperial policy could change what was possible, while local leadership and religious conflict determined how those changes appeared within the city.

At Hippo, sacred space appears in a more local and everyday form. What Augustine's sermons allow us to see is not simply the existence of churches, but how these spaces were repeatedly used. His sermons show the church as a place of teaching, correction and discipline, where Christian behaviour could be shaped and reinforced over time (Augustine, *Ep.* 29.2-10). The importance of the church therefore came partly from the activities taking place within it, rather than from the building alone. It can be argued that preaching, teaching and discipline gradually gave Christian space a greater role in organising local life. Augustine's repeated need to address the behaviour of his congregation also suggests that this process was ongoing. A space therefore became Christian not only through construction, but through the repeated practices that gave it Christian meaning.

The limits of Christianisation

The growing strength of Christianity did not mean that religious conflict disappeared or that Christianisation became complete and uniform. As we have seen, imperial support could strengthen Christian institutions and give bishops greater authority, but it could not create immediate religious unity or remove local resistance. Conflict therefore provides an important way of seeing the limits of both imperial and episcopal authority. Also, the repeated intervention and correction show that Christianisation still had to be negotiated in practice. From this, it becomes clear that there is no clear point at which Christianisation could simply be considered finished, as beliefs and practices continued to change over time.

The Donatist controversy shows these limits especially clearly in Carthage and Hippo Regius. The conference of Carthage in 411 is important because it brought hundreds of Nicaean and Donatist bishops together after nearly a century of division (Brown, 2000, pp. 332-333). This implies that imperial recognition of the positions agreed at the council of Nicaea in 325 had not removed Donatist opposition. This is an important note because Christianisation did not simply mean Christianity replacing older religion but also involved conflict over which form would claim authority. At Hippo, Augustine's letters show the same problem at a more local level. Although he became more willing to accept imperial coercion against Donatists, his own discussion of coercion shows that this was morally and practically complicated (Augustine, *Ep.* 93; *Ep.* 133). It can therefore be argued that imperial coercion strengthened authority more effectively than it created genuine religious unity. The continued need for intervention itself suggests that the division remained deeply rooted.

Alexandria displays a different limit to Christianisation. Here, greater Christian power did not remove conflict but instead changed its form. Conflict would then be apparent between rival

Christian groups and between bishops and civic officials. Athanasius's repeated exiles and returns show the limit of imperial intervention. Emperors could remove him from Alexandria, but this did not permanently settle theological divisions or destroy his local support. Later, bishops such as Theophilus and Cyril became major public figures, but their authority could still clash with civic officials, rival Christians and other communities. As Christianity became dominant, conflict increasingly shifted towards orthodoxy, episcopal authority and control of public religious life. This suggests that Christian dominance should not be confused with Christian unity.

Taken together, these examples show that Christianisation remained uneven despite Christianity becoming institutionally powerful. Donatist division, conflict in Alexandria and Augustine's repeated correction of Christian behaviour show that imperial and episcopal authority could transform institutions and public religious life without fully controlling belief. Christianisation was therefore neither unsuccessful nor complete following its continued need for coercion, councils and correction demonstrates its contested nature.

Why did Christianity develop differently?

The different pathways of the three cities cannot be explained by imperial policy alone. Although Carthage, Alexandria and Hippo all operated within the changing religious framework of the Christian Roman Empire, local conditions shaped how Christianisation developed in each city. Imperial authority therefore provided a common framework, but its effects were filtered through different local circumstances.

Carthage already possessed a strong episcopal tradition, while Donatism made questions of legitimate Christian authority especially important. As a result, Christianisation in Carthage became closely tied to councils, imperial intervention and institutional competition between rival churches (Hess, 2002, pp.5-34; Frend, 1985, pp. 275-289). Alexandria's religiously diverse and competitive urban environment connected Christian authority with theology, civic power and control of public life. Conflicts involving bishops such as Cyril developed within wider competition between Christians, civic officials and other communities (Haas, 1997, pp. 278-315). At Hippo, Augustine's sermons and letters provide a much more pastoral view of Christianisation, where the process can be seen through the bishop's attempts to influence preaching, behaviour and religious practice (Augustine, Ep. 29; Gassman, 2022, pp. 130-159). The difference was therefore not simply how successful Christianity became, but where and how authority was contested. Imperial power shaped the process, but local institutions, communities and bishops helped shape its local form.

This dissertation has argued that the transition from pagan civic religion to Christian public life in Carthage, Alexandria and Hippo Regius cannot be explained by Roman imperial policy alone. Imperial influence was fundamental, because it changed the legal and political environment in which Christianity operated. However, it did not independently cause or control Christianisation nor did it produce the same result in each city. It only became lasting because imperial change interacted with existing churches, bishops and local communities making it a two way process. Therefore, the form and depth of Christianisation depended heavily on how these changes were received and developed locally.

Conclusion

Support and direction from the Imperial court was most effective in changing the legal and institutional position of Christianity. Imperial legislation could protect Church property, support bishops and clergy, restrict certain forms of pagan worship and place pressure on rival Christian groups such as Donatists. These measures clearly strengthened the position of Christianity within public life, or more specifically the particular variant that currently had imperial favour. However, they did not automatically create religious unity or control how people responded. Imperial legislation should therefore be understood as creating the conditions for Christian dominance (and the favouring of a particular creed at given points in time) rather than as a complete explanation for Christianisation itself.

The three cities also show why Christianisation could not develop in a single way. In Carthage, Christianity already had bishops, councils and a wider regional structure before Constantine. So imperial favour strengthened institutions that were already established. Even then, Donatism shows that official support for one Church had its limit and could not remove rival Christian claims to authority. Alexandria developed differently. Rife with religious diversity, powerful bishops along with contested sacred spaces meant that Christianisation became closely tied to theological conflict and control of public life, with imperial intervention often adding to existing tensions. Hippo offers the clearest local view. Augustine could preach, discipline and sometimes support coercion, but the continued need for persuasion and correction shows that episcopal authority did not automatically determine local belief or behaviour. The main difference between the three cities was therefore the local structures through which Christian authority had to operate.

The evidence therefore suggests that imperial and episcopal authority was more effective at reshaping institutions than at controlling belief. Laws could restrict Donatist activity and bishops could define acceptable practice, but this did not guarantee personal agreement or lasting conformity. Augustine's own defence of coercion is revealing, as he argued that pressure could make people reconsider their position, while still recognising that belief could not simply be forced upon them (Augustine, Ep. 93.16-17). The continued activity of Donatist congregations also shows the limits of this pressure (Augustine, Ep. 139). I would therefore place slightly greater weight on local communities when considering how deeply Christianisation entered everyday life. Imperial power could change institutions from above, but belief remained harder to impose.

The surviving evidence does not allow each city to be viewed in exactly the same way, particularly because Augustine provides an unusually detailed picture of religious life at Hippo. Even so, the comparison shows that Christianisation should not be understood as a single point when paganism ended and Christianity replaced it. The process was a gradual reorganisation of public religion, authority and everyday practice, in which Christian institutions became increasingly dominant while some older traditions continued, disappeared or adapted within Christian settings. This change was also visible within the cities themselves, as churches, Christian burial became increasingly prominent. Whilst older religious spaces and practices were gradually abandoned, adapted or given new meanings. Developments in the Imperial court and wider administration, and efforts to impose authority, changed the conditions in which this transition took place, but the evidence from Carthage, Alexandria and Hippo suggests that its local form was shaped by the communities who experienced, accepted and sometimes resisted these changes.

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