

The Background to Vandal Exile

Following the Vandal conquest of Carthage in 439, numerous Romano-Africans were exiled over the course of the fifth century. We know of these exiles mainly through Victor of Vita's *History of the Vandal Persecution* – our principal source for Vandal Africa written towards the end of the fifth century. Within this polemical work, exile is invariably linked to religious conflict: a sanction imposed on Nicene Christians by the cruel and violent Arian Vandals. Indeed, for Victor exile was the most obvious manifestation of the persecution of the African church. However, over the last decade and a half a renewed interest in Vandal Africa has caused scholars to look again at certain aspects of Victor's narrative. It has become increasingly clear that Victor, writing at a time when religious boundaries were beginning to blur, exaggerated the levels of intolerance. Some historians have gone even further, doubting the very existence of a persecution. In my poster I have tried to explore some of these revisionist arguments, to see if they perhaps encourage us to rethink the application of exile.



Figure 1: Movement of Vandal Exiles 429-509

Mapping Exile

I have approached the phenomenon of exile from a geographical perspective, charting the distribution of all the known individuals exiled over the course of the fifth century. The data was mainly drawn from Victor's *History* (c.487), but was supplemented by 3 additional works; the *Epistolae* (435-457) of Theodoret of Cyrrhus; the *Notitia Provinciarum et Civitatum Africae* (c.484); and the *Vita Fulgentii* (c.533). A number of visualisations that exploit the relevant geographical information (place exiled from and destination) can be seen on the poster. For example, Figure 1 depicts the known movements of every individual or group of individuals exiled by Vandal authorities.

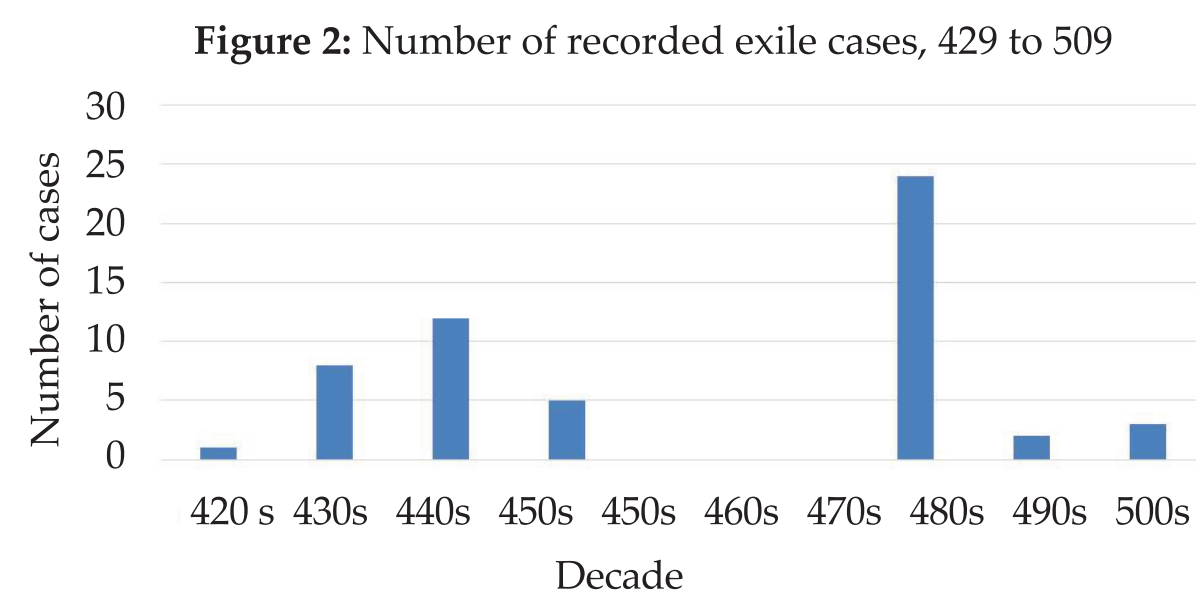


Figure 2: Number of recorded exile cases, 429 to 509

Two Periods of Exile

A close examination of Vandal exile reveals an important chronological division. As you can see from the graph of recorded exile cases (Figure 2) there was an initial burst of exile following the establishment of the Vandal Kingdom, a gap in documented cases in the middle years of the 5th century, and a second more significant burst in the 480s, which continued into the first decade of the 500s. Here, the two periods have been examined in isolation. Figure 3 depicts exile movement up to the 450s, whilst Figure 4 depicts movement after 480. Clearly, they have produced two very different geographical profiles. The most important distinction shown in these two maps is the contrast between 'external' and 'internal' exile. This ultimately explains the changing nature of the phenomenon, reflecting a shift from displacement to banishment.

Vandal Exile to the 450s: Displacement

As shown by the map (Figure 3), up to the 450s exile can be characterised as 'external' with individuals moving out of the Vandal Kingdom (shaded in red) to Italy or the Eastern Mediterranean. This suggests that the Vandal authorities did not directly control exile movement. Whilst it could represent individuals fleeing from religious conflict, it is unlikely to represent the coherent policy of state persecution described by Victor. In this context, exile should instead be linked to the peculiar form of Vandal settlement. The Vandals acquired their territory in North Africa through military conquest, and were dependent on the confiscation of land from the Romano-African aristocracy. These dispossessed Carthaginian aristocrats constitute the majority of exile movement depicted in Figure 3. Having lost their African properties, they fled east to relatively stable areas still subject to Roman authority – Italy or the Eastern Empire. They are likely to have been the very wealthiest African families; we might call them the Roman 1% whose widespread estates throughout the Mediterranean made relocation a viable option. Thus, contrary to Victor's narrative, exile was not invariably the product of religious persecution; here, exiles had primarily been displaced by socio-economic pressure.

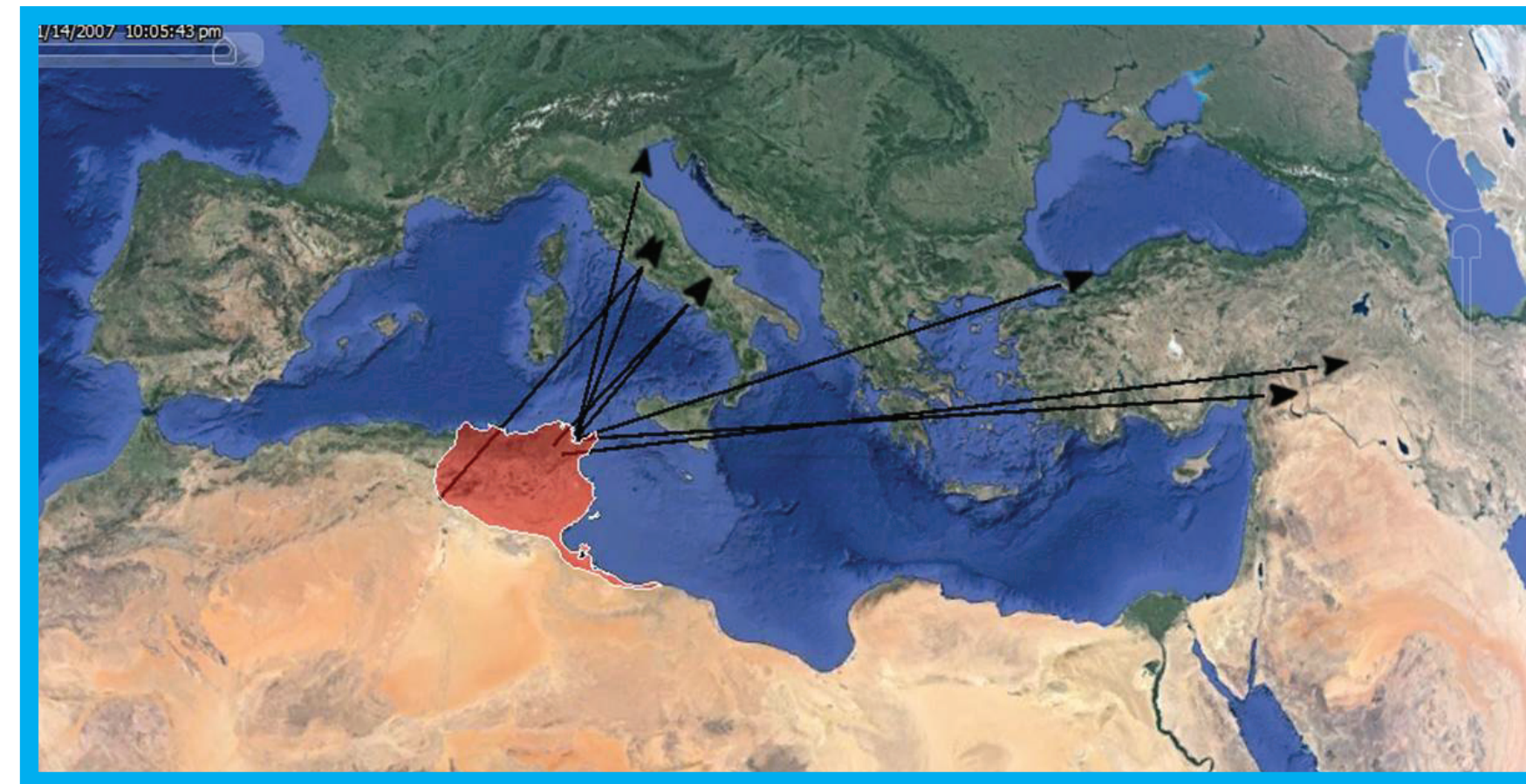


Figure 3: Movement of Vandal Exiles up to 450s

Vandal Exile after 480: Banishment

The second period of exile (Figure 4) looks very different to that prior to the 450s. Once again the red layer represents the extent of the Vandal Kingdom. The yellow layer to the south represents the Berber tribes of the desert interior. Although semi-autonomous, they also seemed to have recognised Vandal authority. Exile, thus, appears overwhelmingly internal, with 87% of exiles moving to a location within the kingdom. Of these internal exile cases, 74% involved Catholic clerics mostly banished after the Council of Carthage in 484. This seemingly confirms the existence of a persecution of the Catholic Church. Exile was now state-directed, a tool of oppression used to relegate prominent members of the Catholic hierarchy to peripheral areas: the desert interior or Mediterranean Islands, with Corsica the most popular place of banishment. Crucially, they remained within the boundaries of the kingdom, allowing the Vandal King to closely control their movements – for instance, the clerics banished to Corsica were said to have been put to work cutting lumber for the King's ships (Vic. Vit. Hist. 3.20).



Figure 4: Movement of Vandal Exiles after 480

The Limited Geographical Extent of Persecution

Despite the frequent use of internal banishment after 480, we still must be careful when talking about a general persecution. Victor implies that the entire African church suffered during the period; however, this is not supported by a systematic analysis. In Figure 5, which indicates the cities and towns that clerics were exiled from, we see that only a tiny area of the Vandal territory was seemingly affected.

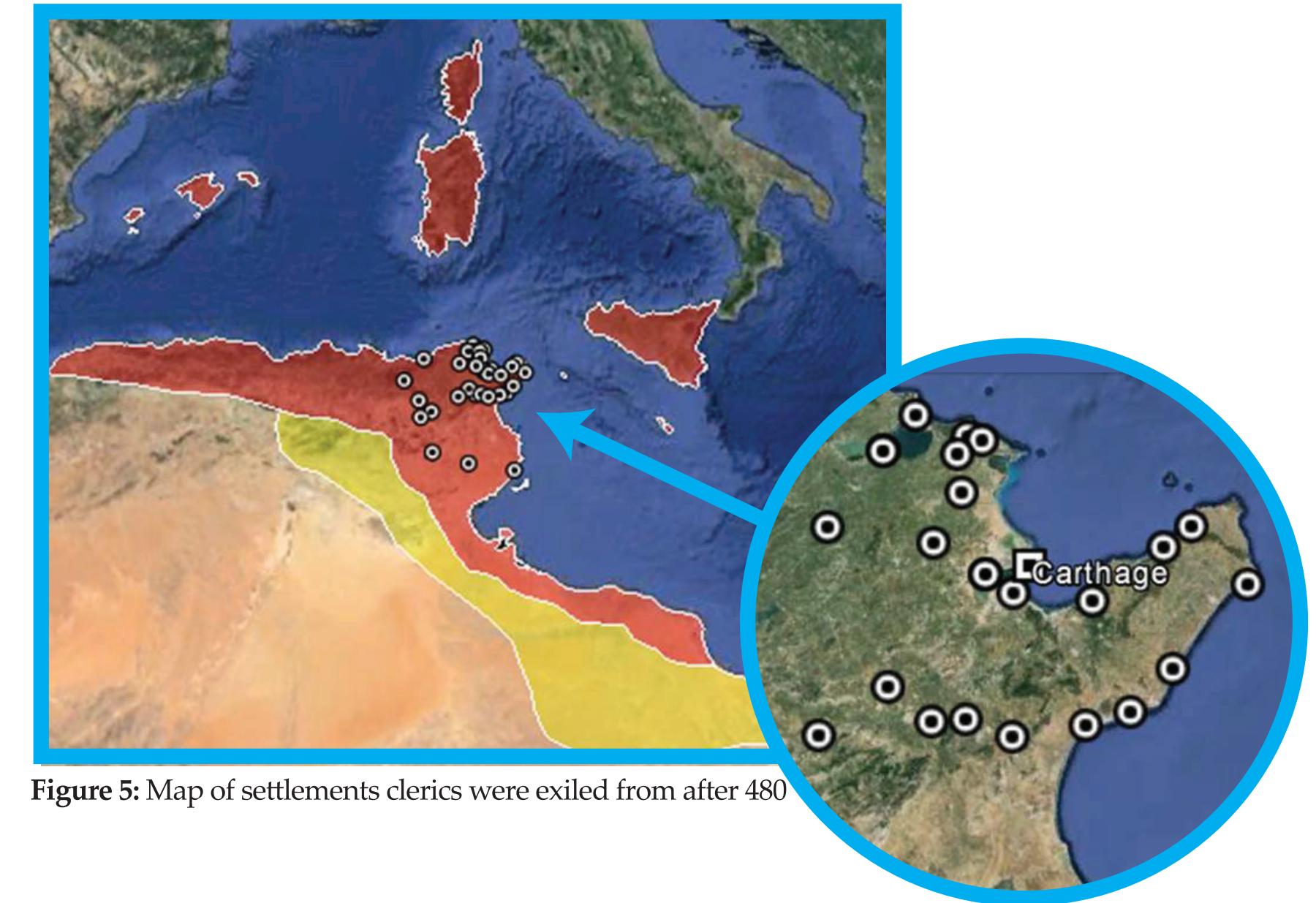
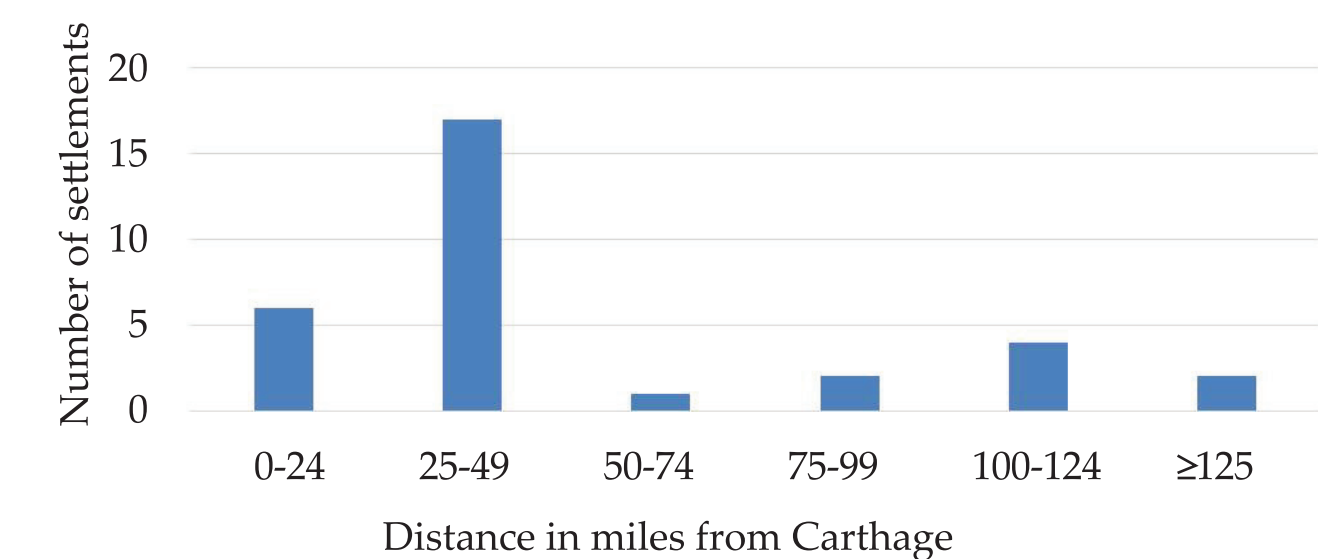


Figure 5: Map of settlements clerics were exiled from after 480

Specifically, we see a clustering of sites around the Vandal capital of Carthage. This is further supported by statistical analysis. Figure 6 is a graph showing the distance of exile home communities from Carthage. The vast majority of sites (72%) lay within a 50 mile radius of the city.

Figure 6: Distance of exile home communities from Carthage



The Roman Precedent behind Vandal Banishment

Evidently, Vandal religious policy was largely restricted to the region around Carthage (Figures 5 & 6), with the majority of exiled clerics previously residing only 2 or 3 days travel from the capital. Whilst demonstrating the limits of the Vandal King's authority, here we also see the influence of late Roman traditions on barbarian rule. When targeting Catholics, Huneric recycled the anti-heresy laws of early fifth century Roman emperors, specifically Honorius (compare Vic. Vit. Hist. 3.3-14 to C.Th. 16.5.52). This Roman influence can equally be detected in the choice of location. From the time of Constantine onwards, it was the policy of Roman emperors to remove heretics from the main population centres and banish them to the edges of empire: places such as Britain or the Egyptian desert. The Vandals seem to be following exactly the same procedure albeit on a much smaller scale, with heretics, now defined as Catholics, removed from the area of Vandal settlement (i.e. Carthage and its environs) and confined to similarly peripheral locations.

From displacement to banishment: A study of exile from the Vandal Kingdom (429-509)

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