

Registri Ecclesiae Carthaginensis Excerpta

The *Registri Ecclesiae Carthaginensis Excerpta* (“Excerpts from the Register of the Church of Carthage”) are a small collection of canons from fifth-century North Africa. The modern title was introduced by Charles Munier, whose critical edition (CCSL 149, pp. 173–232) remains the authoritative reference. Earlier scholarship frequently refers to the collection as the *Codex canonum ecclesiae Africanae*, a designation introduced by early modern editors. In the manuscripts of *Dionysiana II*, the *Excerpta* are referred to as *diuersa concilia uniuersae prouinciae Africae, transactis temporibus Aurelii Carthaginensis episcopi celebrata*.

The *Excerpta* derive from a more extensive register of synodal acts once preserved in the archives of the Church of Carthage in the fifth century. This register contained the proceedings of both general and provincial councils held in North Africa during the episcopate of Aurelius of Carthage (391–430). In his effort to reform and consolidate the African Church, Aurelius convened synods on a regular basis, the acts of which were recorded and arranged chronologically according to the date of each assembly. The register was evidently updated as new synods were convened. Although the original compilation has not survived, its existence is attested through the *Excerpta*, which transmit one hundred canons, some in abridged form. It is highly probable that the Council of Carthage of 525, held under Vandal rule, still made reference to this register, implying that it remained extant at that time.

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That the *Excerpta* do not represent the complete register is evident from several editorial remarks that must originate with the epitomator rather than the original compiler. Thus, for example, the text notes that the Synod of Hippo 393 was omitted because its decisions had already appeared “above,” that is, elsewhere in the same manuscript: *Gesta huius concilii ideo descripta non sunt, quia ea quae ibi statuta sunt, in superioribus probantur inserta* (Munier, *Concilia Africae*, p. 182). Similarly, the proceedings of the Synod of Carthage of June 397 are merely summarized, with an instruction that readers wishing to consult the full acts should refer to the authentic copy: *Gesta in authenticis qui quaeret inueniet* (Munier, *Concilia Africae*, p. 193). Such annotations demonstrate that the *Excerpta* constitute an abridged version, most likely compiled in Carthage itself – the place where the unabridged register was preserved and could be consulted.

Further internal evidence suggests that the epitomator’s intention was to produce a concise yet representative digest of current canonical norms of the African Church, probably for pedagogical use (*ad instructionem studiosorum*; Munier, *Concilia Africae*, p. 214).

The *Excerpta* preserve material from the records of eighteen synods held between 393 and 419. In some cases, only the location and date of the council are mentioned (e.g., the Synod of Hippo, 8 October 393), while in others a substantial number of canons are transmitted (e.g., Carthage, 1 May 418). The collection addresses a broad range of subjects, including clerical discipline, ecclesiastical procedure, the administration and protection of church property, liturgical observance, and theological matters.

The following table offers an overview of the synods excerpted in the *Excerpta*. The first column (“Canon”) lists the canon numbers where extant (following the sequence in the *Dionysiana II*, in which the *Excerpta* follow the thirty-three canons of the Synod of Carthage of 25 May 419, and therefore begin with number 34); the second column (“Munier”) provides the corresponding page and line references in Munier’s CCSL edition; and the third (“Synod”) identifies the respective church council.

Canons	Munier	Synod
–	p. 182 l. 2–4	<i>Prologue „Recitata sunt“</i>
–	p. 182 l. 6–11	Hippo, 08.10.393
–	p. 182 l. 13–18	Carthage, 16.06.394
34-56	p. 182 l. 20 – p. 193 l. 380	Carthage, 28.08.397
–	p. 193 l. 382–386	Carthage, 26.06.397
–	p. 193 l. 388 – p. 194 l. 396	Carthage, 27.04.399
57-65	p. 194 l. 398 – p. 198 l. 558	Carthage, 16.06.401
66-85	p. 198 l. 561 – p. 205 l. 783	Carthage, 13.09.401
86-90	p. 205 l. 785 – p. 208 l. 876	Mileve, 27.08.402
91-92	p. 208 l. 878 – p. 211 l. 996	Carthage, 25.08.403
93	p. 211 l. 998 – p. 214 l. 1088	Carthage, 16.06.404
94	p. 214 l. 1090–1112	Carthage, 23.08.405
95-106	p. 214 l. 1114 – p. 219 l. 1277	Carthage, 13.06.407
–	p. 219 l. 1279–1283	Carthage, 16.06.408
–	p. 219 l. 1285–1291	Carthage, 13.10.408
107	p. 220 l. 1293–1299	Carthage, 15.06.409
–	p. 220 l. 1301–1308	Carthage, 16.06.410
108-127	p. 220 l. 1310 – p. 228 l. 1561	Carthage, 01.05.418
128-133	p. 229 l. 1562 – p. 232 l. 1630	Carthage, 30.05.419

Transmission and Later Reception

The *Excerpta* represent a central witness to the transmission of late antique African synodal law. They served as the principal vehicle through which the African conciliar tradition entered both Western and Eastern canonistic corpora. As far as current evidence allows, the entire textual tradition derives from Dionysius Exiguus, who, at the beginning of the sixth century, incorporated the *Excerpta* into the second edition of his conciliar collection (*Dionysiana II*). In this collection, the *Excerpta* are presented as part of the acts of the Council of Carthage of 419 and are said to have been read and confirmed at the session held on 25 May. The *Dionysiana II* thus introduces the *Excerpta* with a brief prologue: *Recitata sunt etiam in ista synodo* [i.e., the session of 25 May] *diuersa concilia uniuersae prouinciae Africae, transactis temporibus Aurelii Carthaginensis episcopi celebrata*.

As Cross, *History and Fiction*, p. 239, following Schwartz *Kanonessammlungen*, p. 71 n. 1, has demonstrated, this claim cannot correspond to historical reality. As the table above shows, the *Excerpta* include the canons of the second synodal meeting of 30 May 419 – material that could not possibly have been read aloud five days earlier. The attribution to the Council of 419 is therefore a literary fiction introduced by Dionysius Exiguus. This fictional framing, however, does not diminish the historical value of the *Excerpta*, which transmit authentic canons of the African councils.

Whether or not the *Excerpta* were formally confirmed in 419, there remains a clear chronological connection with the synod of that year. As can be inferred from the later use of the register at the Council of Carthage in 525, the *Excerpta* reflect the register in the form it

had assumed between 419 and 421; subsequent synods are not cited (cf. Stüber, “History and Fiction”).

Through the mediation of the *Dionysiana II*, the *Excerpta* entered a wide range of medieval Latin canonical collections. They appear not only in the *Dionysio-Hadriana* and the *Dionysiana Bobiensis*, but also in older Gallic compilations such as the *Collectio Albigensis*, *Burgundiana* (prologue only), *Diessensis*, *Lugdunensis*, and *Remensis*. Their influence extended as well to Visigothic Spain, as attested by the *Epitome Hispana* (or rather its source, the *Liber Complutensis*) and the *Collectio Hispana*. The *Excerpta* were also quoted in numerous systematic canonical collections, including the *Concordia canonum* of Cresconius, the *Collectio Vetus Gallica*, the *Collectio Hibernensis*, the *Dacheriana*, the *Quadripartitus*, Regino of Prüm’s *Libri duo de synodalibus causis*, Burchard of Worms’s *Decretum*, and, eventually, Gratian’s *Decretum*.

The *Excerpta* likewise achieved significant diffusion in the Eastern Church and in some Oriental Orthodox Churches, such as the Coptic and Georgian Churches. Together with the acts of the Council of Carthage of 419 (also derived from the *Dionysiana II*), they were translated into Greek and incorporated into the *Syntagma XIV titulorum*, compiled in Constantinople around 580. Their authority was later confirmed by the *Concilium Quinisextum* (Council in Trullo) in 691/692, which ensured their continued transmission and integration into subsequent canonical collections.

Literature

Frank Lesley Cross, ‘History and Fiction in the African Canons’, in: *The Journal of Theological Studies* 12.2 (1961), pp. 227-247; Charles Munier, *Vers une édition nouvelle des Conciles Africains (345-525)*, in: *Revue d’études augustiniennes et patristiques* 18 (1972), pp. 249–259; Charles Munier, *La tradition littéraire des canons africains (345–525)*, in: *RechAug* 10 (1975), pp. 3–22; Heinz Ohme, ‘Sources of the Greek Canon Law to the Quinisext Council (691/2). Councils and Church Fathers’, in: Wilfried Hartmann / Kenneth Pennington (eds.), *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500 (History of Medieval Canon Law; Washington D.C. 2012)*, pp. 24–114; Till Stüber, ‘History and fiction’ revisited. Zur Überlieferung der karthagischen Synode vom Mai 419, in: *Annales Historiae Conciliorum* 54.1 (2024) (in print).