Prologue

Map. 1 Late Antique North Africa (4th century)

The Making of Saints in Late Antique North Africa
Between Story Telling and Architectural Staging

SABINE PANZRAM

Context

Making a saint is no easy task. That was the case even in Carthage, North Africa's Mediterranean metropolis. In the 4th century, it was here – or, to be precise, just north of the city itself, in the rural, so-called *megara* of the necropolises allocated for Christian burials – that three basilicas were erected. Their construction sparked the genesis of Carthage's Christian sacral topography, which developed in two phases from the 4th to the 6th centuries (Fig. 1).

We now know them by their modern toponyms as Damous el Karita, Mcidfa, and Sainte Monique, and that their function and specific architectural similarities justify referring to them as a unique group of ecclesiastical buildings that remains without parallel in North Africa.[1] Of the three, we can date only Damous el Karita precisely, due to the discovery of a coin featuring Constantine II from sometime between 355 and 361, thus providing a terminus post quem for the basilica's construction. All three buildings sport a remarkable number of naves: Damous el Karita has nine, while Mcidfa and Sainte Monique have seven each. Only one other basilica in all of North Africa, located in *Tipasa* (Tībāza), approaches these numbers. The interior space used by the congregation – the *quadratum populi* – measured 65 × 45 m in Damous el Karita, 61 × 45 m in Mcidfa, and 50 × 37 m in Sainte Monique. We are largely ignorant of their decorations and upper-level architecture, but they presumably featured typically eclectic spolia (multi-colored marble columns, capitals of varying sizes, etc.) and galleries. Burials took place in the interior space and/or the atrium – Damous el Karita's side naves were, at floor level, completely covered in gravestones. At a depth of 1.5 m, Mcfida's

1 BOCKMANN, Märtyrer Karthagos; see also DI STEFANO, Cartagine romana e tardoantica, pp. 57–68; LEONE, Changing Townscapes in North Africa, pp. 96–111; BARATTE et al., Basiliques chrétiennes d'Afrique du Nord, pp. 132–139, 142–147; BURNS/JENSEN, Christianity in Roman Africa, pp. 134–147.

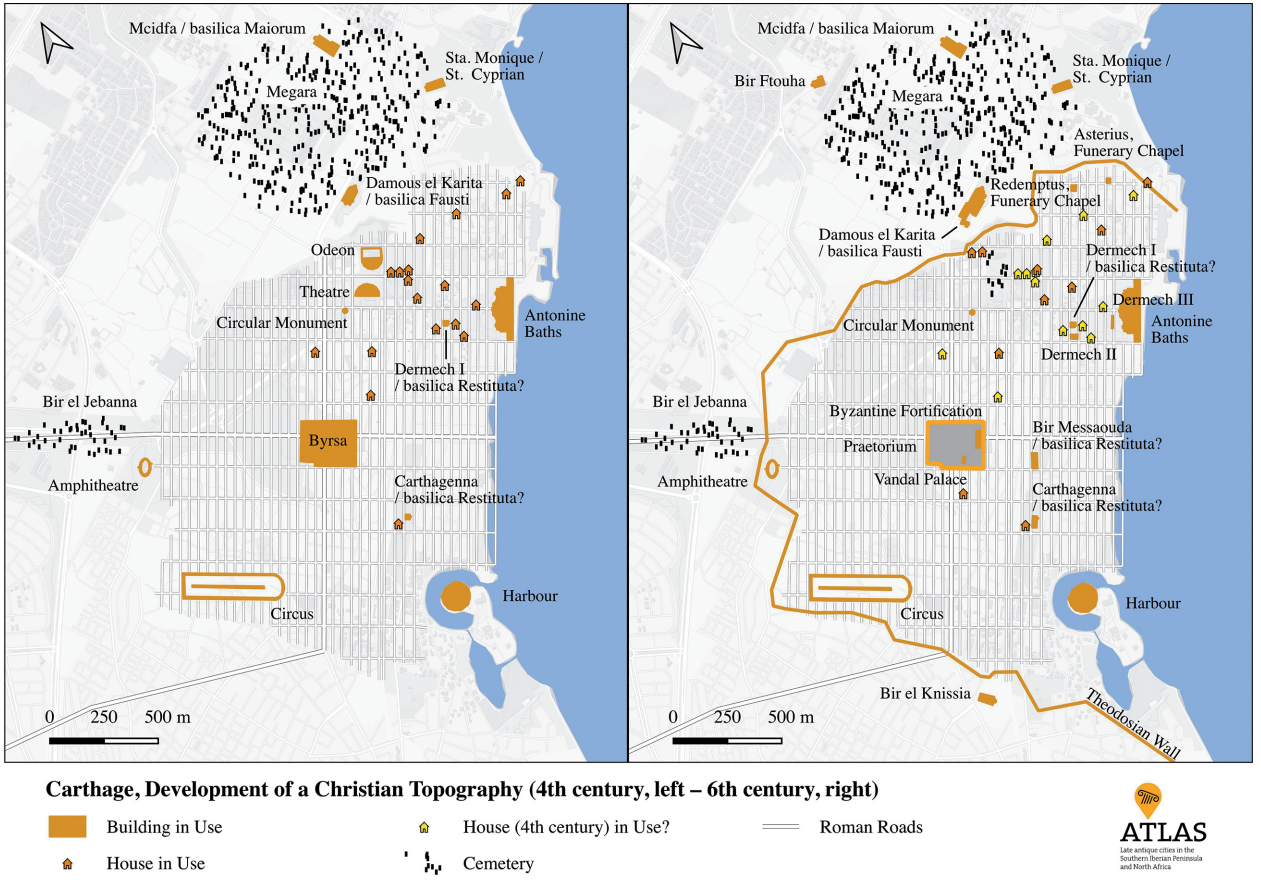

Fig. 1 Carthage, Development of a Christian Topography (4th century, left – 6th century, right)

entire interior space was systematically filled with burials; the majority of its almost 4,000 inscriptions are Christian epitaphs. Sainte Monique features a comparable density of burials and number of epigraphic monuments. Moreover, all three churches comprise not just such significant quantities of burials, but also qualitatively outstanding areas that indicate martyr interments: a barred-off triconch with sarcophagi at the back of the atrium in the extended central axis (Damous el Karita), a crypt as well as larger tombs outside the church (Mcidfa), and an underground tomb in the atrium's center (Saint Monique). Features such as wells in the interior space (Saint Monique) or atrium (Damous el Karita, Mcidfa) suggest that funeral banquets were held there, as water was required for cleaning. All three churches thus functioned as funeral churches and served the veneration of saints. They could host a large number of congregation members for funeral ceremonies and services, and were fully functioning on a liturgical level.

Research identified the buildings through literary and epigraphic records, or else through their location within the topography.[2] Damous el Karita would be the *basilica Fausti*, which was linked to the Scillitani who were martyred in Carthage on July 17, 180: eleven, twelve, or thirteen Christian men and women with Punic and Roman names from an unidentifiable place under the Carthage jurisdiction then exerted by Publius Vigellius Saturninus.[3] The basilica's *area Fausti* developed into a funeral site of supra-regional renown, the place "they call that of the Scillitani" and which served as the final resting place of figures such as Bishop Leucius of Theveste (Tebessa).[4]

Mcidfa could be identified as the *basilica Maiorum*, which in 203 became the burial site of the high-born Perpetua, her slave Felicitas, and her four companions, all arrested and sentenced to death for preparing for baptism and refusing to renounce their faith. They were martyred in the Carthage amphitheatre on March 7th[5] as attested by a marble epitaph measuring around 1.13 m × 0.80 m.[6] The script survives only in fragments but explicitly refers to the burial site – including *Hic] sunt marty[res]* – and lists the catechumens by name. The letter shapes date the inscription to no earlier than the beginning of the 6th century, indicating that the surviving slab is the last version of the martyrs' grave, presumably preceded by older designs. Sainte Monique's location near the coast makes it the likely location for the *memoria* of Cyprian condemned under Valerian's persecution and executed on the 14th of September 258. Martyr records state

2 ENNABLI, Carthage, une metropole chrétienne, pp. 18–26 and 121–135.

3 Pass. Scill., ed. RUGGIERO.

4 Pass. Fel. rec.: *in vico qui dicitur Scillitanorum, in Fausti* (ed. DELEHAYE, p. 259 and p. 265); Cypr. sent. episc., 31 (260); for this DOLENZ, Damous-el-Karita, esp. pp. 16–19.

5 Pass. Perp., ed. AMAT.

6 DUVAL, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, pp. 1:13–16: [(croix)] *Hic] sunt marty[res]* / [(croix)] *Saturus Satur[r]n[inus]* / (croix) *Rebocatus, S[e]c[undulus]* / (croix) *Felicit(as), Per[pe]t(ua) pas(si) [non(as) Mart(ias)]* / *[… M]aiulu[s …*; cf. ENNABLI, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, vol. 2: Mcidfa, no. 1/p. 35.

Fig. 2 Sainte Monique funeral basilica – Saint Cyprien

that the bishop was laid to rest on the necropolis of Proconsul Macrobius Candidianus by Via Mappaliensis. Augustine wrote in his *Confessiones* that his mother Monica retreated to Cyprian's *memoria* by the coast, close to where the ship he boarded for Italy lay anchored (Fig. 2).[7]

Clearly, the burial of the respective martyrs – be they lay people or bishop – motivated the construction of large and significant churches whose physical presence attracted further burials and endowed festivities, such as those held on feast days, with more meaning than mere spiritual affinity could accomplish. Augustine preached in each of the three basilicas on their "birthdays", that is, their respective execution dates.[8] A vigil was held the evening before the Eucharist celebration, and the scripture readings and psalm were selected to suit the specific day.[9] These were followed by an account of the martyrdom, and then the sermon. The North African liturgy here departed from the

7 Cypr. rec. 5; Aug. conf. 5,8,15; cf. Vict. Vit. 1,5,16; Proc. Vand. 1,21,17.

8 So for example in the *basilica Maiorum*: Aug. serm. 25 A, 16 A, 294, 165; and in the *basilica Fausti*: Aug. serm. 101, 23, 134, 261.

9 For this CUBELIC/LOUGOVAYA/QUACK, Rezitieren, Vorlesen und Singen; LEATHERBURY, Inscribing Faith in Late Antiquity.

standard practice of other traditions, such as the Roman, which forbade any readings of martyr accounts: by order of the councils of *Hippo Regius* and Carthage from 393 and 397 AD, they were permitted in this region on saints' feast days.[10] The performative framework doubtless colored the liturgy's interpretation, but the readings had a strong effect on the congregations, as Augustine relates in the case of Perpetua and Felicitas' *passio*.[11] Augustine was well aware of the *meliora spectacula*'s dramatic potential and also knew what they were competing against: if the Church prevented Christians from attending the theatre it needed to offer something even more attractive. Miracles were heavenly *spectacula*, so Augustine made the following rather crude comparison: "Forget your theatre, wait for our Peter, not walking on a tightrope, but, as I shall tell you, walking on the water."[12] The celebration of the Eucharist shifted the focus of martyr commemorations into the service and thus guaranteed that "each re-telling of the martyr's story (re)enacted the martyr's victory, the victory of the Church,"[13] as well as crafted a counterweight to the excessively celebrated funeral banquets[14] that attracted so much of the Church father's ire: "The martyrs hate your jugs, the martyrs hate your frying pans, the martyrs hate your drunken debauchery."[15]

That the making of saints was a difficult but ultimately successful endeavour can be seen by the fact that the cult of Perpetua and Felicitas came to be celebrated in the rest of the Western Mediterranean: the Roman chronograph – an illustrated collection of pagan and Christian calendars containing lists with a *depositio martyrum* – marks the 7th of March 354, with the phrase *Perpetuae et Felicitatis. Africae*.[16] The Ravenna Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuova and the Cappella Arcivescovile feature images of both martyrs,[17] and a 4th-century sarcophagus on the Iberian Peninsula (Burgos) depicts one of Perpetua's visions, in which she and the presbyter Saturus approach the ladder to heaven.[18] A decisive factor for the pair's popularity would have been the fact that they were women: "What, after all, could be more glorious than these women, whom men can more easily admire than imitate?"[19] Cyprian, too, is recorded in the Roman chronograph for 354 – the entry for September 14 reads *Cypriani Africae. Romae cel-*

10 8th October 393, *Concilium Hipponense* 36; 28th August 397, *Concilium Carthaginense* 46: *Liceat etiam legi passiones martyrum, cum anniversarii dies eorum celebrantur*.
11 Aug. serm. 280–282; for this ELM VON DER OSTEN, *Perpetua Felicitas*.
12 Aug. in psalm. 39,9: *Obliuiscere theatrum tuum, adtende Petrum nostrum, non funambulum, sed, ut ita dicam, mariambulum*, ed. DULAEY, p. 240.
13 GRIG, Making Martyrs, p. 4.
14 DENZEY LEWIS, Food for the Body.
15 Aug. serm. 273: *Oderunt martyres lagenas vestras, oderunt martyres sartagines vestras, oderunt martyres ebrietates vestras*.
16 Chronogr. a. CCCLIII, XII: *Feriale Ecclesiae Romanae*, p. 71.
17 DEICHMANN, Ravenna, fig. 130 and 239.
18 BÜCHSENSCHÜTZ, Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage, pp. 149–150 with fig. 8 and 9.
19 Aug. serm. 280,1: *Quid enim gloriosius his feminis, quas viri mirantur facilius, quam imitantur?*

ebratur in Callisti.[20] As the *depositio martyrum* was a calendar of martyrs' feast days along with details about their respective burial sites, it logically listed martyrs of Rome and the surrounding regions. Cyprian is, alongside Perpetua and Felicitas, an exception, and his entry additionally gives the site of his celebrations: the catacomb named after Callistus (Calixtus) along the Via Appia, whose origins stretch back to Rome's first Christian necropolis, erected by Bishop Zephyrinus around 200 AD and serving as the burial site of most 3rd-century bishops.[21] Sixtus II, Fabianus, and Pontianus are also listed for this location – those in Rome apparently commemorated Cyprian at the same place they commemorated the Roman bishops. This is all the more astonishing as his relationship with his colleagues had not exactly been free of tension. His altercations with Stephanus of Rome during the so-called rebaptism controversy – in which the Roman bishop argued that the *lapsi* should be readmitted on the condition that they do penance, whereas the North African insisted that they would need to be rebaptised[22] – were also strongly shaped by their diverging understandings of the episcopal office: Cyprian believed in the existance of a horizontal order of equal bishops who owed an account of how they administrated their duties only to God. No bishop, accordingly, had the right to give another bishop orders.[23] Stephanus, meanwhile, had demanded that his fellow bishops recognize him as *primus inter pares*. Unlike Victor, who during the "Easter controversy" had claimed precedence by referring to the Apostles, Stephanus – who saw himself as the *cathedra Petri*'s legitimate heir – claimed authority through the *primatus Petri*. Yet this unambiguous formulation of his claim within the ecumenical world was not originally his own: it was Cyprian, in fact, who in the course of his arguments had placed the "rock on which I will build my Church" phrasing in relation to Rome (Mt 16, 18–19) and thus made the Roman bishop's reference to Petrus possible in the first place.[24] Indeed, the ever-increasing confrontation between Rome and Carthage at this moment gave the impression that the outcome remained essentially up in the air, suggesting that the papacy's emergence was not inevitable.[25] This was, however, a brief window of opportunity, as Stephen only held office from mid-May 254 to early August 257. After his death, the mediation efforts of Dionysius of Alexandria proved successful, while the martyrdoms of his successor Sixtus II

20 Chronogr. a. CCCLIII, XII: *Feriale Ecclesiae Romanae*, p. 72.

21 For this BAUMEISTER, Martyrium, Hagiographie und Heiligenverehrung, pp. 293–304.

22 For this HALL, Stephen I of Rome; SEBASTIAN, "*… baptisma unum in sancta ecclesia …*"; SCHIMA, *Caput occidentis*?

23 Cypr. epist. 66,8,2–3.

24 Cypr. un. eccl. 4,9–32. For this MONTGOMERY, Subordination or Collegiality?; and the appropriate comparison of CASPAR, Geschichte des Papsttums, p. 79: "(…) so gleicht er dem Goetheschen Zauberlehrling, der die Geister, die er rief, nicht mehr los wird. Cyprian hat mit dem Zauberwort 'Kathedra Petri' die Idee des römischen Primats über die gesamte Kirche entfesselt. Er hat auch jene Zauberlehrlingstragik an sich selbst erfahren."

25 PANZRAM, *Ille ecclesiae fundamentum*; see also BLAUDEAU, Le Siège de Rome et l'Orient (448–536).

and of Cyprian himself in the course of Valerian's Christian persecutions led to a normalization of relations between the churches. Research has therefore interpreted the commemoration of Cyprian *in Callisti* in the context of the roughly simultaneous martyrdoms of the two bishops of the City of Rome and Carthage, and classed it as a sign of resumed ecclesial communion.[26] Alternatively, it has been postulated that Carthaginian immigrants made the cult so popular in Rome that the makers of the list were forced to include it.[27] However, if one assumes that the *Depositio martyrum* originated during the episcopate of Fabianus, i. e., in the middle of the 3rd century when Rome's Church began to organize itself internally and construct an official, unified image of the past,[28] then the entry was an intentional act with a (church-)political function.

Cyprian had set in motion the institutionalization of the bishop of Carthage's primacy over the whole territory of North Africa, a process that among other things fuelled the Donatist controversy about readmitting *lapsi* that broke out after persecutions ended, in which the moderate Caecilianus[29] found himself challenged by the implacable Donatus, who argued that those who had lapsed should be categorically excluded from the ecclesiastical community.[30] It wasn't until a century or so later, at the synode of 411, that Augustine and Aurelius of Carthage put an end to the conflict, ruling in favour of Caecilianus's supporters. A primate like Aurelius, who held office for a good 40 years,[31] was authorized to disclose the Easter date; he convened and presided over the general councils and had the right to visit all ecclesiastical provinces etc.[32]

Perhaps it is going too far to say that the monumental program of church construction of the 4th century, which led to the erection of 24 houses of worship, was initiated and financed in *reaction* to Rome's own construction program – but it was certainly with *knowledge* of what was happening there. Rome spent these decades building three martyrs' basilicas: Old St. Peter in the city's north-western region, covering 123 m × 66 m and five naves with the memorial construction integrated into the basilica's curving apse;[33] Basilica Apostolorum by the Via Appia, an ambulatory basilica of 73 m × 30 m, constructed over (and therefore blocking) Petrus and Paulus's modest memorial site; and finally San Paolo fuori le mura. This simple hall of 17 m × 12 m integrated the Paulus *memoria* into its construction, which after lay along its curving apse. Constantine is generally credited with having launched the program, but in Carthage it were most

26 For this BAUMEISTER, Martyrium, Hagiographie und Heiligenverehrung, pp. 297–299.
27 So, for example, RÜPKE, Zeit und Fest, p. 78.
28 SALZMAN, On Roman Time, pp. 42–47.
29 PCBE 1, s. v. Caecilianus 1, pp. 165–175.
30 PCBE 1, s. v. Donatus 5, pp. 292–303.
31 PCBE 1, s. v. Aurelius 1, pp. 105–127.
32 For this ECK, Der Episkopat im spätantiken Africa; BURNS/JENSEN, Christianity in Roman Africa, 363–439; LASSÈRE, *Africa, quasi Roma*, pp. 349–365; 515–525; 545–635.
33 KRAUTHEIMER/CORBETT/FRAZER, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae*, pp. 5:114–138; 5:153–167; 5:246–273; BRANDENBURG, Die frühchristlichen Kirchen Roms, 63–69; 91–102; 114–130.

likely members of the local and regional elite who financially contributed to making the Church's leadership claim architecturally manifest. The city traditionally drew its vast financial resources from the *pertica* region. The expansion of this complex territorial organization is difficult to measure, but over 80 *pagi* were fiscally bound to Carthage in the 2nd century, and the olive oil and wheat trades were booming.[34] This surrounding region's economic power – rooted in export-oriented, intense agriculture – and the "African clan's" integration into both the state-organized and autonomous trade networks of the respective governmental system allowed it to finance a "construction boom" with a structurally comparable "*gigantisme carthaginois*", such as the approximately 300 ha city layout of the imperial period. In fact, the hill of Byrsa's forum, to name just one example, came to 30,300 m² and was thus one-and-a-half times larger than Rome's Caesar and Augustus fora put together![35] Members of the wealthy elite acted across the empire – represented within the networks protecting their economic interests, as well as personally in Rome in the innermost circle of Roman power. That Rome included Cyprian, the first bishop to face martyrdom in Africa, in its *Depositio martyrum* is thus to be understood less as "hospitality towards foreign cults" and more as a political act; similarly, the introduction into North Africa of *memoria Apostolorum*, that is, of Petrus and Paulus, considered founders of the Church in Rome and "pillars of discipline", was not just an expression of loyalty to the Catholic Church, but a clear opposition to the Arian one.[36]

The Vandals who conquered Carthage in 439 and made it their kingdom's capital clearly recognized and respected the potential of institutionalized veneration of the saints, as Geiserich began his reign by confiscating the large martyrs' churches for the Arian Church.[37] Granted, the Vandals did not alter or add to the originals – and it remains unclear how the confessional change impacted the congregations – but the king surely set store in the symbolic and representative value of laying claim to the basilicas north of Carthage, with all their prestigious martyrs' cults, as well as their furnishings, financial resources, and landholdings. *Byzantium*, however, which conquered North Africa in 533 under Belisarius, was a master at using "symbolic capital" for its own purposes in Bourdieu's sense[38]: the monumental church building program in *Carthago Iustiniana*, the capital of the Byzantine prefecture in Africa, not only testified to the victory of imperial orthodoxy, but also confirmed the Church's claim to leadership. In addition to the already existing cults of local martyrs, as well as those widely known outside the region, such as St Stephen, the veneration of Mary took root; pilgrimage shrines and monasteries were erected and almost all churches were extensively altered,

34 AOUNALLAH, La pertica des Carthaginois; see also HOBSON, The North African Boom.
35 GROS, Le culte impérial; HURLET, L'image du pouvoir impérial.
36 For this FREND, From Donatist Opposition to Byzantine Loyalism.
37 Vict. Vit. 1,9.
38 BOURDIEU, Sozialer Sinn, respectively ID., Die feinen Unterschiede.

Fig. 3 The Damous el Karita martyrs' and cemetery basilica; the Mâlik ibn Anas mosque in the background

the builders sometimes incorporating Eastern elements in the liturgical architecture. Damous el Karita (Fig. 3) was given a cruciform interior and expanded into an eleven-nave basilica.[39] The realignment of the liturgical apse created a new axis that connected the semi-circular atrium with its burials to a new memorial building, an underground rotunda. In the center of the high, column-supported room, with its mystical lighting, a shrine may have rested – perhaps for the relics of Julian of Antioch, which were transported to Carthage in the early Byzantine period, or perhaps the new leadership sought to give the veneration of the Scillitani a new form.[40] In any case, the basilica complex was significantly enhanced by the addition of the rotunda, which offered its visitors an emotionally charged experience of the saint(s) (Fig. 4).

In comparison to this architecturally stellar feat, other construction measures appear comparatively humble. Take those adopted in Mcidfa, where builders added a crypt designated as a *confessio* and restructured the central nave with a row of columns;

39 For this DOLENZ, Damous-el-Karita, 41–104.
40 BOCKMANN, Märtyrer Karthagos, 364–367.

Fig. 4 The new memorial building added to the Basilica of Damous el Karita in Byzantine times: an underground rotunda, in the centre of which a reliquary may have been located

the crypt apparently held the remains of Perpetua's group of martyrs, as inscriptions attest.[41] Visitors will have had limited access, only able to come into direct contact with the martyrs through a *fenestella confessionis*. By transferring the necropolis into the church as well as architecturally framing the relics, the authorities gained control over them – excessive ceremonies in the necropolises were no longer needed. The clergy was obviously actively attempting to restrict and regulate the veneration of the saints. Epigraphic monuments and murals indicate the increasing veneration of Saturus, a presbyter himself and the only clergyman whose vision of the *passio* was appended. Even in Carthage, the prominence and popularity of Perpetua and Felicitas led to their suppression by the clergy: their feast day no longer feature in the 6th-century calendar of martyrs.

The aim of this volume is therefore to show how architectural staging and storytelling promoted the making of the saints, because, as Kate Cooper has so aptly put it, we must understand the Late Antique martyr cult "in agonistic terms."[42]

Current State of Research

On March 7, 1895, Cardinal Barthélemy Clément Combes, Archbishop of Carthage, in his capacity as Primate of Africa, consecrated an underground chapel in the amphitheater to commemorate the anniversary of Perpetua and Felicitas's deaths in 203 AD (Fig. 5).[43]

The discovery of a vault under the arena in 1881 had given his predecessor Charles Martial Lavigerie the opportunity to create a chapel, soon furnished with archaeological finds such as tomb slabs. In 1903, the chapel was expanded and fitted with a memorial plaque, and a massive stone cross adorned the ceiling. Every year on March 7, the clergy would undertake a pilgrimage, which was soon supplemented by a "fête populaire". In 1909, the Vatican canonized Perpetua and Felicitas and officially recognized the once-local cult. The site had thus become a decidedly Christian place of remembrance, a "lieux de memoire". Alfred Louis Delattre, a Catholic priest of the *Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique* and an archaeologist, enthusiastically wrote: "[Carthage] has fallen; but it has risen again. The voice of Cardinal Lavigerie has called it from its grave. Carthage is no longer pagan; … Carthage is Christian!"[44] The cardinal had founded the missionary society *Pères blancs*; in 1884, only three years before Tunisia became a French protectorate, he had managed once again to make Carthage the seat of the most important spiritual officeholder in all of Africa. On May 15, 1890 – the Day of the

41 BOCKMANN, Märtyrer Karthagos, 368–369; cf. ENNABLI, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, vol. 2: Mcidfa, no. 2/p. 36.
42 COOPER, The Martyr, the *matrona* and the Bishop, p. 298.
43 For this and the following JANSEN, Karthago und die Pères Blancs.
44 DELATTRE, L'Amphithéâtre de Carthage, pp. 11.