

I. Introduction

This study deals with North Africa in the Vandal period, putting especially the archaeology of the era in its focus. The Vandals entered Africa in 429, crossing the strait of Gibraltar as a mixed war-band, the core of which had crossed the Rhine into Gaul nearly 30 years before and spent most of the time in-between in *Hispania*, in different alliances and relations to Romans, Alans, Goths, Suebi and others. Geiseric, king of the royal family of the Hasdings, led this inhomogeneous group, which became to be known simply as ‘the Vandals’ to Africa¹. The crucial year of the Vandal era in North Africa was the year 439 when Geiseric and his army captured Carthage and made it the capital of a kingdom that would last for almost 100 years, until in 533 a Byzantine army invaded North Africa and the last Vandal king Gelimer surrendered in 534. Between 439 and 533, the Vandal kingdom showed continuity in regard to late Roman North Africa in many aspects of culture and economy, but also produced discontinuities and disruptions in military and religious affairs. The rulership system and the nature of the state changed – from an imperially controlled set of provinces to an autonomous state ruled by a royal family. The perspective from which Vandal North Africa is approached in this study is an archaeological one. The book especially has questions of the governance of Vandal North Africa as overall topic, and will take into account how Vandal rulership affected society in North Africa in general in that period. Before outlining what can be comprehended from the study of governance in Vandal North Africa and from which specific angle it will be approached, a short history of how the Vandal kingdom came into being shall be outlined. The characteristics of the establishment of Vandal rule will help to understand the later outline of the kingdom (a map of the western Mediterranean and North Africa can be found on plate 1).

The establishment of the Vandal kingdom

The later periods of antique North Africa and the Mediterranean in general, have only come into focus rather recently, although the role that the Vandals, Goths and others played in the collapse of Roman rule in the western Mediterranean has been intensely debated since the 18th century². In an academic environment inspired by the romantic, and later also nationalistic movements, the Vandals were seen as one of the ‘Germanic peoples’ leaving their ‘homeland’ in search for new grounds to settle on and new fields to plough. Our understanding of the various groups and their motivations for movements, alliances, battles and

¹ see on the history of the Vandals in general Merrills & Miles, 2010; on Vandal ‘ethnogenesis’ Berndt, 2007

² in the late 18th century, Gibbon in his epic ‘The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire’, first published between 1776 and 1788 (various reprints, e. g. Gibbon, 1896–1900), presented the view that the rise of Christianity to the dominant religion of the Roman empire had been mainly responsible for a cultural decline, from the perspective of classical Antiquity, that gave way for the destruction of the empire by the barbarians; Hodgkin changed perspective about a hundred years later in ‘Italy and her Invaders, 376–476’, first published between 1880 and 1899 (reprint Hodgkin, 1996), arguing against the view of an abrupt end of Roman culture when the last emperor had been removed from the throne; Pirenne, 1937 postulated the hypothesis that the real break between Antiquity and the Middle Ages had not taken place with the invasions of the fifth century, but only with the Arabic-Islamic expansion; see in general for the literally hundreds of reasons discussed for the end of the Roman empire: Demandt, 1984

settlement arrangements of the late fourth and fifth centuries has augmented considerably since then. Simple explanations are of no use – the period between Late Antiquity and Early Medieval is a complex entity of its own. Considerable changes took place in this period of transformation in many spheres of society. The world of the successor states was deeply rooted in the ground the later Roman Empire had defined. The Vandal kingdom was the first of these states that lasted for a considerable period, spanning over several generations for nearly 100 years. Apparently, the reign of the kings had been firmly established, and the rulers had found a way to organise the state in a manner that worked. The history of the establishment of the Vandal kingdom can be divided into two periods. The first started in 406, when the group that became the African Vandals entered Roman history in Gaul, and ended with the exit of this group from Spain a generation later. The second period spans ten years between 429 and 439, in which the kingdom of the Vandals was practically established in North Africa, and shortly after acknowledged by contracts with the Western Roman Empire. The early history of the Vandals was marked by military activity and by a constant contention with the late Roman Empire that influenced how the later kingdom was shaped. It is also important to keep in mind that no Vandal state had existed before, and that the ruling family had to establish itself, and the system in which it ruled, completely new.

406–429: From the crossing of the Rhine to the transgression into Africa

According to the chronicles of Prosper Tiro and Hieronymus, the Vandals crossed the Rhine in early January 406 together with Alans and other groups³. The Vandals took the chance that weak frontiers offered at the turn from the fourth to the fifth century. By then, the Roman Empire had suffered serious defeats against the Goths that had culminated in the devastating loss in the battle of Adrianople a generation earlier⁴. Subsequently, the Goths had managed to establish themselves inside the boundaries of the empire by treaties that allowed them a great degree of autonomy – the first stones were laid that became the basis for the establishment of the so-called successor states of the Roman empire⁵.

On the Rhine, in 405, the *comitatenses* troops, the mobile parts of the army, had been withdrawn to fight an invasion in Italy⁶. The borders of Gaul remained to be defended by

³ Prosper Tiro, *Epitoma chronicon*, 1230, speaks only of Vandals and Alans: ‘Wandali et Halani traiecto Rheni ingressi II kal. Ian. (a. 406)’; Hieronymus mentions Quadi, Vandals, Sarmatians, Alans, Gepides, Aetolians, Saxons, Burgundians, Alamans and ‘*hosti pannonii*’; probably, the intention of Hieronymus was to underline the great multitude of barbarians that entered the imperial realm at that time, whereas Prosper Tiro might have been writing from the viewpoint of the situation in Hispania; for the crossing of the Pyrenees into the Iberian Peninsula in 409, Suebi are mentioned as well, see below; on the date of the Rhine crossing, Berndt, 2007, pp. 89–90

⁴ Valens died in the battle and the armies of the eastern empire had practically been erased; see Heather, 1991, pp. 142–147 on the battle of Adrianople and the battles before

⁵ the Goths were given tax free estates and allowed to live under their own law and leaders inside the empire; the Goths furnished troops for the emperor, for which they were paid as well, and that were commanded by their own officers; their leaders accepted the emperor’s supremacy, but refused to accept orders from him, see Demandt, 1989, pp. 126–127 and in detail Heather, 1991, pp. 157–165

⁶ Italy had been put under pressure constantly at that time by Gothic groups in Illyricum and by Alaric, who demanded the title of *magister militum* for himself, be it for the power and prestige of the title to strengthen his position as a leader, be it for the payments for troops linked to it, see Heather, 1998, p. 511; Alaric entered Italy in 408 and sacked Rome in 410 with his Goths; his successor Athaulf led the Goths to Gaul, from where

Frankish federates⁷. The Vandals and the other allied groups took the empire at its disadvantage and crossed the border in 406. In the following three years, Vandals and Alans plundered a number of cities in Gaul, obviously unable to attain a stable position⁸. The crossing of the Rhine frontier apparently had been arranged after an observation of the political and military situation. The plundering of a number of cities indicates that no arrangement had been made with imperial authorities for the supply of the armies. This changed a little later in Hispania.

Vandals, Alans and Suebi entered Hispania in 409⁹. The reasons given for this by antique authors are either the prosperity of Spain (chroniclers) or a punishment by God (Christian authors). Both explanations are *topoi* and Arce has proposed an alternative: a coalition of Vandals, Alans, and Suebi with Gerontius, *magister militum* in Hispania. Gerontius initiated a revolt against Constantine III, aiming to install his son Maximus as emperor instead¹⁰. The foreign soldiers had at first apparently been stationed in the cities and supplied by taxes¹¹. In 411, Gerontius was killed and Maximus fled back to Spain. Vandals, Alans and Suebi stayed in Hispania. According to Hydatius, residence was arranged between them: The Vandals and Suebi settled down in Gallaecia in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula and the other groups in the southern half: the Alans in Lusitania on the Atlantic coast and Carthaginiensis on the Mediterranean coast and the ‘Vandals called Silings’ in central Baetica¹². However, the western emperor was not willing to accept the *status quo* in Hispania. In 418, a Gothic army under Vallia on imperial mission exterminated the Silings and defeated the Alans heavily, so that the survivors joined the Vandals under their king Guntheric in Gallaecia¹³. In 421, another Roman army, commanded by the

they were later send to fight the Vandals and other groups in Hispania, and finally managed to establish permanent settlement in southern Gaul under Theoderic I and his successors

⁷ the contemporary sources blame Stilicho, the responsible *magister militum* of the western empire, for exposing Gaul and acting in favour of the barbarians, see Orosius, *Historia*, 7, 38, 3; Berndt, 2007, pp. 88–89 rejects this view and points out, similar to Drinkwater, 1996, p. 30, that the crossing of a barbarian army over the Rhine was unexpected by the empire at that time; anyway, the threat of Radagaisus was more immanent and concerning Italy itself; nevertheless, Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, 6, 3, 1.2 evens speaks of a Roman victory over the Gallic invaders in 406; the situation in Gaul only calmed down a couple of years later; by now, Alans, Franks and Burgundians had established themselves on the left side of the Rhine after the Rhine crossing, see Berndt, 2007, p. 86

⁸ Hieronymus, *Epistulae* 123; see Schmidt, 1942, pp. 17–18 and Courtois, 1955a, pp. 42–51 on the supposed way through Gaul, with a map in Courtois, 1955a, p. 46; see as well Berndt, 2007, p. 91

⁹ Hydatius, *Continuatio chronicorum Hieronymianorum*, 42

¹⁰ Arce, 2008, pp. 98–99

¹¹ Arce, 2008, p. 101 citing Hydatius, *Continuatio chronicorum Hieronymianorum*, 48 and Orosius, VII.41, 4–5

¹² Hydatius, *Continuatio chronicorum Hieronymianorum* 49: ‘...Gallaeciam Vandali occupant et Suevi sita in extremitate oceani maris occidua: Alani Lusitaniam et Carthaginiensem provincias et Vandali cognomine Silinge Baeticam sortiuntur’; this is the only mentioning of the Silings as Vandals; the Silings had already been mentioned by Ptolemy, *Geographia*, 2, 11, 10 without further specification; see on this Berndt, 2007, pp. 155–157; Pohl, 2004, p. 37 called the position of the Hasdings in Galicia remote, but Koenig, 1981, p. 353 with note 187 pointed out that this region, albeit agriculturally poor, was favoured because of its gold mines and possibly because of this had been divided between two groups

¹³ Hydatius, *Continuatio chronicorum Hieronymianorum* 60, 63, 68; the Silings are not mentioned any more after the events; according to Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus transmitted in Gregory of Tours, *Historia* 2, 9, Guntheric’s predecessor Godigisclus had already died in the fights at the Rhine frontier in 406, cited by

magister militum Castinus fought the Vandals on the Iberian Peninsula, but apparently some of the Gothic auxiliary units changed sides for the Vandals, who were able to fight off Castinus¹⁴. The Vandals started moving south now, attacking the cities of Hispalis (modern Seville) and Carthago Nova (modern Cartagena on the southern Mediterranean coast in Spain), where they probably acquired ships, plundering the Balearic Islands only a little later¹⁵. In 428, the Vandal king Guntheric died and his brother Geiseric assumed regality¹⁶. Hispalis seems to have been the centre of the Vandals now, who carried out raids on the Balearic Islands and in Mauretania Tingitana¹⁷.

Apparently right from the start, the Vandal leaders had watched Roman politics closely¹⁸. They had used their chance to cross into Gaul when the border defence was weakened. The sojourn in Gaul appears to have been some kind of a lost case, with no attempts apparently being made to find an arrangement between the foreign armies and the Roman administration. A settlement had finally been reached in Hispania, probably following an alliance with the rebellious Roman commander in Hispania. The Roman authorities were not willing to simply accept the situation, however, they were not successful in the military campaigns against the foreign armies that had established themselves on the Iberian Peninsula. A number of important developments took place in Hispania. The Vandals apparently centred their settlement on Hispalis for a couple of years, that seems to have been a first regnal centre. Guntheric became more powerful through the Alans that came under his rule. As we will see later on, the royal title the Vandal kings carried in Africa explicitly referred to the Alans, although we do not hear about them in any other source from Africa. By obtaining ships, the Vandals enhanced their options. Military power and naval mobility were important presuppositions for the establishment of the Vandal kingdom in Africa.

The Vandals' crossing to Africa has again been explained by ancient authors with the intervention of God as punishment for the sinful Romans, whereas most modern scholars have seen the economic power of the African provinces as main allusive factor. However, also in Africa a military alliance, or at least contact with the *magister militum* Bonifatius, might have existed. Furthermore, Geiseric's ambition and strategic thinking surely played a role. It is very likely that he aimed at controlling the western Mediterranean from Carthage, being well aware of the crucial role this metropolis played. According to Hydatius, the Vandals crossed in 429 from Spain to Africa¹⁹. Victor of Vita speaks of 80,000 people altogether, including women and children²⁰. The military strength has been considered to

Berndt, 2007, p. 92; according to Procopius, *The Vandalic War* I, 3, 23 Guntheric had become king of the Vandals in Hispania

¹⁴ Arce, 2002, p. 81

¹⁵ Hydatius, *Continuatio chronicorum Hieronymianorum*, 86; Berndt, 2003, p. 24

¹⁶ Hydatius, *Continuatio chronicorum Hieronymianorum*, 89

¹⁷ Arce, 2008, p. 103

¹⁸ this view is also stated by Traina, 2009, pp. 81–91

¹⁹ Hydatius, *Continuatio chronicorum Hieronymianorum*, 90; the exact route is not known; Procopius, *The Vandalic War*, I, III, 26 speaks of Gadira (modern Cadíz), Gregory of Tours, writing as well in the sixth century names *Traducta* (not securely located, see Berndt, 2007, p. 120), and Victor of Vita, *Historia persecutionis*, speaks only of a narrow point where the sea is only twelve miles wide between Spain and Africa; similarly Jordanes, *Getica*, XXXIII, 167; Berndt, 2007, pp. 122–123 has rightfully stressed the point that in Late Antiquity, Mauretania Tingitana lying opposite of the Iberian Peninsula, was administratively a part of Hispania, not Africa

²⁰ Victor of Vita, *Historia persecutionis*, I, 2

have been lower therefore, more around 15,000 to 20,000 men, based on the assumption that Victor's statement is right, and 80,000 Vandals and Alans included the whole population. Apparently, the army itself was accompanied by a baggage train with families, which would not have been unusual for the time²¹. Victor of Vita wrote about 50 years after these events had taken place, and might have used earlier sources. For sure, he wrote under the impression of the situation he was experiencing himself, under Vandal rule in Africa. Procopius, who wrote some decades later even, also gives a similar number: referring to arrangements Geiseric made after the crossing had taken place, Procopius speaks of 80 'chiliarchs', leaders of a thousand (similar to Victor's *millenarii*), which had been named by the king²². According to Procopius, the 'chiliarchs' led the Vandals and Alans Geiseric had organised in companies to make it appear that he had a fighting force of 80,000 men, whereas the number of the Vandals and Alans was only 50,000 men²³, which still appears quite high. Procopius might have wanted to augment the Vandal force in his report on *The Vandalic War*. The number of 80,000 people crossing to Africa in 429 has been generally accepted today²⁴. However, the value of absolute numbers is often difficult to assess in ancient sources²⁵. Procopius might have used Victor of Vita, who probably also used other sources that did not survive.

In Africa: Capturing Hippo Regius and Carthage

Apart from possible agreements between the Vandals and the African military commander, the economical prosperity of Africa, that has traditionally been considered as main reason for the Vandals to cross to Africa, indeed very likely played a role²⁶. Already in the early imperial period, Africa had been the most important region of corn production for the Roman and Italian market²⁷, and many aristocratic families owned big estates in Africa, with the imperial estates making up the biggest share²⁸. The application of a law known as the *lex Manciana*, allowing the usage of before unused land for cultivation (and the possibility to inherit these lots and the connected relation of being the *coloni* of a *dominus* who is the proprietor of the land), meant for Africa that its soil was extensively used and provided the necessary resources for a big population to make a living²⁹. Africa was the most densely

²¹ see also Berndt, 2007, p. 121 on the number of soldiers, who underlines that Victor mentions elders, youths and slaves but does not mention women explicitly; however, also Hydatius as well spoke of the Vandals 'with all their families', 'cum Vandalis omnibus eorumque familiis ... transit'

²² Procopius, *The Vandalic War* I, V, 18

²³ Procopius, *The Vandalic War* I, V, 18–19

²⁴ see Pohl, 2004, p. 38

²⁵ Goffart, 1980, pp. 232–234 has good reasons to doubt all numbers transmitted for the Vandals' crossing to Africa

²⁶ see Courtois, 1955a, pp. 157–158; see also Lepelley, 1979, pp. 29–36 on Africa's prosperity in the fourth century

²⁷ Flavius Josephus states in *The Jewish War*, 2, 383, that Africa fed Rome for eight months of a year, Garnsey, 1978, p. 240 calls this number exaggerated, but Africa definitely was Rome's largest corn-supplier

²⁸ Pliny, *Historia naturalis*, 18, 7, 35 states that Nero had six senators killed who owned half of Africa, making the emperor the biggest land owner in the province

²⁹ on the *lex Manciana* see Le Glay, 1968, pp. 226–227, who dates the beginnings of this arrangement to the Vespasian epoch; the main documents for its application are four inscriptions, see Flach, 1978, p. 444: Henchir Mettich: CIL VIII 25902, Ain Djemala: CIL VIII 25943; Ain Wassel: CIL VIII 26416, Suk el-Khmis:

populated and most highly urbanised region of the Roman Empire outside Italy³⁰. Hundreds of cities lay spread along thousands of miles of roads, joining the inland with the important trade ports on the coast³¹.

The importance of corn from Africa mainly in form of the *annona* for the Italian bread supply, shipped over the Mediterranean by the guild of the *navicularii*, resulted in a well established system of trade routes and infrastructure of which other economical branches benefitted as well. By the end of the second century, olive oil from Africa had replaced the predominance of the Iberian oil on the Roman market³². The distribution of African amphorae allows the reconstruction of the development of trade routes and intensity between North Africa and the rest of the Mediterranean³³. Fine ware pottery, the ‘African sigillata’ (or ‘African red slip’ ware), was another important product for export. Having been produced since the middle of the first century AD, its popularity rose continually to reach a climax in Late Antiquity³⁴. The *annona* infrastructure that subsidized African traders meant that through ‘piggy-backing’ in corn and oil shipments, the African fineware pottery was unbeatable in price³⁵. By the fifth century, the African sigillata dominated the luxury pottery market of the Roman world, having replaced the formerly predominant production centres in Italy and Gaul. African fineware was produced mainly in what is today northern

CIL VIII 10570; the principle seems to have been widely used, even if not necessarily the *lex Manciana* was cited; the arrangements allowed the *coloni* to work the land and to keep two thirds of the produce for themselves and deliver the rest to the *dominus* or administrator of the estate, along with a number of labour days per year, see Kolendo, 1976 and Flach, 1978; the term *lex Manciana* is used primarily to characterise the phenomenon from a historical point of view; the inscriptions mentioned above date to the times of Trajan, Hadrian, Commodus and Septimius Severus; Manciana fields are still attested in the Vandal era *Tablettes Albertini*, that will be discussed below

³⁰ Mattingly & Hitchner, 1995, p. 189; Garnsey, 1978, p. 244; Lassère, 1977, pp. 565–596 estimated a growth of population in Roman Africa from Republican to Severan times of up to 70 %; especially Africa Proconsularis and Numidia have been highly populated with a village or town every few kilometers and a density index of more than 100 inhabitants per square kilometre in certain regions, see Picard, 1990, p. 58

³¹ on urbanisation in late Roman North Africa, Lepelley, 1979, 1981 is the standard work; altogether, about 500 towns and cities are known to have existed in Roman North Africa, with average populations for most of them estimated to be a couple of thousand residents, Lepelley, 2001, p. 93; still, many people additionally lived in the countryside on the big estates; the total number of inhabitants of Roman North Africa calculated by Picard to be between seven and eight million people at the end of the principate is surely not too high, see Picard, 1990, pp. 55–61; two surviving antique road maps, one dating to the end of the 2nd century, one to the time of the tetrarchy, and numerous inscribed milestones prove the high degree of disclosure of North Africa in Roman times, see Salama, 1951; 20 000 miles of roads altogether are attested for Roman North Africa, with two big west-east-axes, one on the southern border of the provinces and one between there and the coast. North-south roads as the Carthage-Theveste and the Theveste-Hippo Regius tracks connected the bigger roads with the smallscale regional road networks

³² see Lepelley, 2001, p. 95 who in the same place cites Juvenal mocking about the bad quality of the African oil still in the early second century; on African oil production in general, a classical work is Camps-Fabrer, 1953; on oil export: Mattingly, 1988b

³³ critically recently Bonifay, 2003 and Bonifay & Garnier, 2004 for a content analysis on African amphorae

³⁴ see especially Carandini, 1970 and Fentress & Perkins, 1987; lamps have also been exported on a large scale in the second century: Pavolini, 1986; on Christian lamps from North Africa see Ennabli, A., 1975

³⁵ Merrills & Miles, 2010, p. 147 presume that a similar advantage existed also for olive oil, wine and fish sauce

and central Tunisia³⁶. Evidence from surveys in this region has shown that the agricultural situation remained stable from the second through to the fifth century, proving the persistence of the economical developments³⁷. From this point of view, Africa was a target worthwhile to explore. The strategic position of Carthage for the control of the central Mediterranean trade might have been another factor³⁸. Carthage was the centre of the *annona* trade and the biggest and most important of the African harbours, controlling the western Mediterranean trade routes. Hispania still was a rich diocesis also in Late Antiquity, but the central position of Carthage, with other important trade harbours like Hippo Regius and Hadrumetum and the prosperous African hinterland, was worth more from an economic and strategic point of view.

Before the Vandals entered Carthage, they had established themselves as the only remaining considerable military force in North Africa. In the summer of 430, the Vandal army appeared before Hippo Regius, where siege was laid on the city and the decisive battles against the Roman army were fought. What happened in-between the crossing in spring or summer 429 and the summer of 430 is not known³⁹. Feeding a large group of people must have been a problem for the king. The tactic might have been similar to the one applied in Gaul at the beginning of the fifth century – take what was needed by force⁴⁰. However, alternatively an orderly arrangement could have been made for supply and stationing by an alliance with the Roman *magister militum* in Africa, Bonifatius. Procopius claims that Bonifatius had called the Vandals to Africa to support him when he was opposing the western throne⁴¹. This statement has been judged as unrealistic by many scholars⁴². Arce, who argues for a similar arrangement in Hispania 20 years earlier, nevertheless points out that the Vandals could as well have stayed in Hispania, that was comparatively rich and where the Vandals had obtained a fairly stable position after having beaten the army of Castinus. In Africa, there still was a Roman army, although it might not have reached the ideal strength of 11,500 men of infantry and 9,500 cavalry the *Notitia Dignitatum* lists⁴³.

³⁶ Peacock, et al., 1990; Mackensen, 1993, 1998; see the maps in Bonifay, 2003, p. 117, fig. 1 and p. 126, fig. 4 for the chronological development of production centers; Mattingly & Hitchener, 1995, p. 201 presume other production centers in Africa as well; thanks to the groundbreaking works of Hayes, 1972, 1980, African red slip ware is today widely used for dating Late Antique sites; see as well the 'Atlante delle forme ceramiche I. Ceramica fine romana nel bacino mediterraneo (medio e tardo impero)', Enciclopedia dell'Arte Antica 10, Rome 1981

³⁷ on the Kasserine survey in central Tunisia, that will be discussed below in more detail, Hitchner, 1988a, 1990; on the Oued Tine survey in norther Tunisia: Peyras, 1983, 1991

³⁸ see Arce, 2008, p. 103

³⁹ Courtois dedicated a lengthy section in his study to the reconstruction of the way the Vandals took after they had crossed the strait of Gibraltar, Courtois, 1955a, pp. 159–163; however, the reconstruction is not really convincing; Berndt, 2007, pp. 128–129 suggested that, having a fleet, a good part of the people might have sailed along the coast, parallel to the units marching over land

⁴⁰ in that case, the army must have aimed at the cities with granaries along the bigger roads intended for the movement of troops, see Berndt, 2007, p. 129

⁴¹ Procopius, *The Vandalic War* I, 3, 22

⁴² Berndt, 2008; Pohl, 2004, p. 40; Schwarcz, 2004, p. 51 pointed out that only Procopius mentions this and not the contemporaneous sources (which are basically chronologies)

⁴³ the military strength of the Late Roman army in Africa, at least theoretically, can be reconstructed from the *Notitia Dignitatum*; the *Notitia Dignitatum* lists the civil and military offices and their responsibilities and contains the eastern as well as the western part of the empire, as it had been divided after the death of Theodosius I, thereby giving a *terminus post quem* for the version of 395, most likely 401 (see Zuckerman, 1998, dis-

Africa had been the scene of a number of revolutionary upheavals staged by its high military commanders. In 372, the revolt of Firmus had started, son of the Moorish king Nubel, who was successful in finding a number of allies so that it took the empire two years to finally suppress his revolt⁴⁴. A couple of years later, it was Firmus' brother Gildo who engaged in power politics. He had become *comes Africae*, the highest provincial officer, in 386, much to his benefit as it seems⁴⁵. Probably in 388, he was upgraded to *comes et magister utriusque militiae per Africam*, which meant that he had the absolute civil and military power over the diocese of Africa. Gildo now put pressure on Honorius by holding back the *annona*, the African corn supply for Rome, several times, causing famines in Italy⁴⁶. Gildo was finally beaten in 398 by an imperial army led by his brother Mascezel, and executed⁴⁷. The rank of the highest military commander in Africa was downgraded from *comes et magister utriusque militiae* to *comes* afterwards. The strong power base Africa could provide for rebellious commanders had become too apparent to leave the position as powerful as it had been. Nevertheless, practical power did not diminish considerably for the African military leaders, and the next revolutionary was soon emerging in Heraclian. He had become *comes Africae* in 409 and seems to have been generally supported on a broad basis by a good part of the African aristocracy and the Nicene church⁴⁸. In 413, Heraclian received the consulate. Nevertheless, in the same year, he held the *annona* back, putting pressure again

cussing especially the eastern part), with additions to the western version added until 425, although the general state described in the *Notitia* seems to be refer to before 408, Lepelley, 2002, p. 66; Jones, 1964, p. 1425 (and tables V–VII) points out that the *Notitia*, showing the upgrading of old and the creation of new military regiments, illustrates the heavy losses the Roman army had to cope with in this time, especially in the west; in the diocese Africa, at the beginning of the 5th century, the *comes Africae* as supreme commander had 11 *legiones* of regular *comitatenses* at his hands, one auxiliary legion and 19 cavalry units, the *vexillationes*; he had 16 units of *limitanei* at the borders; in addition to that, the *dux et praeses* of *Mauretania Caesariensis* had another eight units of *limitanei*, the *dux Tripolitanae* another 14; it seems as if the border regions of the diocese *Africa*, the provinces of *Mauretania Caesariensis* and *Tripolitana* were taken care of by the local rulers, the *duces*, while the central part with *Africa proconsularis*, *Byzacena*, *Numidia* and *Mauretania Sitifensis* was under the supervision of the supreme military officer in Africa by then, the *comes Africae*, taking into account that he had a considerably large area to take care of and all of the mobile army under his command; Warming-ton, 1954, p. 16 stresses this as well, underlining that through the concentration of the whole field army in the hands of the *comes Africae*, Romanus, Gildo and Heraclian had attained their power; the titles of commanders and the troops under their command as mentioned in the *Notitia Dignitatum* are also listed by Courtois, 1955a, p. 80

⁴⁴ see Ammianus Marcellinus XXIX, 5 on the war against Firmus; Blackhurst, 2004 on the house of Nubel; the bad reputation of the *comes* Romanus seems to have been a reason for the support of Firmus' revolt by many provincials, Demandt 1989, p. 114, and Firmus itself claimed he only took action because of Romanus' injustice, Ammianus Marcellinus XXIX, 5, 8; on the events after the suppression see Demandt, 1968

⁴⁵ Claudian, *De bello Gildonico*, 157 says that Gildo acted 'privato iure'

⁴⁶ Claudian, *De bello Gildonico*, 17–18; 34; Gildo amassed a fortune, maybe as well through manipulating the *annona*, see Modéran, 1989, pp. 864–865 and Gebbia, 1987, p. 126; his fortune was so big that after his death a new office had to be created to manage it, the *comes Gildoniaci patrimonii*; anyhow, the exact date and implications of this office as documented in the *Codex Theodosianus* are not clear, see Modéran, 1989, p. 861, and footnote 136 on the page, but it definitely shows Gildo's financial abilities

⁴⁷ Modéran, 1989 made clear that Gildo was not leading a 'Moorish' revolt as had been supposed for example by Courtois, 1955a, but was acting rather as a regional potentate

⁴⁸ see Kotula, 1977, esp. p. 261, 263

on Honorius⁴⁹. Heraclian seemed to play at high stakes, sailing to Italy with a considerable army that was nevertheless beaten at Utriculum⁵⁰. Heraclian fled back to Africa, but was pursued and finally executed in Carthage in late 413. However, in the lost battle a good part of the African field army had apparently been destroyed, so that 15 years later, the field army was probably still weaker than it should have been when the Vandals crossed into the diocesis from *Mauretania Tingitana*. Furthermore, also the commanding highest military officer at that time, Bonifatius, had difficulties with his imperial superiors.

In 423, Bonifatius had become *comes Africae*⁵¹. In the same year, Honorius died and – after an interruption in the Theodosian dynasty⁵² – was succeeded by his younger brother Valentinian III as emperor in the west in 425⁵³. Bonifatius was suspected of infidelity⁵⁴, because of his religious actions and military failures⁵⁵, which resulted in conflict with Galla Placidia and the western emperor⁵⁶. In 427, Bonifatius defeated a first army sent against him, which was followed in 428 by a Gothic army commanded by Sigisvult sent from Ravenna. Apparently, Augustine, the influential bishop of Hippo Regius, intervened and Bonifatius did not oppose Sigisvult's army, that was withdrawn again and Bonifatius finally rehabilitated⁵⁷. He remained in position as *comes Africae*, but apparently pursued his own policy, supported also by Gothic federates that seem to have been a kind of private army of Bonifatius⁵⁸.

The events that had taken place in Africa before the Vandal army entered the diocesis show clearly that imperial control in Africa had often been seriously questioned. The African army was consistently used as personal instrument of power by ambitious military

⁴⁹ Orosius VII, 42, 12

⁵⁰ Orosius VII, 42, 13 speaks of 3.700 ships, Hydatius, *Continuatio Chronicorum Hieronymianorum* 56 of 50.000 soldiers that had taken part in the battle of Utriculum

⁵¹ the date is not absolutely sure, see Blockley, 1998, p. 135, annotation no. 3: surely between 422 and 424, more likely to be earlier; Bonifatius fled to Africa in the first place in 422 and received the office of *comes Africae* later; his exile was due to power politics after the death of Constantius, who had been named *augustus* by Honorius but not recognised in the east; the new *magister utriusque militiae* Castinus forced his adversary Bonifatius to flee

⁵² the *primicerius notariorum* John, a civilian officer, was proclaimed emperor in Rome after the death of Honorius and backed by the military officers Castinus and Aetius in Ravenna; in the east, Theodosius II who had followed his father Arcadius on the throne in 408 – being seven years old at that time –, reacted by supporting Valentinian III and his mother Galla Placidia, who were proclaimed *caesar* and *augusta* retroactively in 424; an eastern army managed to capture John in Ravenna, who was subsequently killed in Rome; Castinus was exiled, but Aetius was bought off with gold and the title of *comes et magister militum per Gallias*, see Blockley, 1998, p. 136

⁵³ Valentinian III stayed in office until 455; he had been only five years old when he was proclaimed *caesar* in 424; in the east, Theodosius II reigned until 450

⁵⁴ although he had defended Africa against John in 424/5, Prosper Tiro, *Epitoma chronicon* 1286

⁵⁵ he had married an Arian wife, Warmington, 1954a, pp. 13–14, tolerated the Donatist church and had no success against the Moors, see Demandt, 1989, pp. 150–151

⁵⁶ Flavius Felix, who had become *magister utriusque militiae* in service of Galla Placidia after Castinus had been exiled, was opposing Bonifatius and intriguing against him, making Placidia call Bonifatius to Ravenna to declare himself, which he refused, see Demandt, 1989, p. 151; Procopius, *The Vandalic War* 1, 3, 17–20 tells of another plot: in his account, Aetius is already Bonifatius' adversary and plays him and Galla Placidia off against each other; on Aetius, see Stickler, 2002

⁵⁷ Augustinus, *Epistulae* 229, 230

⁵⁸ Traina, 2009, p. 85, with ann. 21

commanders, who had access to large sums of money from the strong African economy and in many cases were able to gain the support of the African leading classes. The situation in Africa was quite favourable for the Vandal ingression in 429. Bonifatius had been in a politically difficult situation before, and probably did not command an African army at full strength. Although considerable doubt remains about an official arrangement between Bonifatius and Geiseric⁵⁹, an arrangement between the two cannot be completely ruled out⁶⁰. If there was no agreement, Geiseric had at least chosen the right moment to attack. More or less a year after the Vandals had left Spain, in the summer of 430, they besieged Hippo Regius⁶¹. Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, died in the third month of the siege according to his biographer Possidius⁶². Prosper Tiro dates the death of Augustine to August 28, 430, which would mean that the Vandal siege must have begun in the early summer of that year⁶³. Before, there had been an encounter between their army and the troops of Bonifatius. Bonifatius had lost the battle and retreated into the fortified city⁶⁴. The Vandal siege, although it lasted for fourteen months⁶⁵, had not been successful and had to be raised finally. Bonifatius' troops were reinforced with contingents from the western as well as from the eastern empire commanded by Aspar. The re-inforced Roman army however was beaten a second time, so that Bonifatius and Aspar both retreated from Africa⁶⁶. Hippo Regius came under Vandal control⁶⁷.

The Vandal ingression into Carthage in 439 was followed in the first years by Vandal raids to Sicily and southern Italy and unsuccessful attempts of military response both by the western and eastern empire⁶⁸. An attempt of sending a fleet to reconquer Carthage had to be abandoned in 441⁶⁹. In 442, a treaty was finally signed between Geiseric and Valentinian III, acknowledging the situation. Prosper Tiro gives a brief summary of this contract: '*Cum Gisirico ab Augusto Valentiniano pax confirmata et certis spatiis Africa inter utrumque divisa est* (a. 442)⁷⁰'. What exactly the division looked like can only be deduced from later documents. Victor of Vita states that the central parts of Roman North Africa – Africa Pro-

⁵⁹ see Berndt, 2008, p. 144

⁶⁰ Arce, 2008, p. 103; Demandt, 1989, p. 151 believed Procopius as well, citing as support Jordanes, *Romana* 300

⁶¹ Berndt, 2007, p. 120 has rightly stated that a transition before May 429 would have been unlikely because of the risky weather conditions in winter and early spring

⁶² Possidius, *Vita Augustini*, 29

⁶³ Prosper Tiro, *Epitoma Chronicon*, 1304

⁶⁴ there is no more information on these events than the short mention by Procopius, *The Vandalic War*, I, 3, 31

⁶⁵ Possidius, *Vita Augustini*, 28

⁶⁶ Procopius, *The Vandalic War*, I, 3, 35–36

⁶⁷ Procopius does not give any specific information on this, but Possidius, *Vita Augustini*, 28 relates the Vandal ingression into Hippo Regius to the death of Augustine that made the inhabitants leave their city to the Vandals to burn it down – this version is not very likely, considering that Hippo Regius became the first Vandal settlement centre, and does not correspond with the information given by Procopius

⁶⁸ Merrills & Miles, 2010, pp. 111–112

⁶⁹ the coasts of Italy had been set into alarm after the Vandals had taken Carthage, *Novellae Valentinianae* V, VI and IX; an eastern Roman fleet of 1.100 vessels for Africa had been gathered in Sicily in 441 but had to be called to Thrace and Illyricum instead by the eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II to fight back a Hunnic attack, Prosper Tiro, *Epitoma Chronicon* 1344, 1346

⁷⁰ Prosper Tiro, *Epitoma Chronicon*, 1347

consularis, Byzacena and the eastern parts of Numidia – were reserved for the royal house and the army and therefore formed the main Vandal zone of influence, whereas the Mauretanian provinces and Tripolitania at first remained under imperial rule until 455⁷¹. How far the rule of the Vandal kings went and if they were completely independent or if they depended in some form on the imperial government is an old topic of discussion among researchers on the Vandals. Mainly F. M. Clover has argued repeatedly for a Vandal dependency, based on the one hand on the survival of the institutions of the imperial cult in the Vandal era in North Africa (which will be discussed further below in some examples) and on the other hand on the fact that the Vandal state did not produce gold coins of its own. Furthermore, according to Clover, the treaties signed with the western empire were allegedly designed on rather old-fashioned *foedera* treaties⁷². Although the first treaty with the western empire signed by Geiseric in Hippo Regius in 435 theoretically put the Vandals in a position of federates, Geiseric apparently ignored this status and acted as sovereign in and around Hippo Regius in religious affairs⁷³. The status of the Vandal state in North Africa as an independent kingdom already from 439 and surely after the death of Geiseric's treaty partner Valentinian III in 455 is incontestable in my point of view, as will become clear during this study. Let us consider both treaties, the first signed in 435 in Hippo Regius and the second one signed 442 in Carthage, in more detail.

Prosper Tiro gives a short mention in his chronicle of the treaty of 435: '*Pax facta cum Vandalis data eis ad habitandum Africae portione [per Trigetium in loco Hippone III idus Febr.] (a. 435)*'⁷⁴. The treaty was signed a couple of years after Hippo Regius had been captured by the Vandals. We do not know what happened in-between, but probably the western empire earlier was initially not willing to accept a permanent settlement of Geiseric's Vandals in Africa. The treaty of 435 has by some scholars considered to have been a *foedus*⁷⁵, and the expression '*a part of Africa has been given to the Vandals*' would indicate that, but in fact, the Vandals had taken a part of Africa and this had only been acknowledged by the treaty. Procopius, who refers to a treaty between Geiseric and Valentinian III, is a bit ambiguous at first sight, saying that Geiseric was eager to secure his position by signing a treaty with Valentinian that included him providing yearly tribute from Africa and his son Huneric being sent as a hostage to the imperial court⁷⁶. This sounds more like a traditional submissive treaty⁷⁷. It is not exactly clear which of the two treaties Procopius

⁷¹ Victor of Vita, *Historia persecutionis*, I, 13

⁷² Clover, 1982, pp. 667–668 on the *foedera* treaties, pp. 666–667 on the imperial cult

⁷³ Merrills & Miles, 2010, p. 61

⁷⁴ Prosper Tiro, *Epitoma Chronicon*, 1321

⁷⁵ Courtois, 1955a, p. 169; Demandt, 1989, p. 152; Barnwell, 1992, p. 115; Procopius himself gives a critique of the term *foederati* in *Bellum Vandalicum*, I, XI, 2–4, saying that it had originally been used by the Romans to describe treaties with their enemies on an equal basis, but in his days it had lost its specific reference to barbarians because 'anyone' could now call himself that; Procopius does not refer to the Vandals though, he talks about units of the Byzantine army going to Africa in 533; nevertheless, it shows that the term *foedus* did not mean much in Late Antiquity, as Heather, 1997 has clearly shown as well, and had been used without the specific conditions of earlier times

⁷⁶ Procopius, *Bellum Vandalicum*, I, IV, 13

⁷⁷ Clover, 1982, p. 668 interpreted Procopius's statement as Geiseric accepting very old conditions of the *foedus*; Modéran, 2002, p. 92 has argued that these were in fact the outdated terms of the *foedera* used with client kings during the republic and early principate to evoke the impression that the empire kept some kind of control over Geiseric's Africa, which in fact it did not; the argument is the same as in Heather 1997, for the fourth

refers to. Although in both cases the contract partners were Geiseric and Valentinian III, the formulation Prosper Tiro uses differs. For the contract of 435, he speaks of a certain Trige-tius having accorded peace with the Vandals, whereas for 442, he speaks of Valentinian himself making peace with Geiseric. Maybe this difference should not be given too much weight, considering the brevity of Prosper Tiro's chronicle. However, most likely Pro-copius meant the latter contract, first describing the fights around Hippo Regius, and then referring to the later outcomes after the Vandals had captured the African capital. Procopius seems to have cut a long story short. He was writing more than 100 years after these events had taken place and maybe concentrated them into a dense summary, of which he gives the result: '*So the Vandals, having wrested Libya from the Romans in this way, made it their own*'⁷⁸. He probably would not have stated this after the Vandals had settled in or around Hippo Regius, but only after the African capital Carthage had been taken by them. Pro-copius describes the contract to show Geiseric's foresight and modesty, showing his good will by guaranteeing the supply of corn that must have been of vital importance for Valen-tinian, and showing his will to prove his loyalty by sending his son to Valentinian.

The supply of corn must indeed have been the most vital interest of the western Roman government after the practical loss of control over Carthage and its hinterland (and Hippo Regius before), which meant that the supply of Rome and a good part of Italy with one of its basic aliments was endangered. Clearly, there were deeper motivations behind the ar-rangement, covered by Procopius using old style pro-Roman formulations. As will be dis-cussed below, Geiseric tried to influence dynastic politics at the highest level, arranging a marriage between his son Huneric and Valentinian's daughter Eudocia, taking advantage of the weak position of the western emperor. Probably as part of this arrangement, Huneric relocated to the court of Ravenna. However, things did not work out as Geiseric had wis-hed, and the whole arrangement became invalid in 455, when Valentinian III died and Gei-seric sacked Rome (the event and its context will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter). No new treaty with the western empire was signed afterwards. There can be no doubt that the Byzantine government of Justinian regarded the Vandal state as completely independent in 533/4 at the time of the 'Vandalic War', that was carefully justified. Pro-copius' formulation of the Vandals '*having wrested Libya from the Romans*', making it their own⁷⁹, does not sound very much like the Vandal kingdom being a dependent client kingdom. Furthermore, Procopius describes in the following passage how Geiseric had enslaved the Romans he had captured after his victory, among them the future emperor Marcian, whose destiny was indicated by an eagle flying above him and providing him with shade⁸⁰. The story is clearly an anecdote, but nevertheless shows that Procopius considered Geiseric to be able to act independently right from the beginning. For Procopius and the Byzantine emperor Justinian, who was careful to stress the righteousness of the Byzantine invasion for reasons of broken treaties, the independence of the Vandal kingdom had been a long-time fact. This is very clear in the Byzantine sources, where Procopius, Iordanes and the Codex Iustinianus show that in 533, the Byzantines acknowledged the independent status of the Vandal kingdom and considered it in the propagandistic justification for the

century; I think that the most important factor here is that Procopius was trying to portray Geiseric as a con-siderate king who knew how he could secure his kingdom, which of course makes him not an easy adversary

⁷⁸ Procopius, *The Vandalic War*, I, 4, 1; translation Dewing, 1916

⁷⁹ Procopius, *The Vandalic War*, I, IV, 1

⁸⁰ Procopius, *The Vandalic War*, I, IV, 1–11

war⁸¹. As the outcome of the treaties with Valentinian III after the battles of Hippo Regius, what had been an inhomogeneous group of military servicemen and their families, led by the Hasding family, became the army of Africa. The leader of the Hasding house was the king who signed treaties with the emperor acknowledging the situation. Similar processes took place in various parts of the western Mediterranean, in Italy, Gaul and Spain, where later 'successor states' of the Roman empire were formed.

The Vandals were an inhomogeneous group that had forced its way into the Roman empire. Alliances changed over time, and with them the composition of the group. In some periods during the sojourn on the Iberian Peninsula, arrangements might have been made with the western imperial government. In Africa, contracts were signed. The Vandals moved within the established system of communication and cooperation (or confrontation) with the Roman Empire. They had become a Roman-style force at the latest on the Iberian Peninsula, if they had not been one before. The Hasding family established itself as leaders of the group in Hispania. The king Geiseric used the chances that a weak military and governmental situation in Africa offered. Their military ability was the basis for the Vandals' success. Leadership mainly in the form of command over the army therefore was an important, if not the most important, aspect of being the king. It has to be kept in mind that the Vandals came as a minority, from a theoretical background as federates (even if they were no federates they operated within the same frame of close contact with the empire, as, for example, the Goths), but with the intention of establishing their own influence zone.

Research on Vandal North Africa

Research on Vandal Africa has been dominated by historical works mainly based on written sources, only selectively taking archaeological material into account. In this study, I will follow a different approach and put the focus on the archaeological material available for the fifth and early sixth centuries in certain cities and regions. One of the reasons why a study of this kind has not been conducted earlier is that there was not much archaeological material available, and, furthermore, that there was little interest in it. In recent years however, a lot more archaeological material has become available. In addition, the older material can be restudied and reconsidered in a more differentiated way thanks to modern excavations, that have extended our understanding of what was going on archaeologically in the later periods of Antiquity in North Africa.

For centuries, the Vandals have had a very bad reputation. For a long time, the role of the Vandals was seen mainly as a destructive one and the term 'vandalism' has become the epitome of senseless violation. The bad reputation of the Vandals based on the anti-Vandal sources that dominated the picture of that period for a long time. The biggest part of these sources consists of religious literature defending the concepts of the 'Catholic' denomination, orthodox according to its own standards, following the regulations established in the council of Nicaea. The Nicene denomination had been at least temporarily suppressed and persecuted by the Vandal kings, who, along with the majority of their soldiers and officials, followed the 'Arian' denomination, which – simply speaking – differed in the way the relation between God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was defined⁸². The *'History of the*

⁸¹ see Rodolfi, 2008, pp. 238–239

⁸² although 'Arian' is a term used by Nicene Christians to denigrate the rival denomination, that had theologically nothing to do with the original conceptions of Arius developed in the early fourth century, I will still

persecution' by Victor of Vita, a Nicene cleric in later fifth century Carthage, had been edited already in the Middle Ages in France⁸³. Here as well, a number of hagiographies connected to violent events in the early fifth century involving Vandals, were edited and published in the 17th and 18th centuries. The flourishing of these anti-Vandal writings led to the first written attestation of the use of the term 'vandalism' by the bishop of Blois in 1794 to describe destructions taking place in the course of the French Revolution⁸⁴. Victor of Vita, though, was only the most elaborate and productive ecclesiastical author of the Catholic-Nicene faith who targeted the Vandal rule in North Africa and its Arian policy (at least among the ones whose texts survived). The other influential source on Vandal Africa was Procopius, who served as officer in the Byzantine army that conquered the Vandal kingdom in 533/4. His *Vandalic War* is a very important secular source for many spheres of the late Vandal state, but it was at the foremost a piece of historiography written for imperial needs⁸⁵. Victor of Vita and Procopius dominated the view on the Vandal period on North Africa for a long time from a rather biased perspective. Seldom is the proverb that 'History is written by the winners' truer than in the case of the Vandals.

Modern historical research on the Vandals started with Felix Papencordt's 'Geschichte der vandalischen Herrschaft in Afrika' that first appeared 1837 in Berlin⁸⁶. The editing and publication of the chronicles of Victor of Tunnuna, Prosper Tiro and Hydatius and the *Laterculus regum Wandalorum et Alanorum* in the *Chronica minora* of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* by Theodor Mommsen in 1892, 1894 and 1898 provided important source material. In 1901, Ludwig Schmidt's 'Geschichte der Wandalen' was published, re-published in 1942 with its strong ideological undertones⁸⁷. Early authors were especially interested in the person of Geiseric, the Vandal king who had initiated the transgression of the Vandals into Africa and established the African kingdom. Although only fragments of his life and character are transmitted, the interest Geiseric received illustrates the fascination of the later 19th and early 20th centuries with 'barbarian leaders'⁸⁸.

Modern historical research has nuanced and enhanced the early one-dimensional view of the Vandals as destroyers of culture in the course of the 20th century. The most influential work has been Christian Courtois' 'Les Vandales et l'Afrique' that first appeared in

use the term for the sake of clarity instead of the more neutral 'Homoean', that has not been used by 'Arians' to describe themselves either

⁸³ the latest and most comprehensive edition, including a commentary has been published by S. Lancel in 2002, see Victor of Vita, *Historia persecutionis*; other important sources from the religious sphere include the works of the fifth century African bishops Qoudvultdeus and Fulgentius of Ruspe, along with Ferrandus' *Vita Fulgentii* and Possidius' *Vita Augustini*, as well as some of Augustine's writing itself

⁸⁴ see Steinacher, 2003, p. 66 on this in more detail

⁸⁵ as Cameron 1996, pp. 135–141 has pointed out, Procopius' description of the *Vandalic War* was based more than his other description of Justinianic wars on his personal involvement; in a way, he is a 'war reporter', led often by his sympathy especially for the Byzantine general Belisarius, his patron; his report is often coloured by his own interests in certain aspects; however, Procopius' importance and indeed quality in historiographic description cannot be disputed, furthermore, he is our only source on the Byzantine war against Vandal Africa; see Cameron 1996, pp. 171–187 especially on Procopius' *The Vandalic War*

⁸⁶ Papencordt, 1837

⁸⁷ Schmidt, 1901 (1942)

⁸⁸ Schulze, 1859, Martroye, 1907 and Gautier, 1932

1955⁸⁹. Courtois is still the major study in the incorporation of a great number of mainly written sources from different areas⁹⁰. The big improvement in Courtois' work when compared with the earlier monographs was his broad perspective that enabled him to line out many basic characteristics of the Vandal period in North Africa. Courtois was the first researcher who tried to incorporate the Vandal kingdom into its African setting, widening the chronological horizon. Although being too apologetic in many respects, Courtois made it clear that the Vandal kings did not destroy Roman culture in Africa, but continued it in many ways. The Vandal kingdom was not 'Germanic', it was an African kingdom. It was a 'successor state' of the Roman empire in the sense that it incorporated many of the structures, ideas and values of the late Roman world.

Courtois' work had thoroughly discussed the available sources at that time and altered many of the basic assumptions about Vandal North Africa, laying the basis for a more nuanced analysis of specific problems. A little later than Courtois, the East German scholar H.-J. Diesner similarly worked on the history of Vandal North Africa⁹¹. His work did not reach the same broad scope as Courtois', and did not receive much attention in the field, probably due to his personal background and position. After Courtois' magisterial work was published, a period of silence followed, until mainly in the 1980s, new discussions started. F. M. Clover concentrated on the Vandal rulership system, discussing among other topics the relation of the kingdom to the western and eastern Roman empires⁹². Larger discussions at that time circled around the legal state of the Vandal kingdom, the Vandal monetary system and how the Vandals were physically established in North Africa, discussing mainly the question of the support of the Vandal army⁹³.

After the edition and publication of the important sources on Vandal North Africa, a desire to find 'the Vandals' in the material culture of North Africa developed. Coins are the main material evidence that can be directly linked to the Vandal kingdom in North Africa⁹⁴. Certain aspects of Vandal coinage were striking from the start, like the portrait busts of Vandal kings and inscriptions naming them, or the use of old Punic Carthaginian symbolism in Vandal era coins that will be discussed further below⁹⁵. Furthermore, the introduction of a new denominational system made the Vandal coins interesting from a numismatic point of view⁹⁶. One of the most famous objects from late antique North Africa is the Bordj Djedid mosaic showing a group of riders. One of the horsemen especially caught the imagination of early scholars who saw him as a Vandal because of the clothes he is wearing

⁸⁹ Courtois, 1955a

⁹⁰ a very good overview especially of the historical research on Vandal Africa including a discussion of the source material available is provided by Merrills, 2004b, pp. 7–24

⁹¹ collected in Diesner, 1966

⁹² see especially Clover, 1982, 1986, 1989; his earlier articles have been reprinted as Clover, 1993, but see also Clover, 2003

⁹³ see for example Morrisson & Schwartz, 1982, Morrisson, 1989 or Clover, 1990 on coinage, and Durliat, 1986 on the question of settlement and taxes, that has been discussed also by Liebeschuetz, 1997 in an article reviewing the whole topic; Clover's work (see ann. 91) regularly touches coinage and the status of the Vandal kingdom

⁹⁴ the earliest catalogues publishing Vandal coins as a corpus have been Friedländer, 1849 and Wroth, 1911; more recently, Hahn, 1973, 1975; Grierson & Blackburn, 1985; Mostecky, 1997; the most comprehensive and up to date reference is Berndt & Steinacher, 2006

⁹⁵ Clover, 1986

⁹⁶ see for example Grierson, 1959; Mostecky, 1987; Morrisson, 1989, 1999, 2001, 2003; Clover, 1990, 1991

and the moustache, both considered to be ‘barbaric’ – we will come back to the mosaic later. Finally, a number of burial finds, especially from Carthage, Hippo Regius and Thurburbo Maius, were considered to represent Vandal material culture⁹⁷. The most famous and most discussed one is the burial of a woman at Carthage-Koudiat Zâteur, discovered as early as 1915⁹⁸. The woman had apparently been equipped for the grave with a highly representational dress including two bow brooches, a third smaller brooch, a belt-buckle and nearly 170 small golden plates that apparently covered textiles. She wore a set of jewellery containing earrings, a necklace and several finger-rings. On the basis of these finds, especially the bow brooches and the belt buckle, the burial has been dated to around the middle of the 5th c. These finds, that will be discussed in more detail further below, have been debated quite intensely because of their implications for a potentially distinguishable ethnic Vandal material culture. Although there are good arguments to put this burial into the context of the Vandal era in Carthage, it does not represent a Vandal dress in the sense of ethnic attire that would identify the geographical origin of its bearer. This idea has been rejected during the last years, after our understanding of what ethnicity meant in Late Antiquity (something utterly different than what it meant in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries) became more differentiated⁹⁹. Recent publications by Christoph Eger and Philipp von Rummel dealt with the small number of supposedly ‘Vandal’ burials, making it clear that some can still be connected to the Vandal elite in Africa, however, without representing any kind of traditional ethnic attire¹⁰⁰. Especially von Rummel has made it very clear that the objects considered as representing a barbarian dress, and linked in traditional academic discussion with certain groups like the Vandals, were part of the Roman cultural world, be it as part of the ideological distinction between *romanitas* and *barbaritas* or simply as part of the military culture that had also been incorporated more and more into the representational styles of the late Roman elite, paying tribute to the risen importance of official service in the imperial administration¹⁰¹.

In the course of a more nuanced and modern view of the sociopolitical background of the late Antique and early Medieval periods in the Mediterranean and Central Europe, which put a modern view on questions of identity and ethnicity, the Vandal kingdom in Africa has also come into focus again¹⁰². With the so called *Laterculus regum Vandalorum et Alanorum*, a document has been studied in detail that had not received sufficient attention before¹⁰³. The *Anthologia Latina*, a collection of poems edited in Carthage at the end of Vandal rule in the 530s, is today considered as important counterweight to anti-Vandal sources like Victor of Vita or Procopius¹⁰⁴. The Vandal era poems in the *Anthologia Latina*,

⁹⁷ the topic had been first brought to a broader academic community by Baye, 1887, with Koenig, 1981 however being the first who has subsumed the alleged ‘Vandal objects’ found in Africa and also in Spain

⁹⁸ first published in 1916, Delattre & Héron de Villefosse, 1916; extensively discussed by Eger 2001, pp. 349–370 and von Rummel, 2007, pp. 270–323

⁹⁹ see for example Pohl & Reimitz, 1998; Götz, et al., 2003; Brather, 2004

¹⁰⁰ Eger, 2001, 2004, 2008; von Rummel, 2002, 2005 and 2007, chapters 7.1 and 7.4

¹⁰¹ von Rummel, 2007, is a basic study on the discussion of ‘barbarian’ and ‘Roman’ material culture

¹⁰² see the edited volumes Pohl, 1997 and Pohl & Reimitz, 1998, on ‘barbarian’ material culture von Rummel, 2007, on identity in North Africa Conant, 2004a and more specifically on the Vandals the article by Steinacher, 2006 and the monograph by Berndt, 2007

¹⁰³ Steinacher, 2001

¹⁰⁴ argued convincingly by Miles, 2005 in an important study; editions of the *Anthologia Latina* have been published by Riese (1894) and Shackleton-Bailey (1982), see *Anthologia Latina*; Rosenblum, 1961 is an edition

which will be discussed more thoroughly later in this study, have been re-considered not only from the perspective of literary studies, but more importantly in their value for social cohesion in Vandal era Carthage¹⁰⁵. It should not be underestimated that also a non-Roman royal court in a Roman cultural *milieu* opened possibilities for skilled and ambitious poets like Dracontius, whose most influential literary output however resulted from his fall into disgrace in the middle of his career: he still had praised the Vandal king Huneric when Gunthamund ruled already, to whom he pleaded for mercy from his prison cell with his *Satisfactio* after this political *faux-pas*¹⁰⁶. Fittingly, the ‘other side’ with alleged ‘Vandal’ names from inscriptions and other evidence for the ‘Vandalic’ language have also been re-studied¹⁰⁷.

With the re-consideration of the evidence for settlement of the Vandals and its relation to their religious policy, a crucial topic has recently received more attention: the relation of the Vandal kingdom to the indigenous groups and autochthonous states of late antique North Africa¹⁰⁸. Two concise histories of the ‘Vandals’ have been published in recent years, one rather traditional, the other one following the approach of Courtois, choosing a broader African perspective¹⁰⁹. Collections of conference papers reflect the vibrant discussions and developments in the study of Vandal North Africa in recent years¹¹⁰. The state of research on Vandal North Africa has been presented and comprehensively discussed recently by Andy Merrills and Richard Miles in a monograph not only dealing with questions of rulership, history and economy of Vandal North Africa, but also giving new directions on questions of identity and the cultural life of that period¹¹¹.

Much of the discussion on Vandal North Africa is primarily based on written sources. This is not surprising as the written sources available for the period are quite numerous, beyond Victor of Vita and Procopius, and also on these much work has been done in recent years to clarify and extend what we can learn from them. However, within the field of archaeology much progress has also been made since Courtois published his ‘Les Vandales et l’Afrique’. The shifting focus towards the later periods of antique North Africa has led to a new appraisal of finds, many related to the Christian history of North Africa, illustrated in a number of recent exhibitions¹¹². For a long time, excavations had not paid attention to late occupational layers. The traditionalist view that was very widespread made archaeologists expect only destruction and decline in North Africa in the fifth and early sixth centuries. The relative dating of phases in archaeological contexts respected this historical frameset

and translation of the Luxorius corpus, and Chalon, et al., 1985 focus on another set of Vandal era poems, providing a French translation

¹⁰⁵ Miles, 2005

¹⁰⁶ on the political case of Dracontius, see Merrills, 2004c

¹⁰⁷ Francovich Onesti, 2002

¹⁰⁸ Modéran, 2002, 2003b, 2008a; Modéran 2003a is a comprehensive study of ‘Moorish’ North Africa in Late Antiquity

¹⁰⁹ Castritius, 2007, Gil Egea, 1998

¹¹⁰ see Afrique Vandale et Byzantine, 2002/2003, Merrills, 2004, Berndt & Steinacher, 2008

¹¹¹ Merrills & Miles, 2010; I thank both authors for providing me with a preliminary version of their book

¹¹² Carthage, 1995; Landes & Ben Hassan, 2001; Algérie antique, 2003; Die Vandalen, 2003; ‘Das Königreich der Vandalen’, Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe, opening on October 24, 2009; due to the opening of this exhibition and the publication of its catalogue very shortly before submission, I have not integrated its essays in this study

for a long time, so that constructional layers could – from a conceptual point of view – only date either to the late Roman or early Byzantine periods. However, due to the more nuanced picture historical research produced, and a better understanding of city development in the later periods fuelled mainly by the 1970s UNESCO ‘Save Carthage’ Project, the situation has improved considerably¹¹³. The establishment of a good fine-ware chronology and modern excavations carefully recording layers and dating material resulted in an improved archaeological picture of late Roman and Vandal North Africa over the last decades¹¹⁴. Research on the production and distribution of African Red Slip fine-ware pottery and amphorae in Africa and the Mediterranean has produced a picture of continuous economic prosperity through most of the fifth century at least¹¹⁵.

A good number of late antique North African churches are today considered to have been constructed in the fifth century¹¹⁶. Also in the field of private architecture, there is more and more evidence for building activities on a good scale throughout the fifth century¹¹⁷. Mosaics especially are today generally dated later, with many being ascribed also to the Vandal period, which would have been unthinkable of only a few decades ago¹¹⁸. A lot of the basic archaeological work on North African sites had already been done in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, when French colonial researchers unearthed many cities concentrating on the big monuments preferably from the Principate, and on inscriptions¹¹⁹. It is often difficult to judge the development of a city as a whole over time, because, also for the later periods, works usually concentrated on the rather impressive buildings like churches and rich townhouses. Nevertheless, a number of studies explicitly focused on later periods in North Africa over the last years. Early Christian Carthage is the topic of a monograph by Liliane Ennabli¹²⁰. Gareth Sears has considered the development of African cities especially in regard to their Christianisation, however drawing a chronological line in the material discussed at the time of the Vandal ingression¹²¹. The main lines of North African city development have been comprehensively worked out by Anna Leone, discussing a vast corpus of material making her book the reference study for the archaeology of the later periods in North Africa¹²².

Still, the picture in the cities is far from satisfying and detailed studies of their development in the Vandal period are lacking. A problem quite regularly pointed out in studies of

¹¹³ see Ennabli, A., 1992a for short summaries of the projects

¹¹⁴ on African Red Slip pottery, the basic work is Hayes, 1972 with the addition of Hayes, 1980; the recent study of Bonifay, 2004 also includes the amphorae and is therefore the most comprehensive resource on African pottery available; for summaries on archaeological work see for example Duval, 1991/1993; Mattingly & Hitchner, 1995; for Vandal Carthage especially Ben Abed & Duval, 2000

¹¹⁵ see Tortorella, 1983; Fulford, 1984; Panella, 1986; Fentress & Perkins, 1987, and recently more critical Bonifay, 2003

¹¹⁶ for example on fifth century ecclesiastical structures Miles, 2006, Béjaoui, 2002 and 2008

¹¹⁷ examples will be discussed below; see in general for example Ghedini & Bullo, 2007

¹¹⁸ see in general Ben Abed, 1995, and Ben Abed & Duval, 2000, pp. 178–179

¹¹⁹ the preference for Roman archaeology by French colonial officers and researchers has led to its disapproval by a part of the Maghrebinian archaeologists initially after the independency of the North African countries; the underlying ideological problem was the view that many colonial archaeologists represented, seeing the French colonial officers as ‘bringers of culture’ to North Africa in Roman tradition; see Benabou, 1976

¹²⁰ Ennabli, 1997

¹²¹ Sears, 2007

¹²² Leone, 2007

the late antique periods in North Africa is the difficulty of precise dating. Stratigraphical information is often missing, especially for the sites that have been excavated a couple of decades ago. As we will see also in this study, it is often difficult to pinpoint building activities precisely to certain epochs, for the simple fact that there is no stylistic break between the late Roman and the Vandal period. In this study, I will concentrate on a number of sites where good dating evidence is available for the fifth and early sixth centuries. Regrettably, not all excavation reports publish the stratigraphy, pottery and coins that led to certain datings in detail. In these cases, the published datings of the excavators have to be trusted, unless there are serious reasons for doubting them.

Questions and approaches of this study

The continuity achieved in many parts of North African society during the Vandal period indicates that a successful system for governing and administrating North Africa had been found. The questions, how this system looked like more specifically, and what consequences its implementation had for the development of North Africa, stand in the centre of attention of this study. How to rule North Africa from a Vandal point of view was an essential issue, considering especially that the group coming to North Africa was a minority that had only found some cohesiveness a generation ago. Controlling North Africa by pure military power was out of the question; we will come back to this point later in the study in more detail. Given this situation, the Vandal government had to create a common ground for the kingdom to rest upon, including 'Vandals' and 'Romano-Africans'. We are therefore dealing with questions of governance in Vandal North Africa. Why 'governance' and not 'government'? The term governance characterises in its original meaning the 'act or manner of governing', but, as a term in political science, has in the last decade come to describe a new perspective¹²³. While government mainly refers to the hierarchical system of state administration, governance is a superordinate concept, including the participation of different, non-government groups within society in running a political entity¹²⁴. The concept of governance therefore is very suitable as an overarching analysis principle in relation to Vandal North Africa. Much of the direct evidence on Vandal North Africa refers to the royal house, with the majority being written evidence. The general lines to which the political system worked from the governmental side can be described in detail. The greatest part of the evidence comes from Carthage or is related to Carthage. The city, that became the capital of the Vandal kingdom in 439, therefore stands in the centre of the first part of this study. I will reconstruct Vandal royal ideology and the role the city played in it. The main perspective that I am taking in this study is an archaeological perspective. As described above, the main works on Vandal North Africa have been written from historical perspectives. Today, it is possible to include a fair amount of archaeological evidence to produce a counterweight to what the written sources tell us.

In the first part of this book, I will discuss the Vandal regnal system, consider the evidence for royal residences in the city and take a look at how the kings presented themselves as benefactors of their subjects and their capital. The city of Carthage stood in the centre of Vandal royal ideology and was an important reference point for Hasding rule. I will use archaeological evidence extensively to contrast it with what we learn from the written sources.

¹²³ Benz et al., 2007, p. 10

¹²⁴ Benz et al., 2007, pp. 12–13

ces. I will show how, in spite of rulership ideology, the focus of the kings was not on the classical city, paying more attention to the 'idea of Carthage' than to its actual physical state. A large part of the archaeological evidence for the fifth and sixth centuries comes from ecclesiastical structures. The Christian topography of Carthage will constitute a considerable part of the chapter. The Vandal royal house took great influence on religious policy by establishing and favouring the 'Vandal Arian church'. Favouring a clerical organisation that was close to court had many advantages in an age in which bishops had become influential members of society, that were not integrated into the hierarchy of the state like magistrates and officials. Bishops and clergy had direct influence on their congregations as moral and religious authorities, and also as secular patrons. They were in crucial positions within the social network and therefore important for governance, being able to mobilise large parts of the population, either in consensus or in dissent with the government. The evidence stemming from the conflict between the Arian and the Nicene churches in North Africa illustrates this. From the point of view of governance, also influential lay members of the elite were important. Means of direct control were limited in Antiquity, and the whole social and political system of the Roman empire depended to a very large degree in elite participation, on the basis of the identification of the elite with the political system and its engagement in it on various levels. I will try to show that the involvement of the local Carthaginian elite was important to secure the functioning of the state in Vandal North Africa, that the inhomogeneous group of Vandals, that had mainly been occupied with military tasks before they established the kingdom, could not have ensured alone. We will take a look at the evidence for elite life at Carthage, both from written sources and from archaeological examinations. Both show not only continuity, but even an augmentation in activity and scale. The elite in Vandal Carthage seems to have been very well off, and I will try to show that in Carthage, in spite of the religious tensions, the system of governance worked well. Royal ideology referred to the city's past, thereby creating a bond with the established local leading class. We will study how intertwined Vandal and Romano-African members of the elite of the city were and look at their official positions, but also their unofficial activities, representing themselves as members of the leading class. The functioning of a system of prestigious elite competition is an important point, because it constitutes a common ground for interaction. Prestige is, simply speaking, 'positive reputation', that is ascribed to an individual by other members of society. According to Erdheim, the prestige of an individual is the knowledge that the related group has about its status as role model¹²⁵. With this definition, Erdheim makes a very important point: the achievement of prestige depends on the acceptance of a common set of values and rules. Prestige therefore gives social life a structure and defines hierarchical relations – ultimately, it belongs to the sphere of power relations¹²⁶. Furthermore, Erdheim rightfully considers prestige as *fait social total*, using a term Marcel Mauss developed for phenomena touching basically all important spheres of society¹²⁷. Social prestige is based primarily on the belonging to a group or class. It is therefore necessary that the membership in the ruling class is visible. The symbols of class affiliation can be very diverse and range from outer signs like clothes and luxurious

¹²⁵ Erdheim, 1973, p. 33

¹²⁶ Bernbeck & Müller, 1996, p. 2

¹²⁷ Erdheim, 1973, pp. 23–25, 39–40; Mauss had developed the idea in his article on gift exchange first published in *Année Sociologique* 1923–24, see Mauss, 1997

housing to more subtle ones like cultivated language and manners¹²⁸. Social prestige works in a ‘social space’, defined by Bourdieu as a web of different relations in which people express their social positions through their lifestyle¹²⁹. Prestige is part of the symbolic capital, and therefore needs representation on a constant basis¹³⁰. The symbolic capital is a form of credit, granted by the community on the basis of display of the material and symbolic value a person has at hand. This credit means power and influence and allows the positioning of a person in a social network, including certain rights¹³¹. The necessity of display lies in the danger of losing prestige again¹³². Prestige is part of the ostentative economy, because representing one’s prestige often means spending money publicly, be it for the benefit of others, be it for self-representation. With this background, gaining, representing and defending social prestige becomes an important factor for governance. Games of prestige are, in spite of their potential for personal conflict, a cohesive factor because of the underlying commonly accepted set of values and symbols. Integrating socially influential persons into the governance system is crucial in a surrounding in which physical control is limited. I will try to show how the Vandal government handled this system, and take a look how it worked in reference to the physical development of the region in the epoch. Ultimately, Vandal North Africa ceased to exist after a century, and it was not only the Byzantine army that was responsible for the failing of the state.

The main ideas I am going to discuss in the Carthage chapter refer on the one hand to the royal house and how a rulership ideology was established, and on the other hand to the involvement of the elite within this system. I will argue that Vandal Carthage was important as ideological centre for the kings, and that this was acknowledged also by the lay elite in their expressions of relation to the city. The Vandal Arian church served at Carthage not only as religious institution. It also was symbolically important to express Vandal supremacy. As we will see, Carthage had a distinct Christian topography when the Vandals established their rule, and it was part of the governmental program to make this topography part of the Vandal city by ‘Arianising’ it. Euergetism was important in rulership ideology, but the upkeep of the classical cityscape was not. The mixed Vandal and Romano-African elite worked along the same lines of cooperation and competition. Ensuring stability and income, the system of governance with the royal court, Vandal army, mixed elite and control of the church worked quite well in Carthage. What about the rest of North Africa?

Chapter III of this study will deal with the problem of controlling North Africa beyond Carthage. I will discuss how far Vandal influence reached according to written evidence. In this section, the question how the Vandal army functioned and what role it might have played in ensuring Vandal authority will be analysed. The relation between the Vandal state and the autochthonous groups of inner North Africa, the ‘Moors’, will appear as crucial. We will then turn our attention to two larger areas to take a careful look at the archaeology

¹²⁸ Kluth, 1957, p. 39

¹²⁹ see Bourdieu, 1999, esp. p. 278; on the concept of the ‘social space’ as well Kraus, 2004

¹³⁰ Bourdieu developed the system of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital in the course of his studies of the Kabylie society in modern Algeria in the 1960s, see Bourdieu, 1976

¹³¹ see Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 217–218

¹³² this has been discussed for example by Bourdieu, 1976, p. 367 on the example of the Kabylie society, but also by Elias, 2002, esp. p. 111 who examined the power politics at the court of Louis XIV, in which prestige defined by proximity to the king was of crucial importance

there and what it tells us about the functioning of society on a local level during the Vandal period. I picked two regions for which written and material evidence allows to reconstruct the presence of a Vandal governmental authority, in whatever person or form. The first region analysed will be northeastern Proconsularis in Chapter IV, where we will encounter a mixed elite in the city of Thurburbo Maius, where social competition among the leading class seems to have been similar to Carthage in that period. Some sites in the region indicate a high level of economic activity and of profit-making during the Vandal period. Finally, also the issue of religious competition can be addressed in a number of ecclesiastical buildings of the epoch. Chapter V will deal with sites further away from Carthage. Hippo Regius was the first city where the Vandal court was established in North Africa for ten years, before the ingression into Carthage, and it remained an important government centre as is attested in written sources. Whereas Hippo Regius lies on the coast near the border of Africa Proconsularis with Numidia, the other sites discussed in that chapter lie in inland North Africa, where the provinces of Africa Proconsularis, Byzacena and Numidia bordered each other in a triangle. The cities of Ammaedara, Theveste and Sufetula mainly allow to discuss questions concerning the position of religion in regard to the Vandal government. The region also contains a number of sites that will enable us to discuss the economic development of the region in the Vandal period. I will compare the development in northeastern Proconsularis with the development in the region further away from Carthage in order to analyse the similarities and differences in the two regions concerning the presence and influence of the Vandal government. The operation of the governance system will be compared in both regions to Carthage, and we will take special attention to reconstruct its influence on society, both local and supraregional. The title of this book gives an idea of the two main aspects that will lead the argument of this study in its double meaning: the capital of the kingdom, Carthage, was an ideologically important central focus – but it was also the economic capital that was important for the functioning of the state and its governance.

