INTRODUCTION

In 416, when preaching a sermon on the psalms in late Roman Carthage, Augustine was able to ask his audience, 'Who now knows which nations in the Roman empire were what, when all have become Romans, and all are called Romans?'[1] Yet already by the time Augustine addressed his Carthaginian audience the continued unity of the Roman Mediterranean was being called into question. The defeat and death of the Roman emperor Valens at Adrianople in 378 had set the stage for a new phase of conflict between the empire and its non-Roman neighbours; and over the course of the fifth century Roman power collapsed in the West, where it was succeeded by a number of sub-Roman kingdoms. Questions that had seemed trivial to Augustine were suddenly and painfully alive: what did it mean to be 'Roman' in the changed circumstances of the fifth and later centuries? And (from a twenty-first-century perspective) what became of the idea of Romanness in the West once Roman power collapsed?

Empires can survive as identities long after they disappear as polities. This book is an examination of that process in late antique North Africa. The region lends itself to such a study above all because Romanness was contested there over the long term and between multiple groups. Roughly corresponding to the strip of modern Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and western Libya between the Mediterranean and the Sahara, Roman Africa was economically and politically one of the empire's most critical territories. Strategically located at the bottleneck between the eastern and western Mediterranean, Africa was also the breadbasket of Rome, providing through annual taxes in kind the grain, oil, and wine that fed the Eternal City, the imperial court, and the administration.[2] The

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[1] Augustine, *'Enarrationes' in psalmos* 58.1.21, ed. E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont, CCSL 38–40 (Turnhout, 1956), 39:744: 'Quis iam cognoscit gentes in imperio Romano quae quid erant, quando omnes Romani facti sunt, et omnes Romani dicuntur?' Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

[2] On the *annona* and its role in the transformation of the late Roman Mediterranean, see esp. M. McCormick, 'Bateaux de vie, bateaux de mort: maladie, commerce, transports annonaires

fate of Africa was intimately connected to that of the western Roman
empire writ large. Not surprisingly, then, in late antiquity Africa had a
troubled history of conquests and reconquests that forced North Africans
constantly to reconsider the terms in which their identities were defined.
In 406, a confederation of peoples known as the Vandals crossed the
empire's Rhineland frontier into Gaul, passing next into Spain (where
they settled for a time) and then in 429 into Africa. There they established
an autonomous kingdom which, from 439, had as its capital the storied
metropolis of Carthage.[3] Roughly one hundred years on, in 533–4, the
East Roman or Byzantine empire managed to re-establish control of
Africa, only to see their domination of the region checked in the inte-
rior by indigenous kingdoms that from an imperial point of view were
thought of as 'Moorish.'[4] Finally, in the seventh century, the armies of
Islam began a fifty-year conquest of Africa, and by *c.*700, they had ended
for ever Byzantine control of the region.[5]

In this study, I argue that the fracturing of the political unity of the
Roman empire which followed from these developments (and simi-
lar ones across the Mediterranean) also led to a fracturing of Roman
identity – above all along political, cultural, and religious lines – as indi-
viduals who continued to feel Roman but who were no longer living
under imperial rule sought to define what it was that connected them to
their fellow 'Romans' elsewhere. The multiple definitions of Romanness
this process produced could (and did) overlap and inform one another,
but they were not always mutually reinforcing. Significantly, though,
in the changed conditions of the fifth and later centuries, Romanness
was not just a question of sentiment or nostalgia; it had practical value,
which varied according to the context. Critically, late antique ideas about
Roman identity could be used in a remarkably flexible manner to foster
a sense of similarity (or difference) over space, time, ethnicity, and so
forth in a wide variety of situations and circumstances. For indeed, even
in the face of protracted political and social upheaval, both the African
elite and a succession of emperors struggled to ensure that Africa 'stay

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et le passage économique du Bas-empire au moyen âge', in *Morfologie sociali e culturali in Europa fra tarda antichità e alto Medioevo*, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo 45 (Spoleto, 1998), pp. 35–122.

[3] The classic studies are L. Schmidt, *Geschichte der Wandalen* (2nd. edn; Munich, 1942) and C. Courtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique* (Paris, 1955); the most recent, A. Merrills and R. Miles, *The Vandals* (Chichester, 2010).

[4] The most recent synthetic treatment of Byzantine Africa remains C. Diehl, *L'Afrique byzantine: histoire de la domination byzantine en Afrique (533–709)* (Paris, 1896). On the Moors, see Y. Modéran, *Les Maures et l'Afrique romaine (IVe–VIIe siècle)*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 314 (Rome, 2003).

[5] See now W. Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa* (Cambridge, 2010).

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Roman' by actively seeking to ensure the region's continued integration into the larger Mediterranean world.

The analysis that follows thus focuses heavily on the interconnectedness of Africa and the Mediterranean. Since Pirenne, questions of this sort have been intimately bound up with the broader transition from Roman antiquity to the early Middle Ages.[6] Connectedness does not in itself provide a definition of Romanness, a heavily freighted term whose meaning was constantly being redefined over time and which was in a continual process of mediation and renegotiation in different situations and contexts. But the culture that had emerged by the fifth century of the present era and which late antique North Africans (among others) thought of as 'Roman' was inherently international. One facet of its preservation in the fifth to seventh centuries was the maintenance of ties – political, personal, religious, intellectual, and economic – among regions that had once been part of the empire, but now found themselves following divergent political trajectories. It is this facet of the maintenance of Romanness that particularly interests me in this book.

1. CONCEPTUALIZING ROMANNESS

The Romanness of Roman Africa has not always been taken for granted. In his 1976 *La Résistance africaine à la romanisation*, the Algerian scholar Marcel Bénabou explored the strength of pre-Roman African traditions and the emergence of a distinctively African form of Roman civilization by arguing that the empire had encountered not only military but also cultural resistance in Africa.[7] Over thirty years on, Bénabou's ideas remain challenging.[8] The notion that Africa had never really been Romanized is also central to what are still two of the most influential books on late antique North Africa, both written as French colonial rule in the Maghrib lurched toward its eventual collapse: W. H. C. Frend's *The Donatist Church* and Christian Courtois's *Les Vandales et l'Afrique*.[9] Both

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[6] Three notable recent works to take up the challenges of H. Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (7th edn; Paris, 1937) are P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2000); M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, AD 300–900* (Cambridge, 2001); and C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford, 2005). See also, on a still wider canvas, B. Cunliffe, *Europe between the Oceans, 9000 BC–AD 1000* (New Haven, Conn., 2008).

[7] M. Bénabou, *La Résistance africaine à la romanisation* (Paris, 1976).

[8] See, e.g., G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 19–20 and G. Woolf, 'Beyond Romans and Natives', *World Archaeology* 28/3 (1997), pp. 340–1.

[9] W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford, 1952); for Courtois, see above, n. 3.

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authors believed that in Africa the empire had encountered a Berber
population that remained fundamentally unchanged by Greco-Roman
civilization. The idea of African resistance (or intransigence) poses an
obvious challenge to a study examining how Africa *stayed* Roman in late
antiquity: had Africa ever really become Roman in the first place?

J. Frank Gilliam once remarked that 'Being a Roman, like being an
American, was a matter of law, not of culture or the lack of it.'[10] Recent
analyses of Roman identity have nuanced this idea, focusing precisely
on the cultural and ethnic aspects of being Roman; but on at least
one level the statement is certainly true: cultural assimilation was not
a prerequisite of Roman citizenship.[11] By the third century of this era
most free inhabitants of the empire were Roman citizens. Moreover,
as we will see, when fifth- and sixth-century Africans thought of things
Roman, they thought for the most part of the empire itself, its history and
army, its greatest poet (Virgil), and the Latin language: the empire and
its institutions defined Romanness. Accordingly, in the minds of some,
the Romanness of a particular provincial group could be lost or gained
according to the empire's varying political and military fortunes – as
some felt had happened in Africa in the Vandal period (see Chapter 4).

It also seems to have been the case that whatever notions the Senate
and people of Rome may have had about their 'civilizing mission' in the
western Mediterranean, political control was the primary factor motivat-
ing the metropolis's relations with its conquered provinces. As often as
not, this was accomplished by working together with local elites. Again,
cultural change was not essential.[12] In an important paper, P. D. A.
Garnsey has adduced evidence of both continuity and rupture in the
African ruling class after the Roman conquest of Africa. The region
unquestionably saw immigration from Italy and elsewhere in the Roman
world. Nonetheless, in accordance with their 'traditional policy of build-
ing up a network of families, groups and communities with vested inter-
ests in the prolongation of Roman rule', Romans also rewarded local,

[10] J. F. Gilliam, 'Romanization of the Greek East: The Role of the Army', *Bulletin of the American
Society of Papyrologists* 2 (1965), p. 66.

[11] Cultural aspects of Roman identity: see, e.g., A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution*
(Cambridge, 2008); E. Dench, *Romulus' Asylum: Roman Identities from the Age of Alexander to the
Age of Hadrian* (Oxford, 2005); and Y. Syed, *Vergil's Aeneid and the Roman Self: Subject and Nation
in Literary Discourse* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2005). Citizenship: see, e.g., P. D. A. Garnsey, 'Rome's
African Empire under the Principate', in P. D. A. Garnsey and C. R. Whittaker (eds.), *Imperialism
in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 248; and, in general, Dench, *Romulus' Asylum*,
pp. 93–151 and A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (2nd edn; Oxford, 1973).

[12] See, *inter alia*, R. Laurence and J. Berry (eds.), *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*
(London, 1998), p. 3; D. J. Mattingly, 'Libyans and the "Limes": Culture and Society in Roman
Tripolitania', *Antiquités africaines* 23 (1987), p. 80; Garnsey, 'Rome's African Empire', pp. 252–4.

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African notables for their support with land and other material benefits. These benefits included access to positions in the central administration and membership in the senatorial aristocracy.[13] Indeed, D. J. Mattingly's studies of Tripolitania (western Libya) seem to indicate that there, at least, Romans preferred to leave existing power structures more or less intact as long as local elites could be persuaded to reconcile themselves to Roman authority.[14] This was probably the case throughout the frontier zone in Roman Africa, where representatives of the empire deployed much the same techniques to ensure their hegemonic dominance.[15]

Though not necessarily aggressively promoted by the Roman state, in the imperial period political control and cultural change nevertheless did go hand in hand. This process has traditionally been referred to as 'Romanization', though the word is misleading if taken to imply a unidirectional flow of culture.[16] As Greg Woolf has recently observed, 'there was no standard Roman civilization against which provincial cultures might be measured. The city of Rome was a cultural melting pot and Italy experienced similar changes to the provinces.'[17] What we seem to see instead is the acceleration of a process already under way in the third century BC whereby the economies, societies, and cultures of the disparate regions of the Mediterranean became ever more tightly interwoven: an increased circulation of people, things, and ideas, and the emergence of what can, even if only loosely, be referred to as a pan-Mediterranean set of attitudes, outlooks, beliefs, and values.

The result was a remarkably flexible cultural system that I refer to here as 'Roman', though it was deeply indebted to the Hellenic tradition, unthreatened by the survival of distinctively local customs and conventions, and easily capable of assimilating 'foreigners'. Reinforced for centuries by an intensely conservative educational system in the hands

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[13] Garnsey, 'Rome's African Empire', *passim*; the quotation is *ibid.*, p. 235.

[14] Mattingly, 'Libyans and the "Limes"', pp. 80–3. As Ramsay MacMullen has recently shown of Juba's Mauretanian kingdom, a high degree of acculturation could accompany such reconciliation: R. MacMullen, *Romanization in the Time of Augustus* (New Haven, Conn., 2000), pp. 42–9.

[15] Hegemonic dominance: D. J. Mattingly, 'War and Peace in Roman North Africa: Observations and Models of State-Tribe Interaction', in R. B. Ferguson and N. Whitehead (eds.), *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare* (Santa Fe, NM, 1992), pp. 31–60. See also D. Cherry, *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa* (Oxford, 1998).

[16] See, e.g., Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution*, esp. pp. 447–8 and for Africa, D. J. Mattingly and R. B. Hitchner, 'Roman Africa: An Archaeological Review', *JRS* 85 (1995), pp. 204–5. See also the similar debate surrounding the term 'Hellenization': e.g., G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1990), pp. 6–7.

[17] Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, p. 7.

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of grammarians,[18] Roman culture was nevertheless not static. Like all cultural systems, it was the end-product of individual people living together and in communication with one another. Cultures adapt to the new circumstances in which they find themselves as a product of the more personal adaptations of individuals. Given the vagaries of distinct personalities and characters, let alone the absorption of new populations, change is inevitable.

This was perhaps most famously the case with Roman religion. Romans were, of course, generally willing to expand their pantheon to include the gods of conquered peoples. By the fifth century of our era, however, an even more profound transformation of Roman religion had taken place as 'the Roman faith' (*fides Romana*) came to mean Nicene Christianity (see Chapter 3). But the adaptability of the Roman cultural system is visible in many different areas, from naming patterns to patterns of thought. By the sixth century AD, for example, the old Roman *tria nomina* or 'three names' had for the most part given way to the use of a single name. In the sixth century, the two most popular of these were John and Theodore, neither of them 'Roman' by, say, the standards of the second century BC. Similarly, Peter Heather has recently shown how even so profound a division in the Roman thought world as that between 'Romans' and 'barbarians' could be adapted to the new realities of the fifth century. As control over the western provinces of the Roman empire was increasingly concentrated in the hands of non-Romans (*barbari*, or 'barbarians'), the very idea of Romanness came to signify a 'willingness to work alongside the empire'.[19] However it is defined, Roman culture – like all cultures – changed over time.

Culture in general is, however, notoriously difficult to define.[20] Like ethnicity, culture seems to be something that is only ever visible in our peripheral vision; on closer examination, it has a tendency to fall apart. This results in an unavoidable degree of vagueness as to the defining features of Roman culture and a corresponding lack of precision in our

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[18] For the role of the grammarians, see R. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 11 (Berkeley, Calif., 1988).

[19] P. Heather, 'The Barbarian in Late Antiquity: Image, Reality, and Transformation', in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed. R. Miles (London, 1999), pp. 234–58; the quotation is from p. 247.

[20] M. Harris, *Theories of Culture in Postmodern Times* (Walnut Creek, Calif., 1999), p. 19 defines culture as 'the socially learned ways of living found in human societies' and sees culture as embracing 'all aspects of social life, including both thought and behavior'. C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), p. 145 defined it as 'the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action'. See also R. C. Ulin, *Understanding Cultures: Perspectives in Anthropology and Social Theory* (2nd edn; Malden, Mass., 2001) and J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988).

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ability to measure them. In a forceful critique of what he calls 'unwork-
able models' of Romanization, David Cherry considers point by point
the provincial adoption of Roman or Roman-style architectural forms,
names, religious practices, styles of dress, and municipal government;
urbanization; the promotion of cities to the status of *municipalia* or *colo-
niae*; the use of coinage; the diffusion of Latin as a spoken and written
language, the 'epigraphic habit', Roman tastes in art, and Roman-style
graves; the distribution of goods of Roman manufacture or style; the
presence of the Roman army in the provinces, and the recruitment
of provincials into it. In themselves, Cherry argues, each of these is
an insufficient indicator of provincial acculturation.[21] Cherry's critiques
are thoughtful and reasoned; his scepticism, sobering. Even if a precise
definition is impossible, however, it must be admitted that when taken
together the combination of factors that Cherry rejects one by one rep-
resent something approximating a working characterization of culture,
or at least of Roman culture.

Considering such a variety of factors also has the advantage of reflecting
late antique perceptions of what it was that distinguished peoples from
one another, and especially barbarians from Romans. Augustine wrote
of 'different rites and customs' and 'a diversity of languages, weapons,
and varieties of dress'.[22] Other late antique writers added laws and forms
of government, religion, battle tactics, and marriage customs, as well
as diet, hairstyle, and other elements of physical appearance to the list
(see Chapter 5).

These marks of distinction are not always traceable 1,500 years or more
after the fact. By almost any indicator, however, Africa Proconsularis
(northern Tunisia), Byzacena (southern Tunisia), and Numidia (eastern
Algeria) participated fully in the broader culture of the Mediterranean
empire. They were the most heavily urbanized of the African provinces,
and Claude Lepelley has demonstrated that their cities and municipal
institutions continued to function right down to the period of the
Vandal invasion.[23] D. J. Mattingly and R. B. Hitchner have observed
that the 'construction of fora, basilicas, Romanized temples, baths, the-
atres, amphitheatres, circuses, and aqueducts was a major concern of

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[21] Cherry, *Frontier and Society*, pp. 82–99.
[22] Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 14.1, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCSL 47–8 (Turnhout, 1955),
   48:414: 'cum tot tantaeque gentes per terrarum orbem diuersis ritibus moribusque uiuentes
   multiplici linguarum armorum uestium sint uarietate distinctae, non tamen amplius quam duo
   quaedam genera humanae societatis existerent.'
[23] C. Lepelley, *Les Cités de l'Afrique romaine au Bas-empire*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1979–81); now see also
   G. Sears, *Late Roman African Urbanism: Continuity and Transformation in the City*, BAR International
   Series 1693 (Oxford, 2007) and A. Leone, *Changing Townscapes in North Africa from Late Antiquity
   to the Arab Conquest*, Studi storici sulla Tarda Antichità 28 (Bari, 2007), pp. 45–125.

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towns of all sorts, with most local schemes limited more by the scale of resources than by resistance.'[24] Latin was so well established as an everyday language in parts of this region that it was said still to be spoken in Tunisia as late as the twelfth century (see Chapter 7). To a Constantinopolitan observer of the sixth century, Africans spoke Latin more pleasingly even than Italians (see Chapter 3). Africa Proconsularis and Byzacena were the production-centres of African red slip ware or *terra sigillata*, the quintessential late Roman fine ceramic tableware, enjoying as it did a pan-imperial distribution in the fourth and fifth centuries. Mosaic arts were highly developed in these provinces too, as demonstrated, for example, by the magnificent collections of the Bardo Museum in Tunis. The Roman educational system was firmly entrenched in Africa and may have survived longer there than anywhere else in the West.[25] The provincial archives of Africa were one of the major wellsprings of information for the codification of Roman law.[26] Nor was Roman legal and political thought always restricted to a thin, highly Romanized elite. Leslie Dossey has argued cogently that such ideas permeated rural aspirations in the late empire.[27] Language, lifestyle, arts, and institutions: by 439, the culture of the central African provinces would have been comfortably familiar to visitors from other parts of the empire.

Even before the influx of new blood in the fifth century, however, local cultures had remained important throughout the Roman world. In Africa, Bénabou was quite right to observe the specifically African nature of Roman civilization. Though Garnsey rejects the explanatory value of the idea of 'resistance', he too concludes that 'a specific cultural complex' emerged in Roman Africa,[28] while Mattingly and Hitchner write of Roman Africa as 'a new world, different from what had gone before and equally distinct from other parts of the Empire'.[29] Punic survived as a spoken language alongside Latin.[30] Pan-imperial artistic motifs such as the four seasons could have a distinctive meaning in an African context.[31]

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[24] Mattingly and Hitchner, 'Roman Africa', p. 205.

[25] H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité* (7th edn; Paris, 1971), pp. 492–3; P. Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West, from the Sixth through the Eighth Century*, trans. J. J. Contreni (Columbia, SC, 1978), pp. 37–9.

[26] A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1964; repr. Baltimore, Md., 1986), 1:474–5.

[27] L. Dossey, 'Christians and Romans: Aspiration, Assimilation, and Conflict in the North African Countryside', Ph.D. diss., Harvard University (1998) and now L. Dossey, *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 47 (Berkeley, Calif., 2010).

[28] Garnsey, 'Rome's African Empire', pp. 252–4.

[29] Mattingly and Hitchner, 'Roman Africa', p. 205.

[30] J. N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 200–45; on Libyan, see *ibid.*, pp. 245–7. See also below, Chapter 3.4.

[31] Mattingly and Hitchner, 'Roman Africa', p. 205.

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Even in the Christian period it is possible to speak of a characteristically local flavour to the African name-stock, peppered with names such as Victor, Adeodatus, Benenatus, Quodvultdeus, Saturninus, Cresconius, and Felix (see Chapter 2). Under the Vandals an unmistakable pride in Africa comes to the surface in the writings of local elites (see Chapter 1). By the fifth century, then, the empire's southern provinces had managed to become Roman while remaining African.

2. AFRICA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN ON THE EVE OF THE VANDAL INVASION

If Roman cultural identity was by definition trans-regional, then integration into the larger Mediterranean world was of the essence. And on the eve of the Vandal invasion, Africa remained well integrated into the empire. Proconsular Africa – the chief province of Roman Africa – had long been governed by a proconsul of senatorial rank. Under Constantine (AD 312–37) Byzacena and Numidia came to be administered by senators as well. The governors of these two provinces were given the title of *consularis* to distinguish them from the non-senatorial governors or *praesides* of Tripolitania and the two Mauretanias (central and western Algeria).[32] Apart from the proconsul, all of these governors were under the authority of the Vicar of Africa who, under Constantine, also came to be drawn from ranks of the nobility.[33]

According to Mechtild Overbeck, whose study is the only full-length investigation to date of the role the African elite played in the political and social changes of the late antique world, the men who governed Africa in the fourth century were for the most part Italian in origin. Office-holders from other regions, including Africa and the provinces of the eastern Mediterranean, played a role as well. The regional origins of the fourth-century governors of Byzacena and the Mauretanias are largely unknown, but an outright majority of the known *consulares* of Numidia were from Italo-Roman aristocratic families, including one of the most important noble households of the late Roman world, the *gens Ceionia*.[34] Similarly, a large number of the Vicars and Proconsuls of Africa stemmed from the great families of the city of Rome, particularly the houses of the

[32] M. T. W. Arnheim, *The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 52 and 56–7; A. Chastagnol, 'Les Consulaires de Numidie', in *Mélanges d'archéologie, d'épigraphie et d'histoire offerts à Jérôme Carcopino* (Paris, 1966), pp. 215–28; and A. Chastagnol, 'Les Gouverneurs de Byzacène et de Tripolitaine', *Antiquités africaines* 1 (1967), pp. 119–34.

[33] Vicars: Arnheim, *Senatorial Aristocracy*, pp. 63–4.

[34] M. Overbeck, *Untersuchungen zum afrikanischen Senatsadel in der Spätantike*, Frankfurter althistorische Studien 7 (Kallmünz, 1973), pp. 29–30; Chastagnol, 'Consulaires de Numidie', p. 219.

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Anicii and, again, the Ceionii.[35] In the later Roman empire, government was a family affair, and through the reign of Constantine the Italo-Roman Proconsuls of Africa typically appointed their sons or younger brothers to the post of legate.[36] The deep, personal engagement in Africa of these prominent metropolitan aristocrats created a human bridge linking the families of two of the wealthiest and most important provinces of the western empire. The local contacts and clientele networks these Italo-Roman proconsuls and legates established in Africa could later be actualized by ambitious Africans who made their way to Rome, even as the greatest families of the ancient capital lent a certain lustre to the circles in which they moved during their African governorships.

Africans were, of course, also involved in the administration of their own provinces. If we accept Overbeck's judgement as to their origins, perhaps 17 per cent of the known Proconsuls of Africa between the years *c*.295 and 429 were themselves Africans.[37] Overbeck also concludes that two *comites Africae* – military commanders of all the troops stationed in Africa – and one Praetorian Prefect of Africa were of local origin as well.[38] Five of the late Roman senatorial governors of Numidia were from African families, and after the reign of Constantine all of the fourth- and early fifth-century proconsular legates appear to have been Africans, too, even when the proconsuls were Roman nobles.[39] Precision is unattainable, but, as Garnsey once observed of Roman Africa in the second century, 'this matters less than the fundamental fact that Africans had access to the central administration and the highest status-group. The empire was still Rome-based, but the ruling class that directed it was cosmopolitan.'[40] Notwithstanding the displacement of Rome as the ruling centre of empire in late antiquity, the comment applies with equal validity to Africa in the fourth and early fifth centuries.

Beyond Africa, scholars have tended to comment on the relative absence of Africans from positions of influence in the fourth and fifth centuries.[41] The data provided by Overbeck, however, further serve to

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35 Overbeck, *Senatsadel*, pp. 23 and 33.
36 A. Chastagnol, 'Les Légats du proconsul d'Afrique au Bas-empire', *Libyca* 6 (1958), p. 12, repr. in A. Chastagnol, *L'Italie et l'Afrique au Bas-empire: Études administratives et prosopographiques, Scripta varia* (Lille, 1987), pp. 67–82, here p. 72.
37 Overbeck, *Senatsadel*, pp. 23–8; see also *PLRE* 1–2, *fasti*. Overbeck, *Senatsadel*, p. 33 rejects the argument of A. Chastagnol, *La Préfecture urbaine à Rome sous le Bas-empire*, Publications de la Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines d'Alger 34 (Paris, 1960), p. 431 that Chilo, Proconsul of Africa in 375, was himself African.
38 Overbeck, *Senatsadel*, pp. 32–3.
39 Chastagnol, 'Légats du proconsul', p. 12; Overbeck, *Senatsadel*, pp. 29 and 31–2.
40 Garnsey, 'Rome's African Empire', p. 251.
41 Overbeck, *Senatsadel*, p. 40 and B. H. Warmington, *The North African Provinces from Diocletian to the Vandal Conquest* (Cambridge, 1954), p. 107.