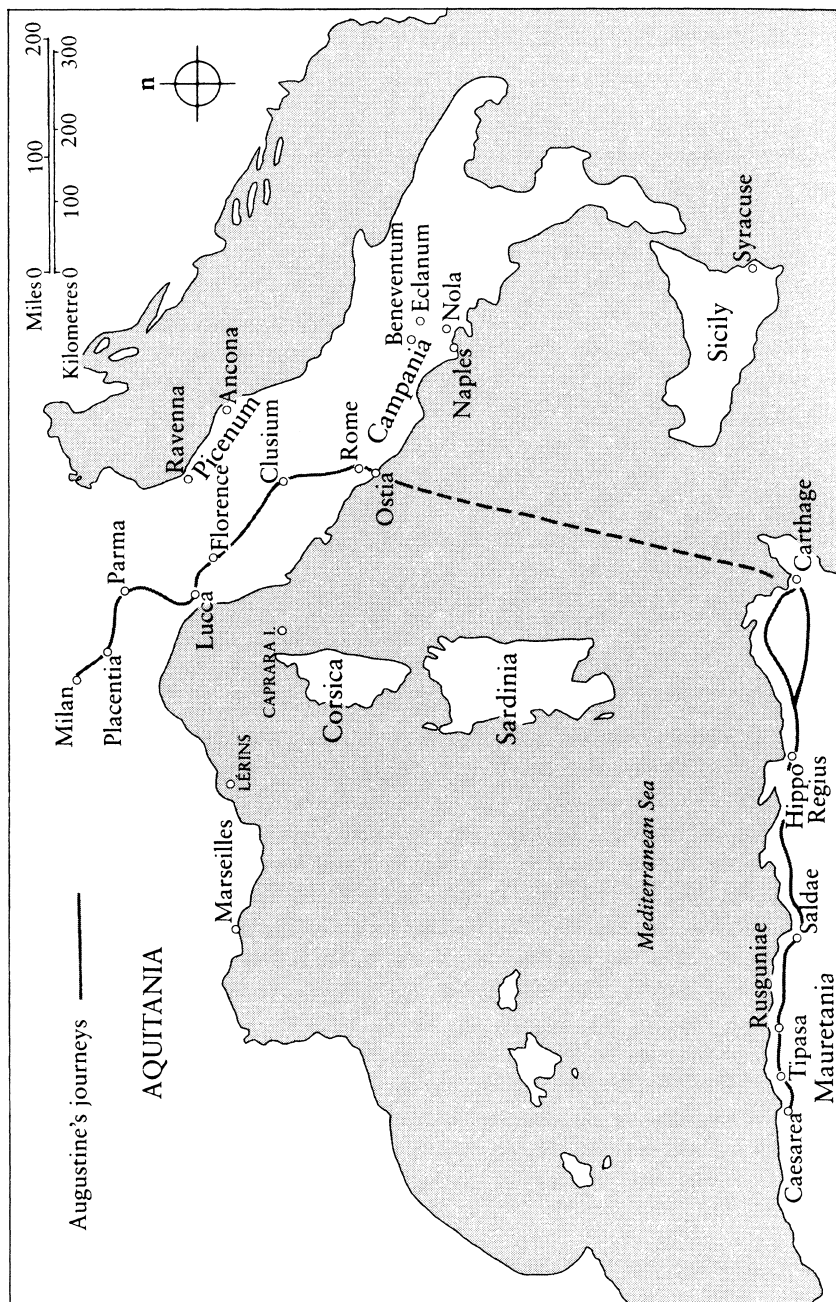


PART I

354-385

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE A

354	Augustine born at Thagaste.	
361	Julian Emperor (to 363).	
364	Rogatist Schism.	
367	Ausonius tutor to Gratian at Trier.	
370	Returns to Thagaste from Madaura.	
371	Goes to Carthage for first time.	
372	Revolt of Firmus.	Patricius dies. Takes a concubine.
373	1.xii. Consecration of Ambrose.	Reading of <i>Hortensius</i> . ? Birth of Adeodatus.
374	Death of Firmus.	
375	17.xi Death of Valentinian I.	Returns from Carthage to Thagaste to teach.
376	Death of friend; returns to Carthage.	
378	9.viii. Defeat by Visigoths and death of Valens at Adrianople.	
379	Accession of Theodosius I. Consulship of Ausonius.	
380	? Vindicianus Proconsul at Carthage.	Writes <i>De Pulchro et Apto</i> (not extant).
383	Revolt of Maximus (June). Faustus of Milevis arrives in Carthage. Ambrose in Trier (from Oct. to following Jan.). Famine in Rome.	Sails for Rome.
384	Symmachus Prefect of Rome. Altar of Victory controversy (summer). Dramatic date of Macrobius' <i>Saturnalia</i> .	Appointed Professor of Rhetoric in Milan (autumn).
385	Jerome (347-?420) sails from Ostia for the East (August).	Monica arrives in Milan (late spring).



I

AFRICA¹

When Augustine was born there, in 354, the town of Thagaste (modern Souk Ahras, in Algeria) had existed for 300 years. It was one of the many nuclei of egregious self-respect, which the Romans had scattered all over North Africa: it called itself 'the most resplendent' council of Thagaste.²

Since the first century B.C. an 'economic miracle' had transformed the hinterland of North Africa.³ Never again would prosperity be extended so effectively over so wide an area. By the third century A.D., the high plains and valleys of the plateau – the old Numidia – where Augustine was born, had been planted with grain, criss-crossed with roads, settled with towns. Even farther south, beyond the Aures mountains, a chain of forts guarded the boundary between intensive cultivation and its absence, on the very edge of the Sahara. In that age of affluence, the inhabitants of one area, of Thysdrus, the modern El-Djem, had set up in the middle of the open plain, an amphitheatre almost the size of the Colosseum at Rome; but the most typical memorial of this 'boom' period comes from an inscription at Timgad, a town far to the south of Thagaste, in what are now the desolate highlands of southern Algeria: 'The hunt, the baths, play and laughter: that's the life for me!'⁴

By the fourth century, the original expansion had come to a sinister halt. Schemes for building had stopped, the old public monuments had begun to crumble, 'shanty-towns' as chaotic as the

1 P. Alfarc, *L'Évolution intellectuelle de S. Augustin*, 1918, is the most complete and scientific account of Augustine's youth, and W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: a movement of protest in Roman North Africa*, 1952, esp. pp. 25-75, is an outstanding study of the African background of the age of Augustine.

2 *Corpus Inscript. Lat.* VIII, 5145; 5146; 5150.

3 v. esp. G. Ch.-Picard, *La Civilisation de l'Afrique romaine*, 1959, pp. 45-102; cf. P. G. Walsh, 'Masinissa', *Journ. Rom. Studies*, lv, 1965, pp. 151-155 (on the economic position of pre-Roman Numidia).

4 R. Cagnat, *Carthage, Timgad, Tébessa*, 1912, p. 70.

winding lanes of the bazaars of an Arab town, had come to press in around the chequerboard avenues of the old Roman cities. The wealth of Africa had moved away from its former centres. Instead, forests of olive-trees had come to cover the hillsides of southern Numidia. Augustine could work all night in Africa, his lamp stocked with plentiful supplies of the coarse African oil: it was a comfort he would miss during his stay in Italy.¹ This oil came from little men, from villages which lacked the swagger of the Roman towns. These sturdy planters, suspicious of the outside world, living in tight-knit communities, whose habits had changed little since pre-historic times, had become the arbiters of the prosperity of Africa: 'Here lies Dion, a pious man; he lived 80 years and planted 4000 trees.'²

Augustine's Thagaste was perched on a plateau at the edge of this new Africa. It was administered from Carthage; but it had belonged to the old kingdom of Numidia. Our imaginations are dominated by the Africa of Carthage, the Africa of the Mediterranean coast. Augustine, however, grew up 200 miles from the sea, and 2,000 feet above it, cut off from the Mediterranean by great forests of pine, by high valleys of corn and olives. As a boy, he could only imagine what the sea was like by looking into a glass of water.³

This was a world of farmers. A town was a symbol of civilization; it was not a unit distinct from the countryside. For all their pride, these little Romes would have had populations of only a few thousand, living off the land in exactly the same way as the present inhabitants of a Spanish *pueblo* or a S. Italian township. It was on the land that the pleasures of life were sought by those who could afford them. On mosaics we can see the great country-houses of the African Romans: two-storied villas, surrounded by paddocks, fishponds, ornamental groves of cypresses. Their owners are shown, in the flowing robes of the age, hunting on horseback, and receiving the obeisance of a subservient peasantry. These men were the *patroni*, the 'protectors' of their community, in town and country alike. As they strode through the forum with their great retinues, the poor man was well-advised to rise and bow deeply to his lord.⁴

Misery also went with the land: the misery of 'bent backs', near starvation, brutality like that of Tsarist Russia. A decade before

¹ *C. Acad.* I, iii, 6.

² *Inscriptions latines de la Tunisie*, no. 243; v. esp. Frend, *Donatist Church*, pp. 38-47.

³ *Ep.* 7, iii, 6.

⁴ *Enarr. in Ps.* 39, 28.

Augustine's birth, Southern Numidia had witnessed a peasants' revolt, tinged, significantly, with a combative form of Christianity. Augustine, as a respectable member of a Roman town, was shielded from this misery. Indeed, as a schoolmaster, and later as a bishop, he was one of a very small class of men who had no direct contact with the land: he could even afford to talk nostalgically about gardening, to regard agriculture as 'bracing exercise'.¹ Tied to his desk in later years, he could only harbour distant memories of the long days in which he had roamed this countryside, hunting birds.²

To be a full member of a Roman town, Augustine had to be free and civilized: he did not have to be rich. His father, Patricius, was a poor man, a *tenuis municeps*, a burgess of slender means.³ Augustine will grow up in a hard, competitive world, among proud and impoverished gentlefolk. A classical education was one of the only passports to success for such men; and he narrowly avoided losing even this. His early life will be overshadowed by the sacrifices his father made to give him this vital education: Patricius and his family had to go poorly-dressed;⁴ he had to scrape; for one disastrous year Augustine found himself condemned to give up his studies at a pleasant 'university-town' at Madaura (or Madauros: modern Mdaourouch) to run wild in primitive Thagaste.⁵ His cousins were less fortunate: they remained without a proper education;⁶ and would have to face the poverty and boredom of a narrow world of unlettered squireens.

Yet Patricius could claim, perhaps as a relative, the patronage of a local grandee, Romanianus.⁷ Romanianus would go frequently to Italy to defend his property at the Imperial court. He would return to Thagaste to show his power by giving wild-beast shows, and by patronizing young men such as Augustine. He would receive speeches and statues from his fellow-townsmen. He could expect titles and administrative positions from the Emperor.⁸ In the very fluid world of the fourth century, luck and talent could close the gap between a Patricius and a Romanianus. By 385, Augustine will be a professor of rhetoric in Milan; he will be in a position to toy with the prospect of a rich heiress and a provincial governorship.⁹ At that time he might well have reflected, as another successful African of his age had done: 'I grew up in the country, the son of a poor,

1 *de Gen. ad litt.*, VIII, viii, 15-18. 2 *de quant. anim.* xxi, 36.

3 *Conf.* II, iii, 5. 4 *Serm.* 356, 3. 5 *Conf.* II, iii, 5.

6 *de beata vita*, i, 6. 7 v. esp. *C. Acad.* II, i, 3 and Alfarić, *L'Évolution*, p. 7.

8 *C. Acad.* I, i, 2. 9 *Conf.* VI, xi, 19.

uneducated father: in my time, I have come, through my pursuit of literature, to live the life of a nobleman.'¹

For men like Patricius and Romanianus did not think of themselves as 'Romans' for nothing. It is most unlikely that Augustine spoke anything but Latin. Between the exclusively Latin culture into which he had been so successfully educated, and any pre-existing 'native' tradition, there stretched the immeasurable qualitative chasm, separating civilization from its absence. What was not Roman in Africa, could only be thought of by such a man, in Roman terms. Augustine will use the word 'Punic' to describe the native dialects which most countrymen would have spoken exclusively, and which many townsmen shared with Latin. This was not because such men spoke the language of the ancient Carthaginians. Rather Augustine, an educated man, would instinctively apply this, the traditional, undifferentiated term, to any language spoken in North Africa that did not happen to be Latin.²

Yet, even the fully Latinized African of the fourth century remained somewhat alien. The opinion of the outside world was unanimous. Africa, in their opinion, was wasted on the Africans.³

In the days of their swaggering affluence in the second and third centuries, Roman culture had taken a significantly different turn in their hands. They strike us as 'Baroque' rather than classical men.⁴ The gifted African for instance, delighted in the sheer play of words, in puns, rhymes and riddles: as a bishop, Augustine will be hugely admired by his congregation, for being superbly able to provide a display of verbal fireworks.⁵ Such a man needed controversy. He throve on self-justification. He aimed to impress his fellows by eccentric turns of phrase, by vivid and far-fetched similes. At the

1 Aurelius Victor, *de Caesaribus*, XX, 5; v. the most interesting study of K. M. Hopkins, 'Social Mobility in the Later Roman Empire: the evidence of Ausonius', *Classical Quarterly*, n.s., 11, 1961, pp. 239-248.

2 On this very difficult subject, v. the arguments of W. H. C. Frend, 'A note on the Berber background in the life of Augustine', *Journ. Theol. Studies*, xliii, 1942, pp. 188-191; Chr. Courtois, 'S. Augustin et la survivance de la punique', *Revue africaine*, 94, 1950, pp. 239-282; M. Simon, 'Punique ou berbère?', *Annuaire de l'Inst. de Philol. et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves*, xiii, 1955, pp. 613-629 (= *Recherches d'Histoire Judéo-Chrétienne*, 1962, pp. 88-100); and the useful remarks of Picard, *La Civilisation de l'Afrique*, pp. 393-395.

3 *Totius orbis descriptio*, 62, ed. Müller, *Geographi Graeci minores*, 1861, p. 527.

4 v. esp. the brilliant characterisation of Picard, *La Civilisation de l'Afrique*, ch. VI, Le Baroque africain, pp. 291-353.

5 Christine Mohrmann, 'S. Augustin écrivain', *Rech. augustin.*, i, 1958, pp. 43-66, esp. pp. 61-65.

age of seventy, this very African fire would still burn strong in Augustine: an opponent had seemed to concede a point out of sheer embarrassment. 'Why, it looks as if your very ink had turned to rouge!'¹ The mosaics such men commissioned were bright, full of minutely observed details of daily life, a little grotesque.² Men like these could write novels: an unfailing eye for detail, for the picaresque, and an interest in the stirrings of the heart have ensured that the only two books of Latin literature that a modern man can place with ease beside the fiction of today were written by Africans – the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius and . . . *The Confessions* of Augustine. Augustine had been encouraged to weep gloriously at the tale of Dido and Aeneas, a very African interlude in the life of the upright founder of Rome;³ and it is an African poet who will rectify the omissions of Vergil by writing the love letters of the deserted queen.⁴

The great African writers, however, were sudden meteors. The average African was more notorious as a lawyer. Augustine might have become one: 'that's a great thing, to have eloquence wielding great power, to have clients hanging on every word of the well-turned speech of their protector, pinning their hopes on his mouth . . .'.⁵ Like the litigious country-gentlemen of the Elizabethan age, the 'good farmer' in Africa had, also, to be 'skilled in the law of the courts';⁶ and, as among the Elizabethans, a dry, fierce legalism, a passionate dedication to manipulating the public forms of life by argument in the courtroom, was an effective complement, in the many, to fantasy and sensibility in the few. At exactly the same time, the leaders of the Christian church in Africa had imported this vigorous growth into their own controversies. A legal culture, hard-headed and relentless, had proliferated in its new clerical environment. Viewed by an Italian bishop who knew him well and heartily disliked his theology, Augustine was merely the latest example of an all-too-familiar figure, the *Poenus orator*, 'the African man of law'.⁷

Augustine, however, decided that he would rather be a school-

1 *C. Jul.* III, xiii, 26.

2 A. Audollent, *Carthage romaine*, 1901, p. 665; J. Leclercq, 'Prédication et rhétorique au temps de S. Augustin', *Revue bénédictine*, lvii, 1947, pp. 117-131, esp. p. 126, notices identical qualities in an African sermon.

3 *Conf.* I, xiii, 20.

4 *Epistula Didonis ad Aeneam*, ed. Behrens, *Poetae Latini Minores*, IV, pp. 271-277.

5 *Enarr. in Ps.* 136, 3.

6 Gsell and Joly, *Khamissa, Mdourouch, Announa*: I, *Khamissa*, p. 29.

7 *Op. Imp.* I, 48.