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Res Gestae. Czasopismo Historyczne 5, 35-45

2017

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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African Authors in the East in the Times of Justinian: Their Works and Sources¹

Abstract: The paper deals with four sixth century authors who were of African origin, but whose works are our major sources of information for the history of the Christological controversies of the sixth century in the East. The works of Facundus of Hermiane and Liberatus of Carthage are of particular relevance here; both of them spent some time in the East, where they gathered material for their work. The chronicle of Victor of Tunnuna is also very important, as it follows the text of Theodore Lector exactly for the period when Theodore was an autonomous writer, not depending on Socrates, Sozomenos and Theodoretus. Some attention is also given to Junillus Africanus, who wrote his exegetical treatise in Constantinople.

Key words: Three Chapters controversy, Facundus of Hermiane, Liberatus of Carthage, Victor of Tunnuna, Junillus, Justinian

When we speak about the Christian literature in Africa, what probably comes to mind firstly are the very exordia of the Latin Christian literature: the acts of the martyrs, the works of Tertullian and Cyprian and then the gigantesque corpus of the works of Augustine. The bishop of Hippo is such a towering figure that he overshadows all that came afterwards. Particularly forgotten are the works of the sixth-century African authors, from which we still have many preserved texts.

Until the end of the fifth century, African Christian literature was rather insular and not very interested in the great theological debates in the East. So were also the historical works: the history of Victor of Vita is concerned only

¹ The author of this article was supported by grants from the Polish National Science Centre: 2013/10/E/HS3/00202 and 2015/19/D/HS3/00626.

with events taking place in Africa; Orosius, on the other hand, with his universal history, cannot be considered as an exclusively African author. This insularity changed in the sixth century when the African authors got more involved in Eastern controversies. We can already see it in the writings of Fulgentius of Ruspe, who was consulted in 523 by the Scythian monks.²

The activity of Fulgentius happened while Africa was still under Vandal rule. The reconquest of Africa by Belisarius in 533/534 was expected to bring peace and stability for the Catholics of there, however, the efforts of the Emperor Justinian to find some kind of accommodation with the anti-Chalcedonian opposition in the East lead to the Three Chapters quarrel, in which many Africans found themselves engaged; at the same time continuous warfare against the Moors raged in Africa, showing that the promised peace was still a faraway hope and the Empire was unable to guarantee stability in the African provinces.³ Three African clerics, Facundus, Liberatus, and Victor of Tunnuna, wrote works at that time which focus rather on Eastern than Western issues (certainly the first two of them, Victor partly) and all three have something in common that differs them from Augustine, Fulgentius and Ferrandus: they spent at least some part of their life in the East, albeit not always voluntarily.⁴

Facundus of Hermiane

Facundus was the bishop of Hermiane, an unknown place probably in Byzacena. For reasons unknown to us he came to Constantinple before the end of 547, where in winter 547/548 he was one of 70 Western bishops gathered in the capital at a meeting, the character of which is unknown to us.⁵ Facundus must have been a very skilled theologian at the time because he boasted about having prepared a written résumé in defence of the Three Chapters in seven days.⁶ This résumé must have been the basis for his later work, the “Defence of the Three Chapters”, also known as “To Justinian”. This work is not historical but theological, nevertheless history plays a big part in it; it is quite natural as the dispute about the Three Chapters was in fact a dispute about history, about people who were no longer alive. In fact, the “Defence of the Three Chapters” is the best account of the history of the controversy that we have, especially books V and VI which very carefully follow the events that took place at the council of Chalcedon, to prove that Ibas of Edessa was acquitted there after a thorough investigation of his orthodoxy.

Facundus uses a lot of the Bible firstly. Then, he cites the correspondence of the main protagonists of the Christological controversies, especially the authors of the Three Chapters but also of Justinian, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, John of Antioch, Proclus, John Chryostomus, Augustine, Hilarius of

² *Epistula scytharum monachorum ad episcopos* (CCL 85A, 157–172 = CCL 91A, 551–562).

³ S. Adamiak, 2016, p. 23–36.

⁴ For the survey of using deportations and exiles in the sixth century see J. Hillner, 2013.

⁵ Facundus, *Ad Iust.*, praef., 1; *Contr. Moc.*, 36.

⁶ Facundus, *Ad Iust.*, praef., 3.

Poitiers, Jerome, Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and Isidore of Pelusium.⁷ He took many of these texts from the acts of councils, especially of Ephesus and Chalcedon. However, the texts given by Facundus differ from those found in the Latin collections, which means that he translated them from Greek himself, probably having the possibility to copy them during his stay in Constantinople.⁸ There are texts, for example the letter of Peter of Alexandria to the exiled clergy⁹ or the Letter 90 of Emperor Julian,¹⁰ that survived only thanks to its Latin translation being inserted by Facundus in his work.¹¹

The stay of Facundus in Constantinople was not very long and one has to marvel at the vast knowledge of Facundus which he displays when dealing with the events that took place far away from his native Africa. It would be interesting to know how he got to know all of this, having presumably spent his youth under Vandal rule, although we cannot exclude that he might have travelled to study in some other places. If he had studied in Africa, it would suggest the existence of an extensive library there. On the other hand, Facundus must have had a good memory: his work “Contra Mocianum” was written whilst in hiding, probably in 552, when the imperial administration intervened heavy-handedly in African ecclesiastical affairs, trying to coerce the Africans into accepting the decisions of Justinian. It is hardly possible that Facundus had many manuscripts with him in his hiding place but he was still able to produce a work that was coherent and full of erudition.¹² It only proves the opinion of Philippe Blaudeau that the clerics from Africa had good theological and linguistic preparation, as opposed to the Roman ones.¹³

Liberatus

The “Breviarium causae nestorianorum et eutychianorum” of Liberatus remains one of the main sources of the history of the Monophysite controversy. The *terminus post quem* of its composition is AD 555, because the death of Vigilius is mentioned in it¹⁴ and the *terminus ante quem* is AD 566, as Theodosius of Alexandria is mentioned as still living.¹⁵ Filippo Carcione in his introduction to the Italian translation of “Breviarium” argues for an even earlier date, hypothesising that the last chapter of the work was added by someone else after the death of Liberatus¹⁶ but it does not go well with the fact that the Latin “Historia Tripartita”, used by Liberatus, was written after the establishment of

⁷ See A. Fraïsse-Bétoulières, 2002, p. 86.

⁸ A. Fraïsse-Bétoulières, 2002, p. 86–92.

⁹ Facundus, *Ad Iust.*, IV, 2, 14.

¹⁰ Facundus, *Ad Iust.*, IV, 2, 61–64.

¹¹ For other examples see A. Solignac, 2005, p. 366–367.

¹² A. Solignac, 2005, p. 359.

¹³ P. Blaudeau, 2010, p. 550.

¹⁴ Liberatus, *Brev.*, 22.

¹⁵ Liberatus, *Brev.*, 20.

¹⁶ F. Carcione, 1989, p. 28–32.

the community in Vivarium by Cassiodorus, that is after 555. Therefore the year 560 is often given as the earliest possible date of this work.¹⁷

The author of “Breviarium” was the deacon of the Church of Carthage. He is described in the incipit of his work as “archdeacon of the sixth region of Carthage”, but it is hardly reliable, as this is the only instance where this Roman nomenclature is applied to African clergy. The division of Carthage into ecclesiastical regions is known already in Augustine’s times.¹⁸ His bishop Reparatus trusted him and sent him on a mission to Rome in 534/5.¹⁹ Liberatus probably accompanied his bishop to Constantinople in 551. At some point in his life, Liberatus must have travelled more and he certainly spent some time in Alexandria because he mentions it in the first sentence of his history when he declares that he collected his information from the “ecclesiastical history recently translated from Greek into Latin, from the synodal acts, the letters of the fathers, adding to it the Greek writings he read in Alexandria and what he learnt from the faithful narration of serious people”.²⁰

These are five different sources. The first of them, the “ecclesiastical history” mentioned here, must be the “Historia Tripartita”, based on the works of earlier Greek ecclesiastical historians: Socrates, Sozomenos, and Theodoret. It has been transmitted among the works of Cassiodorus, who admits that he was using the translation from Greek made by a guest of his community in Vivarium, Epiphanius. Epiphanius was probably not using the original texts of the three earlier authors but the roughly contemporary history of Theodor Lector. Liberatus sometimes cites the history of Cassiodorus verbally, sometimes he summarizes it and sometimes he inserts passages of an unknown origin. He knows another version of “Historia Tripartita”, presumably a version of Socrates.²¹ When he cites the chronicle of Prosperus, he wrongly attributes it to Lucentius.²²

Later, when Liberatus mentions the synodal acts and the letters of the fathers, we do not know what he refers to exactly and whether these sources were in Latin, or in Greek. We can trace the references to them in his work, which seem to suggest that Liberatus was using the Greek version of the acts of Chalcedon and that he himself translated them into Latin, or alternatively, he was using a Latin translation that has not survived to our time. At one point Liberatus mentions that he got in Alexandria the Latin translation of the acts of Ephesus II, read at Chalcedon.²³ However, neither the acts of Chalcedon themselves, nor *Tomus ad Flavianum* are cited by Liberatus.²⁴ Thanks to Lib-

¹⁷ Eg. M. Simonetti, 2007, col. 2822.

¹⁸ V.H. Drecoll, 2010, p. 15–16.

¹⁹ *Collectio Avellana*, 85, 5; 87, 3.

²⁰ Liberatus, *Brev.*, 1: “ex ecclesiastica historia nuper de Graeco in Latinum translata et ex gestis synodalibus vel sanctorum patrum epistulis hoc breviarium collegi, nectens temporum illa quae in Graeco Alexandriae scripto accepi vel gravissimorum hominum didici narratione fidei”.

²¹ For an exact analysis see V.H. Drecoll, 2010.

²² Liberatus, *Brev.*, 2.

²³ Liberatus, *Brev.*, 12.

²⁴ M. Wallraff, 2010, p. 60–73.

eratus we have only got the Latin version of *Henotikon*.²⁵ Among other documents cited by Liberatus are: the letters of Cyril to Nestorius, Eulogius, Acacius of Melitene, Valerian of Iconium, the letters of Nestorius, Celestine I, John of Antioch, and Emperor Theodosius II.

The fourth and fifth kind of sources mentioned by Liberatus (“the Greek writings he read in Alexandria and what he learnt from the faithful narration of serious people”) are most interesting to us because they show us his knowledge of Greek and his personal experience, especially from travelling to Alexandria. We do not know who “the serious men” from whose knowledge he profited were, but certainly they must have been Greek. It is hardly possible that someone in North Africa would have been so well acquainted with the vicissitudes of the Christological controversies. Liberatus follows also the anonymous “Gesta de nomine Acaci” [CPL 1670].

We do not know whether Liberatus found himself in Egypt of his own will or whether he was constrained to go there. After the imperial crackdown on the opposition of the African clerics in 552, some bishops were imprisoned and eventually deported to the East.²⁶ We will discuss it in the paragraph consecrated to Victor of Tunnuna, who was one of the exiles. He mentions only the names of the bishops but it is very possible that some lower clergy went with them, especially such an outspoken defender of the Three Chapters as Liberatus. He himself stated at the beginning of his work that he was tired “by many peregrinations”; it is usually interpreted as the proof of his exile.²⁷ It is also very probable that Liberatus followed his bishop Reparatus to Constantinople and later to Euchaita in Pontus where Reparatus died in 563. He would probably be free to travel later because the reinstatement into the Church of Carthage run by Primosus, would have been difficult.²⁸ The fact that Victor of Tunnuna is apparently not aware of the work of Liberatus may be treated as a hint that Liberatus did not remain in Constantinople after 563 since, if he did, Victor would have probably (but not necessarily) got to know him.

The text of Liberatus can also show us the narration applied by those in Egypt who tried to follow the decisions not only of Ephesus but also of Chalcedon, still very careful to present Cyril of Alexandria in the best way possible, as the true champion of orthodoxy (in opposition to those who later used his authority); a difficult tactic for a defender of the Three Chapters, one of which was the letter of Ibas of Edessa to Mari, very openly criticising Cyril.

Liberatus states explicitly the goal of his work in its opening sentences: he wants to explain to his compatriots, to those who do not know Greek and do not know well what the Eastern controversies are about. This is also why he calls his work “Breviarium”. Even if we are not sure whether the full title, as transmitted in the manuscripts, come from Liberatus himself,²⁹ Liberatus uses

²⁵ Liberatus, *Brev.*, 17.

²⁶ S. Adamiak, 2016, p. 76–80.

²⁷ Liberatus, *Brev.*, 1: “peregrinationis necessitatibus defatigatus”. F. Carcione, 1989, p. 17–18, thinks that Liberatus refers to his study trips here.

²⁸ P. Blaudeau, 2010, p. 544.

²⁹ H.C. Brennecke, 2010, p. 75.

the word “Breviarium” in the first sentence of his work. It had never before been applied to the ecclesiastical history. There existed “breviaria” (or in Greek “epitomai”) of secular history, especially popular at the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century, written by authors such as Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and Festus (all of them pagan!). They were probably meant to provide the new court and military elite the ability to learn quickly about Roman history.³⁰ In the ecclesiastical sphere, the word “breviarium” was used for collections of the canons of councils. The first example of “breviarium” is the “Breviarium Hipponense”, composed by the bishops of Byzacena who arrived for the council of Carthage in 397 and edited the canons which had been accepted at the council of Hippo four years earlier.³¹ Already during the lifetime of Liberatus, his fellow deacon Ferrandus composed “Breviatio canonum”, including 232 canons, many of them only from the oriental councils.³²

The breviary of Liberatus is concentrated strictly on ecclesiastical issues but it is similar to the “civil” breviaries in its ambition to present complicated issues in an easy way to the otherwise unprepared reader. Liberatus made some errors: for example, he put the beginning of the pontificate of Maximianus in Constantinople at the wrong time.³³ He probably knew Facundus, although when they cite the same documents (e.g. the letters of Proclus to John of Antioch), there are differences which show that they were not dependent on each other.³⁴

The work of Liberatus was aimed at defending the Three Chapters³⁵ and was read as such. However, the greater part of it dealt with the controversies before the Three Chapters quarrel and it presented the strictly Chalcedonian point of view. Therefore it is no wonder that the “Breviary” of Libaretus was transmitted in the Chalcedonian collection of the texts known as *Collectio Sangermanensis*. Similarly, Facundus was transmitted with the Latin version of the acts of Chalcedon, and Victor of Tunnuna with the Chronicle of Isidore, that is with the texts considered as absolutely orthodox, also from the point of view of the supporters of the condemnation of the Three Chapters.³⁶ It may well be that only in this way their survival to our times was assured.

Victor of Tunnuna

Victor was a bishop of Tunnuna (spelled also as Tonnona or in some other ways³⁷) and was amongst the most staunch opponents of the condemnation of the Three Chapters. He left a chronicle which is for its earlier period a repetition of the Eastern sources and for the last part an original source for the development of the Three Chapters controversy in Africa. Victor himself

³⁰ See M. Wiśniowski, 1985, p. 17.

³¹ CCL 149, 23–53.

³² See P. Blaudeau, 2015, p. 74.

³³ V.H. Drecoll, 2010, p. 30.

³⁴ F. Carcione, 1989, p. 27.

³⁵ Despite the claims of M. Meier, 2010.

³⁶ R.A. Markus, C. Sotinel, 2007, p. 9.

³⁷ In various manuscripts: *Tunnensis*, *Tunnonensis*, *Tuniensis*, *Tunnuriensis*.

was one of its protagonists, and was among the bishops exiled by Justinian, who have already been mentioned above. It is obvious that he finished his chronicle while already in exile but we cannot say for sure when he started it. The only information we have about the life of Victor comes from his chronicle, the only part added by Isidore of Sevilla is that Victor died in exile.³⁸

Victor was exiled firstly to the Balearic Isles, then to the places close to Carthage: the monastery of Mandracum and the *Aegimuritana* island (today Zembra), and finally Alexandria.³⁹ In 564 he was convoked with another African bishop to Constantinople to discuss their theological views in front of Justinian again. The Africans persisted in their defence of the Three Chapters and were confined in the monasteries of the capital. Since Isidore says that Victor died in exile, it must have happened during the following year, before the death of Justinian and the decision of his successor, Justin II, to allow all the religious exile to return (unless Victor was already too frail to travel to Africa and died in Constantinople). This was argued by Antonio Placanica, however, Carmen Cardelle de Hartmann thinks rather that the second possibility (the death of Victor in Constantinople under Justin II) is true, showing that some passages of the chronicle point at its edition between 568⁴⁰ and 575.⁴¹

The existing text of the chronicle starts in the year 444, taking over more or less when the Prosper of Aquitaine ended. It is also stated in the first sentence of the chronicle, as we have it: "Huc usque Prosper uir religiosus ordinem precedentium digessit annorum cui et nos ista subiecimus".⁴² However, Isidore of Sevilla writes that the chronicle of Victor started with the beginning of the world.⁴³ Marc Reydellet thinks that it is because Isidore did not distinguish between Victor and Prosper⁴⁴. However, it is rather more possible that Victor indeed started his chronicle from the beginning of the world, making an epitome of the works of Jerome and Prosper but a compiler of the *Complutense* manuscript (the oldest surviving) substituted this part with the original text of Prosper.⁴⁵

Victor used Theodore Lector exactly for the period when Theodore was an autonomous writer, not depending on Socrates, Sozomenos and Theodoretus, that is between 439 and 518. For the later period, Victor gathered the information himself, which explains the shift in weight from occidental to oriental sources. Although Victor's special interest lay in the events of his lifetime, particularly in Africa, he understood very well the need to present them in

³⁸ Isidore, *De vir. ill.*, 25.

³⁹ Vict. Tunn., *Chron.*, 153.

⁴⁰ Vict. Tunn., *Chron.*, 126, where the first consulate of Justin II is mentioned.

⁴¹ Vict. Tunn., *Chron.*, 167, where eleven years of the pontificate of Pelagius I are mentioned.

⁴² Vict. Tunn., *Chron.*, praem.

⁴³ Isidore, *De vir. ill.*, 25.

⁴⁴ M. Reydellet, 1970, 369.

⁴⁵ C. Cardelle de Hartmann, 2001, p. 102*–106*. This is indicated by Victor stating that he made reference to Evagrius before (Vict. Tunn., *Chron.*, 170; Evagrius was not mentioned either by the *Chronicle* of Jerome, nor by Prosper); then, there are no traces of any codex in which the epitome of Jerome and Prosper would be attributed to Victor (which would justify the error of Isidore, according to Reydellet).

a broader context, both chronologically and geographically. Therefore, the chronicle of Victor has an ambition to be a universal history. He writes both about the events from the life of the church and from general history. In the part where he is dependent on Theodore, those aspects of course become intertwined and the attitude towards the Council of Chalcedon seems to be the most important part of imperial politics. Victor also took from Theodore the descriptions of supernatural events, such as the disappearance of water from the baptismal font prior to the Arian baptism⁴⁶ and the capture of the castle Zundabar, defended by demons, by the Persian king Kavades supported by the prayers of Christian priests.⁴⁷

Victor dates the events according to the consuls, so he probably had access to a consular list. Antonio Placanica thinks that he had access to some official acts.⁴⁸ Victor and Liberatus seem independent, their only point of encounter is on Vigilius but the details of his history are accounted in a different way by two authors. Victor may have used chapter 13 of "Contra Mociantum" for his chapters 57 and 104.⁴⁹ The chronicle of Victor was continued by John of Biclar, and Victor was not cited by the later Byzantine sources.

Junillus

Junillus Africanus was the *Quaestor Sacrii Palatii* from the death of Tribonian in 542 to 549.⁵⁰ During his period in office he wrote the *Instituta Regularia Divinae Legis*. It was a treatise on a biblical exegesis, written in the form of a dialogue between master and student. In many manuscripts the teacher is indicated by the Greek letter D (for *didaskalos*) and the student by M (for *mathētēs*), in some parts it is reversed, taking the Latin names (*Magister and Discipulus*).⁵¹ This "FAQ" format comes from the Greek and Classical model and not from Christian Syriac literature. It was used for the first time in Philo of Alexandria's "Questions on Genesis" and "Questions on Exodus", which survived only in the Armenian translation, later was used by Ambrosiaster, Jerome, Augustine, Eusebius of Caesarea, Basil of Caesarea, Eusebius of Emessa, Theodoret of Cyrhus, Hesychius of Jerusalem, Maximus the Confessor, Anastasius the Sinaite – but nowhere in the Syriac models.⁵²

We would like to know much more about Junillus. Is the fact that he was African an accident? How did he manage to get to the imperial court and achieve such a high position in not even a decade from the landing of Belisarius in Africa? Where and how did he study law? Was he an émigré from the Vandal kingdom? He hardly knew any Greek.⁵³

⁴⁶ Vict. Tunn., *Chron.*, 82 = Teodore E 472.

⁴⁷ Vict. Tunn., *Chron.*, 88 = Teodore E 516.

⁴⁸ A. Placanica, 1997, p. 20.

⁴⁹ C. Cardelle de Hartmann, 2001, 113*.

⁵⁰ Proc., *Hist. Arc.*, 20, 20.

⁵¹ M. Maas 2003, p. 20; J. O'Donnell, 1979, p. 247–249.

⁵² M. Maas, 2003, p. 20–22.

⁵³ Proc., *Hist. Arc.*, 20, 17–20.

There are only two people mentioned in the *Instituta*. The first of them is Primasius, who must be identical with Primasius of Hadrumetum, an African cleric of whose literary activities we have proof. Junillus dedicated his work to Primasius but he claimed that he is mainly following the thoughts of Paul the Persian. Junillus declared that he was just transmitting the views of the School of Nisibis. The School of Nisibis, opened shortly after the council of Nicaea, flourished under Ephrem (ca. 309–373), who moved it to Edessa after the sacking of the city in 359 and its surrender to the Persians in 363. It was closed down by the Emperor Zeno in 489, moved to Nisibis again and finally fell into silence in the early seventh century after the rise of Islam.⁵⁴

Junillus admitted his dependence on “Jerome and the others”,⁵⁵ the influence of Augustine can be also noted.⁵⁶ However, Michael Maas underlined the originality of Junillus, especially in making the theology of the Mesopotamians acceptable to the Neo-Chalcedonian currents and in adding to it the legal concepts and practices familiar to him from his legal work.⁵⁷

Was the work of Junillus written in the very thick of the Three Chapters controversy? Some suggest it was written before 543, otherwise basing it on the pro-Nestorian authors would have been unacceptable for someone so pro-imperial. On the other hand, it does not touch the thorny Christological issues, but deals only with general biblical questions (type, prophecies, the relation between faith and reason and so on).

Conclusion

It is somehow an irony of history that the essentially Eastern theological controversy, the condemnation of the Three Chapters, caused the emergence of the works of the authors from the very occidental and Latin milieu. Furthermore, it also means, thanks to one of its authors, that we have many of the fragments of Theodore Lector that would not have arrived to our times otherwise. It only proves that in the times of Justinian the *oikumene*, which included Carthage, Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch, was still a living reality, in which the authors and insights could travel not only from East to West but also the other way round.

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⁵⁴ M. Maas, 2003, p. 102–103.

⁵⁵ Junillus, *Instituta*, I, 3.

⁵⁶ M. Maas, 2003, p. 19.

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