

Arne Hogrefe, *Umstrittene Vergangenheit. Historische Argumente in der Auseinandersetzung Augustins mit den Donatisten*, (Millennium Studies in the Culture and History of the First Millennium C.E., 24.), Berlin–New York: de Gruyter, 2009, 978-3-11-020363-9, XI +393 p.

In recent years, research on Donatism has enjoyed something of a revival, with several monographs focusing on different aspects of this heated controversy in Late Antique North Africa. Arne Hogrefe's monograph, a revision of his doctoral dissertation, which he submitted at the faculty of History and Cultural studies of the Philipps University Marburg (Germany), is another fine example of this renewed interest.

This study focuses on the historical arguments used by Augustine and the Donatists to further their case, arguments which mainly concerned events dating back to the origins of the schism, i.e. a century before. The author reminds us in his introduction of the way in which we should understand here the term *historical argumentation*: "Es geht nicht um eine Form der Geschichtsschreibung, sondern um eine Form der Beweisführung in einem Streitfall" (p. 5).

Three promising perspectives are held forth to the reader in this study: finding out more about the context in which Augustine used his historical arguments, learning more about the historical arguments the Donatists themselves used, and thirdly, offering a more precise account of a few historical details of the Donatist schism (p. 2-3).

As the structure of a book is a good indicator of the quality of its content, it is clear that the reader is in for a treat. In his first chapter, Hogrefe not only presents us with a decent *status quaestionis*, he also coherently explains the overall structure of his study, giving the reader at the start a helpful overview of what will be dealt with in each of the chapters. Also further on in the book, the reader is carefully guided through the author's logical analysis of the historical argumentation used by both sides. Although this book is divided into eight chapters, it falls into two bigger parts, if the introductory chapters 1 and 2 and the concluding chapter 8 are not taken into account.

Chapter 2 can indeed be considered an extension of the first introductory chapter, with a more general historical overview of the Donatist controversy, and of Augustine's involvement divided into three periods of time: 393-405, 405-411 and 411-430, separated by Honorius' *Edict of unity* against the Donatists in 405, and by the Council of Carthage in 411.

In chapters 3 to 5, the author analyses how Augustine and his opponents deploy and interpret historical information and documents

in the controversy. He focuses in chapter 3 on Augustine's *Books against the grammarian Cresconius*, and in chapter 4 on his anti-Donatist letters, in particular on *ep.* 43-45, 53, 76, 87-89, 93 and 105. This first part culminates as it were in chapter 5, discussing Augustine's high point thus far in his battle against Donatism: the Conference of Carthage in 411.

In a second part (chapters 6 and 7), the author focuses on two main elements in the historical argumentations both sides propounded: the dispute on the subject of *traditio* and *persecutio* (chapter 6), and the battle for their version of the *causa Caeciliani* (chapter 7), which proved to be a crucial issue in the controversy: "Augustinus hatte erkannt, dass das karthagische Urteil über Caecilianus das Zentrum der donatistischen Argumentation bildete, und seine Widerlegung entsprechend eingerichtet" (p. 335).

The "Caecilianus case" concerned the validity of the ordination of Caecilianus as successor to Mensurius, bishop of Carthage. Soon this ordination was declared null and void at a council in which seventy Numidian bishops were present, on the grounds that one of the consecrators, Felix of Abthugni, had himself been a *traditor*. These confessors, the "pure", those who had not handed over the sacred books in the past, elected Maiorinus instead.

Fulfilling the reader's by now high expectations about the structure of the book, the author presents in chapter 8 a clear summary of his findings and some concluding remarks. Earlier, Hogrefe had pointed out the importance of the proceedings of Cirta as a source: "das Protokoll von Cirta auch ein wichtiges Dokument für die Entstehungsgeschichte des Schismas. Sollten die Aussagen authentisch sein, ist zumindest die später von den Donatisten behauptete theologische Begründung des Schismas, die Reinheit der Kirche aufrechtzuerhalten, in Frage zu stellen" (p. 246). In an excursus he therefore discusses also the dating of the Council of Cirta (p. 355-361). At the very end some very helpful tools are added, such as a timetable of the relevant dates in the Donatist controversy, and a bibliography of the sources and of the secondary literature used. An index of names of people, of subjects and of place names completes this monograph.

It becomes clear in this study that the historical arguments used in the Donatist controversy have greatly helped us with reconstructing the historical beginnings of this schism. Many of the documents dealing with this subject matter have come down to us via Augustine's reliance on them in his writings. It also shows us how both sides tried to manipulate these sources to their own advantage, since, as the author pointed out in the beginning, theirs was not so much an exer-

cise in writing history, but in winning a case. It is up to us to try and extract the true, unbiased facts from these coloured versions, and Hogrefe has here made an excellent contribution to this task.

Another element which emerges from this study is how brilliantly Augustine handled the historical argument in the controversy. Eager to obtain the relevant sources, skilfully weaving his arguments based on this material, he left no doubt about who was going to win the debate when it came to reasoned argumentation. One is reminded of how brilliantly Augustine attacked the pagan ideology in his *De ciuitate Dei*, using their own history against them, and painstakingly pointing out its inconsistencies.

In his introduction, Hogrefe mentions that the basic scheme of Augustine's approach in his argumentation can already be witnessed in his earliest anti-Donatist work, the *Psalmus contra partem Donati*. He attacks the Donatists's case in three areas: on the themes of baptism and Christian community; violence and martyrdom; the origins of the schism (p. 3-4). In this very same psalm we already witness Augustine's worry that for all his efforts to build a strong, reasoned case against the Donatists, buttressed with solid historical argumentation, it may well turn out to become "*a quarrel without end*", because it all boiled down as to whether each party would accept the evidence put before them:

- 140 Quae si credere non uultis, // uos huc aliqua proferte
*If you do not want to believe these, // then you will have to come up
 with other proof*
- 141 Quibus si et nos non credamus // erit rixa sine fine.
And if we do not believe these // it will be a quarrel without end

What Hogrefe has achieved in this excellent study, is a scholarly analysis of the way in which both Augustine and Donatists alike also tried to make their case with historical argumentations. In doing so, Hogrefe has not only offered us a glimpse of how available sources were sometimes (mis)used at the time, with each side accusing the other of falsifying the material, he also has made a fine contribution in the reconstruction of certain details in the history of the Donatist schism.

Geert VAN REYN