

- *Brove*: It was a church that had produced many martyrs – for example, a young mum named Perpetua, gored by wild animals in the persecution under Emperor Severus in 203; the bishop Cyprian, beheaded in 258. (When Cyprian was sentenced to death – to give us some idea of the spirit of that early North African Church – the Christians in the crowd shouted, ‘Let us go and be beheaded with him!’ and had to be restrained by troops.)’



THE FALL

Yet it fell from all this.

Many of the problems were self-inflicted. The North African Church, which collapsed most completely, was plagued with division. (Not for nothing has the North African Church been called ‘The home of uncompromising Christianity.’)

Then came the Vandals. Burning, looting, pillaging, this Germanic tribe ravaged North Africa in the early years of the fifth century. Theoretically a Christian people, Vandals subscribed to a heresy called Arianism and brutally attacked the existing Church. Some leaders were exiled or enslaved, others tortured and killed. It was a decapitation of the Church far more effective than anything attempted by the Romans.

A century later, the Byzantines, the successors to the Romans, regained North Africa and imposed on it their alien, Greek-speaking Eastern Christianity. They created some wonderful Christian North African architecture, but, evidently, not much else. By the seventh century, Christendom in North Africa was an unpleasant thing to behold: broken, dispirited, heresy-prone, at war with itself.