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## «A suitable successor»: building legitimacy in Hilary's *Sermon on the Life of Honoratus*

by David Natal

In 430 or 431 Hilary of Arles (d. 449) preached a sermon that commemorated the first anniversary of the death of Honoratus, his relative and predecessor as bishop of Arles. Using a great deal of hagiographic motives and language, *VHon.* narrates Honoratus' life from his birth to a pagan, aristocratic family in northern Gaul<sup>1</sup>, until his death in Arles in 429 or 430. Hilary described how, at a young age, Honoratus had decided to abandon his comfortable existence and, against the will of his family, pursue an ascetic life<sup>2</sup>. Honoratus had thus given up his fortune and had started a pilgrimage with his brother Venantius, who eventually died during the trip. After returning to Gallia around 410, Honoratus settled down in Lérins, an uninhabited island off the Occitan coast, in front of the modern day town of Cannes. Honoratus' example soon attracted other ascetics and, in a few years time, Lérins hosted a thriving community of monks.

Hilary was one of them. Born around 401 to a well-off family related to that

### Abbreviations

*Homil. Hon.* = Eusebius Gallicanus' *Homily in honour of the Deposition of S. Honoratus* (critical edition: Eusebius Gallicanus, *Collectio homiliarum*, pp. 773-780)

*VHon.* = Hilary's *Sermon on the Life of Honoratus* (critical edition: Hilaire d'Arles, *Vie de Saint Honorat*).

<sup>1</sup> It is generally accepted that Honoratus comes from northern Gaul, see Hilaire d'Arles, *Vie de Saint Honorat*, p. 21. The question is left open by Vogüé, *Sur la patrie d'Honorat de Lérins*; while Woods has proposed a southern Gallic origin of Honoratus' family: *The Origin of Honoratus of Lérins*.

<sup>2</sup> Hilarius, *VHon.*, IV, 2, pp. 76-78: «usque ad consulatus provectam familiae suae nobilitatem». Woods has related Honoratus with the renowned Bordelaise poet, quaestor and consul, Ausonius, see Woods, *The Origin of Honoratus*, pp. 78-86.

of Honoratus, Hilary also enjoyed a comfortable, aristocratic youth until Honoratus convinced him to give up all his properties and to start a monastic life in Lérins. Years later, in 427 or 428, Hilary followed Honoratus to Arles when the latter was elected bishop of the city, but his stay there did not last long, and Hilary soon returned to the ascetic reclusion of Lérins. Hilary's second stay at the monastery, however, was also brief. In 429 or 430, less than three years after his election, Honoratus died and Hilary was elected as his successor.

Not long after his death, Honoratus started being considered a saint, undoubtedly helped by the image displayed in Hilary's *VHon*<sup>3</sup>. A first-hand account of Honoratus' life, the sermon provides important insight into the first years of the monastery of Lérins. According to Hilary, Honoratus had made his home on the island looking for a life of solitude, as «he could not bear life among men»<sup>4</sup>. In a few years, however, Lérins turned into one of the main monastic centres in Gaul, attracting a vast number of aristocrats, many of whom became bishops in some of the region's most important episcopal sees. The «ascetic invasion» of the Lerinian monks enriched Gallic Christian life with a combination of moderate asceticism and aristocratic culture that is perceptible in Hilary's refined writing<sup>5</sup>.

Accordingly, most of the historiography on *VHon*. has assumed that it was intended for ascetic communities<sup>6</sup>, and has therefore focused on analysing its hagiographic and ascetic elements, with particular attention to the monastic life at Lérins<sup>7</sup>. This is the case with Salvatore Pricoco who, in his seminal works on Lérins, interpreted the sermon as a monastic handbook for the community's moderate, aristocratic asceticism<sup>8</sup>. A different approach can be found in Conrad Leyser, who has argued that Hilary's main purpose was to justify his abandonment of the ascetic way of life in front of the monks of Lérins, and especially in front of Eucherius, a fellow monk at Lérins who had written *In Praise of the Desert* in 427 or 428 to celebrate Hilary's return to the monastery<sup>9</sup>. More recently, Peter Turner has interpreted the hagiographic and biblical *topoi* of *VHon*. as literary stylisations of Honoratus' construction of his ascetic self-identity<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Honoratus is also considered a saint in *Hom. Hon.*, which was probably written between 430 and 439 and shows some similarities with *VHon*.

<sup>4</sup> *VHon.*, XV, 3, p. 108: «Verum ille humanae conversationis impatiens».

<sup>5</sup> See Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, p. 199, who coined the expression «ascetic invasion»; Fontaine, *L'ascétisme chrétien*.

<sup>6</sup> An exception is René Nouailhat, who argued that the text was a tool of Christian and moral instruction for a wider audience: *Saints et patrons*, especially pp. 48-86.

<sup>7</sup> Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, especially pp. 48-58; Carrias, *Vie monastique et règle à Lérins*; de Vogüé, *Les débuts de la vie monastique à Lérins*; Labrousse, *Saint Honorat, fondateur de Lérins*, especially pp. 25-35. Besides the ascetic elements, also the theological contents of the text have been the focus of substantial academic interest, see Weiss, *Honorat, héros antique et saint chrétien*.

<sup>8</sup> Pricoco, *Modelli di santità a Lerino*; Pricoco, *L'isola dei santi*, pp. 30-40.

<sup>9</sup> Leyser, «This Sainted Isle».

<sup>10</sup> Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity*, especially pp. 63-64, 90-99.

In this article, however, I will focus on the social and political dimensions of the text and will argue that Hilary used his sermon to justify his election as bishop of the city in the previous year. A stranger in town, Hilary used his only connection with Arles, his relative and predecessor Honoratus, in order to legitimise his episcopacy. Hilary played with two opposing models in order to present Honoratus as the ideal bishop of Arles, and structured his sermon accordingly. In the first half, the author emphasised Honoratus' break with the world in order to present him as an outsider to the world, an ascetic without any connections with the episcopal and aristocratic fights that had poisoned Gallic life in the previous three decades. In the second half of the sermon, on the other hand, Honoratus is portrayed as the head of an aristocratic household, who harmonised and successfully managed the communities of Lérins and Arles<sup>11</sup>. Honoratus was thus presented as both a model of sanctity and asceticism, and as the perfect leader of the Arlesian community. Throughout the treatise Hilary also highlighted his special relationship with Honoratus and established parallels between their two careers, leading his audience to the conclusion that Hilary was his most fitting successor as bishop of Arles.

A second related argument of this article is that Hilary's target audience was originally the community of Arles. Although the sermon contains many hagiographical topoi, it was initially composed as a *laudatio funebris*, a funerary panegyric, and was preached in front of the Arlesian flock, with whom the author repeatedly engaged along the sermo<sup>12</sup>. Considering the sermon as epideictic, recitative literature and not solely hagiographical is not only a formal question; it also conditions its interpretation. I will thus argue that reading the sermon, also its hagiographical motives, in the light of the contemporary social and political context provides revealing insights into Hilary's speech.

### 1. *Setting the scene: bishops in a community in conflict*

When Hilary preached his sermon in 430-431, Arles was one of the most important centres in the western empire. On the estuary of the Rhone, Arles had been a node of communication between the Mediterranean and northern Gaul since the early empire and had enjoyed a special political relationship with Rome, attracting a vast deal of public investment during the Julio-Claudian, Flavian and Antonine dynasties<sup>13</sup>. Summing up this picture, around 390 the court poet Ausonius described Arles as «Gallula Roma», the «little Rome of Gaul»<sup>14</sup>. Yet, Arles' relevance reached its peak in the first decades of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when the city became one of the main centres in the West as a result

<sup>11</sup> About the structure of the sermon see Nouailhat, *Saints et patrons*, pp. 130-132.

<sup>12</sup> Bouhot, *Le texte du Sermo de vita sancti Honorati*.

<sup>13</sup> Sintès, Heijmans, *L'évolution de la topographie de l'Arles antique*; Loseby, *Arles in Late Antiquity*.

<sup>14</sup> Ausonius, *The Order of the Famous Cities*, X (see Ausonius, p. 276).

of the empire's geopolitical reorganisation. Probably in 395, the praetorian prefecture of Gaul was moved from Trier to Arles, which hence became the administrative centre of Gaul, Spain and Britain<sup>15</sup>. From the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Arles was also the see of the *Concilium Septem Provinciarum*, an assembly of Gallic aristocrats and bishops that discussed «private and public necessities» in Gaul<sup>16</sup>.

Much like its political and economic relevance, also the development of Christianity in Arles had greatly benefitted from the imperial patronage<sup>17</sup>. Although the first references to religious communities date back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>18</sup>, Christianity gained momentum in the city a century later when Arles hosted an ecumenical council presided over by Constantine and attended by representatives of 44 dioceses<sup>19</sup>. During the 5<sup>th</sup> century, largely as a consequence of its political importance, Arles became one of the most powerful episcopal sees in Gaul and the whole western empire<sup>20</sup>.

The rise of Arles as a political and religious metropolis, however, coincided with a period of much turmoil in Gaul, which suffered seven usurpations and increasingly frequent barbarian raids in the first thirty years of the 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>21</sup>. Greatly affected by this context, Arlesians looked for the protection of the city walls, which helps to explain why, despite its imperial importance, Arles' 5<sup>th</sup>-century archaeological levels are characterised by a scarcity of churches and the invasion of intramural public space by private housing<sup>22</sup>.

This context of instability also affected the Arlesian church. As the episcopate became a key institution for ruling the city, both the usurpers and the empire appointed their own men as bishops of Arles<sup>23</sup>. This was the case of Honoratus' predecessor Heros, appointed by the usurper Constantine III (d. 411) after establishing his court in Arles in 408. Heros later repaid the favour by ordaining Constantine a priest, just before the latter was defeated by the imperial troops in 411. The strategy, however, did not work as planned and

<sup>15</sup> I am following here Palanque's chronology which, with some exceptions, is generally accepted, see Palanque, *La date du transfert de la Préfecture des Gaules*; Drinkwater, *The Usurpers Constantine III (407-411) and Jovinus (411-413)*. Chastagnol proposed a later chronology of 407, accepted among others by Kulikowski, Chastagnol, *Le repli sur Arles des services administratifs gaulois*; Kulikowski, *Two Councils of Turin*.

<sup>16</sup> *Constitution «Saluberrima»* (10 April 418) (*Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini Aevi*, p. 13); Drinkwater, *The Usurpers Constantine and Jovinus*, pp. 269-298; Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court*, pp. 334-338.

<sup>17</sup> Droste, *Arles: Gallula Roma*, pp. 117-119; Loseby, *Arles in Late Antiquity*, pp. 58-63.

<sup>18</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles*, LXVIII (Cyprianus, *Epistularium. Epistulae 58-81*, p. 265).

<sup>19</sup> See *Concilia Galliae*, pp. 14-22.

<sup>20</sup> Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism and Religious Controversy*, pp. 44-68.

<sup>21</sup> From 418, the Visigoths attacked Arles in different occasions in successive attempts to renegotiate the terms of their territorial agreement with the empire. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p. 181; Kulikowski, *Barbarians in Gaul*; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*, pp. 231-237.

<sup>22</sup> Loseby, *Arles in Late Antiquity*, p. 52; Biarne, *Provinces ecclésiastiques de Vienne et d'Arles*, pp. 73-84; Hubert, *La topographie religieuse d'Arles*; Benoit, *Le premier baptistère d'Arles*; Moore, *A Sacred Kingdom*, pp. 45-48.

<sup>23</sup> Frye, *Bishops as Pawns*.

Constantine was finally executed on his way to Ravenna, while Heros was deposed and chased out of Arles<sup>24</sup>.

Heros' replacement as bishop of Arles was Patroclus who, just like his predecessor, was deeply involved in imperial politics. According to Prosper's *Chronicle*, Patroclus owed his episcopal election to his family connections with the *patricius* Constantius, a powerful general who married the empress Galla Placidia in 417 and became emperor in 421, being succeeded by his son Valentinian III after his death, in September of the same year<sup>25</sup>. Apart from Constantius, Patroclus also relied on his friendship with Pope Zosimus (d. 418), who in 417 granted the bishop of Arles the right to appoint bishops not only in Viennensis, the province of Arles, but also in Narbonnensis I and Narbonnensis II<sup>26</sup>. In the following years, however, Patroclus became a victim of the increasing political instability. In Gaul, Honorius' death in 423 led into the usurpation of Joannes, a largely unknown figure who was defeated and executed by the *patricius* Felix (d. 430) in 425<sup>27</sup>. Soon after, Felix also ordered the execution of the bishop Patroclus, who was killed by a barbarian tribune<sup>28</sup>. The episode is only known from a concise entry in Prosper's *Chronicle*, but it has been convincingly argued that a lack of supporters in Rome had led Patroclus to collaborate with Joannes, and his death was thus part of the imperial restoration that followed the defeat of the usurpation<sup>29</sup>.

The aftermath of Patroclus' execution is equally obscure. In what most probably was a manoeuvre orchestrated by Felix, Helladius (or Euladius) was appointed bishop of Arles. Little is known about Helladius' short episcopacy, which lasted around one year and left very few traces in the sources<sup>30</sup>. Still less known are the reasons why, after Helladius' brief episcopacy, the new bishop of Arles was Honoratus, whose old age and delicate health foreshadowed a very quick transition, as it actually happened<sup>31</sup>. Both the elections of

<sup>24</sup> Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, IX, 15, 1 (see Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 1097); Zosimus, *Letter in favour of Celestine against the African Bishops* (XLV, 5 = *Epistulae Imperatorum Pontificum*, p. 100); Prosper of Aquitania, *Chronicle* s.a. 412 (*Chronica Minora*, p. 466); Frye, *Bishops as Pawns*, pp. 349-361; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 212-223.

<sup>25</sup> Prosper, *Chronicle*, s.a. 412 (*Chronica Minora*, p. 466).

<sup>26</sup> Zosimus, *Epistles*, I (*Patrologia Latina*, XX, cols. 642-649). After Zosimus' early death in December 418, his successor, the pope Boniface (d. 422) abolished Patroclus' primacy in Gaul: Bonifacius, *Epistles*, XII (*Patrologia Latina*, XX, cols. 772-774); Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society*, pp. 454-460; Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism*, pp. 60-65.

<sup>27</sup> See Jones, Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, s.v. Felix, pp. 461-462. On Felix's appointment by the Eastern court see Zecchini, *Aezio*, p. 142; McEvoy, *Child Emperor Rule in the late Roman West*, pp. 246-248. For a different opinion see Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, pp. 210-215.

<sup>28</sup> Prosper, *Chronicle*, s.a. 426 (*Chronica Minora*, p. 471): «Patroclus Arelatensis episcopus a tribuno quodam barbaro multis vulneribus laniatus occiditur: quod facinus ad occultam iussio-nem Felicis magistri militum referebatur».

<sup>29</sup> Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism*, pp. 65-74.

<sup>30</sup> Helladius 1: Pietri, Heijmans, *Prosopographie de la Gaule Chrétienne*, p. 969; Griffe, *La Gaule chrétienne à l'époque romaine*, pp. 239-241; Chadwick, *Euladius of Arles*.

<sup>31</sup> *VHon.*, XXIII, 2, p. 134: «nec refugit laborem tanti itineris suis praecipue multis iam dudum infirmitatibus gravem».

Honoratus and Hilary raise many questions considering the context of conflict within Arles. Especially, how it is possible that two monks without any known previous connections with Arles were elected bishops of the most important episcopal see in Gaul, a city whose political stability was a matter of imperial concern.

## 2. *The elections of Honoratus and Hilary*

But what is it, I ask you, that makes you look for such an unknown man from so afar? Who put into your hearts such love for a stranger and previously unseen person? Who prompted this desire in you that made him come to live among you, after having abandoned those to whom God had conceded the desert? With no doubts it is He Who manages everything, Who not only made him donate to his country as he thought suitable, but also made him travel by sea and land for the benefit of those who saw the great grace of his servant<sup>32</sup>.

Behind his colourful rhetoric, Hilary's account shows a great deal of anxiety when describing Honoratus' episcopal election. A skilful writer, Hilary cleverly turned into a virtue what probably was Honoratus' main weakness, i.e. that very few of his Arlesian flock knew who he was before being appointed bishop<sup>33</sup>. Accordingly, unlike in most hagiographical narratives, Hilary did not add any customary allusions to the cheerful unanimity of the community during Honoratus' election<sup>34</sup>. Hilary could embellish what had been a contested process, but he could not lie to the people who only three years before had witnessed Honoratus' appointment. Hilary also omitted any reference to Honoratus' predecessor, or the circumstances of Honoratus' succession, and only mentioned that he had been elected «thanks to his sanctity and actions»<sup>35</sup>, leaving unanswered the important question of who had supported his promotion.

Martin Heinzelmann and Ralph Mathisen have argued that Honoratus owed his election to his familial connections and to the political strategies of a small group of local aristocrats and bureaucrats from the prefecture, who had

<sup>32</sup> *VHon.*, XXV, 2-3, p. 142: «Sed unde illud, quaeso, quod tam e longinquo tam ignotus expetatur? Quis illam absentis nec prius visi gratiam vestris pectoribus adfixit? Quis illud desiderium suscitavit ut orbatus his quibus a Domino apud heremum indultus erat, vobis nasceretur? Ille utique quo cuncta dispensat, ille qui eum et patriae suae, quamdiu congruum videbat, indulsit et per maria et per terras, ad utilitatem videntium hanc tantam cultoris sui gratiam circumegit».

<sup>33</sup> Griffe, *La Gaule chrétienne*, p. 241; Heinzelmann on the other hand, argues that Honoratus was appointed by aristocrats working at the prefecture in Arles, including local groups, see Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien*, pp. 75-79.

<sup>34</sup> See Norton, *Episcopal Elections 250-600*, pp. 39-54. A classic example is the election of Ambrose of Milan according to Paulinus, *Life of Ambrose*, VI (see *Vita di Cipriano. Vita di Ambrogio*, pp. 51-124); McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, pp. 44-52; Duval, *Ambroise, de son élection à sa consécration*. About the legitimating power of the crowd in the Roman empire see Roueché, *Acclamations in the Roman Empire*. On the impact of the *Life of Ambrose* in Gallic hagiography see Consolino, *Ascesi e mondanità*, pp. 51-61.

<sup>35</sup> *VHon.*, XXV, 1, p. 142: «sanctimonia vero et actibus iam prius summum».

promoted Honoratus without the intervention of the local community<sup>36</sup>. To their interpretation, with which I agree, I will only add some emphasis on the imperial scale of connections at play. Local politics in 5<sup>th</sup> century Arles were a matter of larger regional and imperial concerns and the election of Honoratus was not an exception. Although the source material is patchy and does not allow a full reconstruction of the aristocratic networks involved, the evidence we do have suggests links between Honoratus, Hilary and the *patricius* Felix.

On one hand, there are links that connect Honoratus with the entourage of Proculus of Marseille who, just like the *patricius* Felix, was one of Patroclus' sworn enemies<sup>37</sup>. Although not explicitly named, Proculus is one of the two bishops mentioned by Hilary, who explained how the bishop of Marseille had tried to convince Honoratus to remain in the city<sup>38</sup>. Proculus probably tried to attract Honoratus to the monastery of Saint Victor, one of the major monastic institutions in Gaul at this time, whose abbot was the theologian John Cassian<sup>39</sup>. Interestingly, the other bishop mentioned in Hilary's sermon is Leontius of Frejus who, like Honoratus, was a friend of Cassian and a dedicatee of the latter's *Conferences*<sup>40</sup>.

On the other hand, having ordered the execution of Patroclus, Felix had surely orchestrated Patroclus' substitution by Helladius, an ascetic who also shared theological connections with Cassian and Leontius<sup>41</sup>. In this respect, Owen Chadwick has persuasively argued that Helladius was already part of the lerinian entourage<sup>42</sup>, a point which reinforces the argument that both Helladius and Honoratus had been part of Felix's interventions in Gaul after the usurpation. The later *Life of Hilary* (ca. 480), a hagiographical narrative about Hilary of Arles, also supports this possibility as it explicitly mentions how the head of the imperial army in Gaul, Cassius, had mobilised his soldiers to support Hilary's election in 429-430<sup>43</sup>. Cassius had been Felix's appoint-

<sup>36</sup> Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft*, pp. 75-79; Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism*, pp. 87-90.

<sup>37</sup> According to pope Caelestinus a presbyter from Marseilles had been greatly pleased by Patroclus' execution, Caelestinus, *Epistles*, IV, 10 (*Patrologia Latina*, L, cols. 435-436): «Masiliensis vero Ecclesiae sacerdotem, qui dicitur, quod dictu nefas est, in necem fratris taliter gratulatus, ut huic qui eius sanguine cruentus advenerat, portionem cum eodem habiturus occurreret, et vestro eum audiendum collegio delegamus». Although not explicitly mentioned, the unnamed presbyter must be Proculus, with whom Patroclus had some territorial disputes during the papacy of Zosimus, see Zosimus, *Epistles*, I and IV (*Patrologia Latina*, XX, cols. 642-649; 661-665). Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism*, pp. 48-60.

<sup>38</sup> *VHon.*, XIII, 1, p. 102.

<sup>39</sup> On Proculus' relationship with Cassian see Rousseau, *Cassian*; Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 6; Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*, pp. 8-31, 212-226; Tzamalikos, *The Real Proculus Revisited*, pp. 58-60; Leysler, *Authority and Asceticism*, pp. 39-47; Ogliaresi, *Gratia et certamen*, pp. 118-120.

<sup>40</sup> John Cassian, *Conferences*, Preface II (see Jean Cassian, *Conférences*, pp. 98-99).

<sup>41</sup> Prosper, *Epistles*, CCXV, 2, 9 (see S. Aureli Augustini *Operum*, Sectio II, pp. 454-468). Leontius and Helladius are the dedicatees of the second series of Cassian's *Conferences*, see Praeface II (see Jean Cassian, *Conférences*, pp. 98-99).

<sup>42</sup> Chadwick, *Euladius of Arles*, pp. 200-205.

<sup>43</sup> Honoratus of Marseilles, *Life of Hilary of Arles*, IX (see Honorat de Marseille, *La Vie d'Hilaire d'Arles*, p. 108).

ment as «magister utriusque militia per Gallias» in substitution of Aetius, who, despite his previous involvement in Joannes' usurpation, had been reincorporated in the imperial army and was at that moment increasing his power in Gaul<sup>44</sup>.

In addition, this reconstruction fits with the contested and unstable power balance in the empire in the years that followed Joannes' defeat. In 426 Aetius was still negotiating his own return to imperial politics and therefore unable to impose himself over Felix. The same can be said about Galla Placidia, who was not able to defend Patroclus, despite the fact that he was a relative and protégé of her deceased husband, Constantius<sup>45</sup>. Still in 429-430, the election of Cassius as «magister militum per Gallias» shows Felix's considerable influence at court just before Aetius had him executed in 430.

Around a year after the fall of Felix, Hilary wrote his *Sermo on the Life of Honoratus* in a context of considerable instability. In Arles, the bishop had to cope with a deeply divided community that included followers of his predecessor, the bishop Patroclus; aristocrats that had sided with Joannes; supporters of the emperor Valentinian III; and followers of the new strong man in the empire, Aetius, with whom Hilary had a notable incident in 445<sup>46</sup>. Despite its triumphant tone, the *Sermo on the Life of Honoratus* contains hints of the lack of popular support that Honoratus and Hilary had to face in this conflicting environment<sup>47</sup>. In the sermon, Hilary played it safe and tried to dissociate Honoratus and himself from the disputes that disrupted the coexistence in Arles. Hilary's strategy consisted of presenting Honoratus as an ascetic, who had withdrawn from the world, but had all the necessary skills for ruling over the troubled community of Arles. Accordingly, Hilary structured his sermon into two sections containing respectively two opposing processes: the deconstruction and reconstruction of Honoratus' social persona. The tension between Honoratus' rejection of his aristocratic upbringing and his social authority framed Hilary's main argument, namely that Honoratus was a self-made charismatic ascetic, who was destined to lead the community of Arles.

### 3. *Deconstructing Honoratus' social persona*

In his sermon, Hilary used an abundance of scriptural motives that had already been deployed in hagiographical precedents with which the author was familiar, such as Jerome's *Life of Malchus*, Sulpicius' *Life of St. Martin*,

<sup>44</sup> See the name «Cassius» in Jones, Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, p. 269; Stickler, *Aëtius*, pp. 325-328.

<sup>45</sup> Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>46</sup> On Hilary's conflict with Leo the Great and the intervention of Aetius, see Zecchini, *Aezio*, p. 250; Zecchini, *La politica religiosa di Aezio*, pp. 250-277; Heinzlmann, *The 'Affair' of Hilary of Arles*.

<sup>47</sup> On the conflicts in Arles during Honoratus' election see *VHon.*, XXVIII, 1-2; on Hilary's disputed election see *VHon.*, XXIV, 2. Both passages are quoted and discussed below.

and above all Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony*<sup>48</sup>. As in these heroic examples, Honoratus also withdrew from the world and looked for a life of solitude in his pursuit of Christian rectitude. There were, however, significant differences with these models, in which the tension arises from the temptation of the devil, frequently manifested in the form of sexual sins<sup>49</sup>. In Hilary's sermon, on the contrary, temptation arose from the social and political obligations of the late Roman aristocratic way of life<sup>50</sup>. Hilary devoted the whole first half of his sermon to give a detailed account of Honoratus' rejection of his social duties, an emphasis that contrasts with the other first-hand account on the bishop, the later *Homil. Hon.*, which condensed these episodes into a short paragraph<sup>51</sup>. Probably preached sometime between 430 and 439 by Eucherius while he was at Lérins, the homily offers an interesting parallel case of the appropriation of Honoratus' memory. A comparison of these sources further reveals how Hilary reworked the figure of Honoratus in a way that was attractive for his Arlesian audience and opportune for his own political agenda.

Hilary started his narrative of Honoratus' path to sanctity by recalling how the defunct bishop had broken ties with his family when he was still a teenager<sup>52</sup>. In line with classic epideictic literature, Hilary put a great deal of effort into describing the aristocratic pedigree of Honoratus' family, which was also his own family. He thus mentioned that some of Honoratus' ancestors had arrived to held the consulship, and the whole family had an «enviable dignity and is highly esteemed throughout almost the whole world»<sup>53?</sup>. This allusion, which does not appear in *Homil. Hon.*, fits the context of Arles, a city that stood out because of the social relevance of its bishops. Hilary, however, reminded his audience that for Christians «the highest nobility is to be counted amongst the sons of God»<sup>54</sup>, and thus described how Honoratus had challenged all the foundations of his aristocratic family. Honoratus had first renounced the pagan faith of his forefathers, being the first member of the family to embrace Christianity. Hilary presented Honoratus' conversion as a detachment from the traditional upbringing of Roman aristocrats, as Honoratus had been «educated at God's own school»<sup>55</sup>. Honoratus conversion

<sup>48</sup> Hilaire d'Arles, *Vie de Saint Honorat*, pp. 26-27; Courcelle, *Nouveaux aspects de la culture Lérinienne*.

<sup>49</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of St. Anthony*, V, 4; VI, 2 (see Athanase d'Alexandrie, *Vie d'Antoine*, pp. 144, 148), Jerome, *Life of Malchus*, VI (*Patrologia Latina*, XXIII, cols. 56-57).

<sup>50</sup> Nouailhat, *Saints et patrons*, pp. 91-92; About the construction of the ascetic authority among the late antique bishops see Consolino, *Ascesi e mondanità nella Gallia tardoantica*, pp. 46-58; Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, pp. 100-110.

<sup>51</sup> *Homil. Hon.*, IV, 30-35, p. 776.

<sup>52</sup> *VHon.*, V-VIII, pp. 78-90.

<sup>53</sup> *VHon.*, IV, 2, pp. 76-78: «Praetermitto itaque commemorare avita illius saecularium honorum insignia et, quod concupiscibile ac paene summum habet mundus». See Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien*, p. 77.

<sup>54</sup> *VHon.*, IV, 1, p. 76: «et fastigium nobilitatis est inter Dei filios computari» (*Wisdom* V, 5).

<sup>55</sup> *VHon.*, V, 1, p. 78: «quam omnes etiam aetatum gradus gratia semper et virtute transcendit, maiorque se semper inventus sit, ut prorsus divino quodam paedagogio educatum putes».

also clashed with a pillar of the Roman family and society: the authority of the father or *patria potestas*. In sharp contrast with Antony, who showed remarkable obedience to his parents<sup>56</sup>, Honoratus had rebelled against their authority and had claimed to be the son of God the Father<sup>57</sup>. Although the motif is not uncommon in other hagiographical accounts<sup>58</sup>, Hilary put substantial emphasis on it, which he presented as Honoratus' farewell to his aristocratic life<sup>59</sup>. Honoratus' father, nonetheless, is described as a wise, loving paterfamilias, who cared for his son's education, fostering a stimulating environment in which Honoratus had learnt all the necessary skills for his future life as leader of a community<sup>60</sup>.

Honoratus' next step in his withdrawal from society was giving up all his patrimony, an episode that helped Hilary to further emphasise Honoratus' well-off origins: «In this way they [Honoratus and his brother] now got rid of their whole fortune, which although they have been spending for a long time on works of charity, was still substantial»<sup>61</sup>. In line with his hagiographic models, Hilary described the episode as a charitable act for the benefit of the underprivileged: «Their property, which had been at the service of the poor since they had become the owners, is sold in lots, so the money can be distributed among the poor»<sup>62</sup>. Significantly, however, Hilary also presented almsgiving as Honoratus' sacrifice for the whole community. He thus described how the whole country had opposed Honoratus' decision to leave his homeland and journey to the East with his brother Venantius: «their country had received the abundance of their alms and pays back with an abundance of tears»<sup>63</sup>. The episode allowed Hilary to emphasise the brothers' commitment to their community, while explaining their break with the world as the realisation of their true saintly nature: «Leaving *their country, their home, and their parents*, like their model, they truly show themselves as the *sons of Abraham*»<sup>64</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of S. Anthony*, II, 1-2 (Athanasie d'Alexandrie, *Vie d'Antoine*, p. 132).

<sup>57</sup> *VHon.*, VIII, 4, p. 90: «cum Dei patris filius esse contendit».

<sup>58</sup> Jerome, *Life of Malchus*, III (*Patrologia Latina*, XXIII, col. 53); Sulpicius, *Life of St. Martin*, II (see Sulpice Sévère, *Vie de saint Martin*, pp. 254-256). The episode is very briefly mentioned in *Homil. Hon.*, IV, p. 776: «qui patriam vel parentes, illius fervore, contempserit; qui virtute illius, insidiosa saeculi blandimenta calcaverit».

<sup>59</sup> *VHon.*, V, 5, 6, pp. 82, 84.

<sup>60</sup> *VHon.*, VI, p. 84; Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, pp. 35-70. On the importance of managerial skills among Christian bishops see Consolino's study on the episcopal model displayed by Ambrose of Milan, Consolino, *Ascesi e mondanità*, pp. 23-37.

<sup>61</sup> *VHon.*, XI, 4, p. 98: «Diripitur itaque dudum quidem vario misericordiarum opere vexata, adhuc tamen larga substantia»; see Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, pp. 78-89; Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, pp. 7-15.

<sup>62</sup> *VHon.*, XI, 4, p. 100: «Possessio, quae pauperibus, ex quo ab ipsis fuerat possessa servierat, pauperibus nunc distribuenda distrahitur».

<sup>63</sup> *VHon.*, XI, 4, p. 100: «Exceptit patria effusam misericordiam et fletibus effusis repensat».

<sup>64</sup> *VHon.*, XII, 1, p. 100: «Exeuntes de terra sua et de domo et de cognatione sua (*Genesis*, XII, 1), exemplo pares vere *Abraham filii* (*John*, VIII, 39; *Luke*, XIX, 9)»; Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity*, pp. 44-55.

This was not the only case in which Hilary found himself keeping the balance between two contradicting ideas; several paragraphs in the sermon are devoted to explaining how the bishop of one of the most powerful episcopal sees in the West had long rejected ecclesiastical institutions<sup>65</sup>. Unlike Antony and Malchus, who had been constant frequenters of the church<sup>66</sup>, Honoratus' early life is described as a «private episcopate», with the young Honoratus receiving and advising bishops at home and not the other way around<sup>67</sup>. Later in his life, Honoratus bluntly showed his reluctance to join the church of Marseille, when he turned down the invitation of the influential bishop Proculus to remain in the city:

The one whose memory we cherish today was almost snatched from our city by the church of Marseille. The bishop of the city ardently wanted to enjoy his [Honoratus'] company. What resistance could have overcome such a passion that used tears to fight and sweet words to seduce? Nonetheless, with a renewed energy, like sensing a new danger, they set sail<sup>68</sup>.

The episode not only symbolised Honoratus' unwillingness to accommodate his spiritual aspirations to more institutionalised forms, but also helped Hilary to dissociate Honoratus from the ambitious bishop of Marseille. Unlike Honoratus' father, undoubtedly portrayed in a good light, Hilary's nonchalant allusion to the bishop of Marseille is intentionally vague. Due to his conflicts with Patroclus, Proculus was a hugely divisive figure in Arles, but instead of omitting such a delicate issue Hilary had stated Honoratus' connections with the entourage of Marseille in order to gain political capital from them<sup>69</sup>. A skilled rhetorician, Hilary's allusion to the bishop of Marseille allowed different readings that would please both, Proculus' supporters and detractors in Arles. In the first place, Proculus' image is rather neutral in the sermon. Proculus was indeed very fond of Honoratus, but that did not make him better than any other, considering that Honoratus and his brother were loved «wherever they roam», as Hilary explicitly stated in the previous paragraph<sup>70</sup>. Secondly, Honoratus' departure from Marseille is sufficiently ambiguous as to not explain if the “new danger” that threatened the brothers had to do with Proculus or with the general turmoil in Gaul<sup>71</sup>. Although, later in his sermon,

<sup>65</sup> *VHon.*, XVI, 2, p. 112: «diu evitati clericatus officio».

<sup>66</sup> Jerome, *Life of Malchus*, II (*Patrologia Latina*, XXIII, col. 53). Also Martin is portrayed as «always thinking on church matters and monasteries»: Sulpicius, *Life of S. Martin*, II, 4 (Sulpice Sévère, *Vie de saint Martin*, p. 254).

<sup>67</sup> *VHon.*, IX, 4, p. 92.

<sup>68</sup> *VHon.*, XIII, 1, p. 102: «Hunc ipsum iam tunc cuius hodie memoria pascimur urbi huic Masiliensis ecclesia paene praeripuit, hortante illius urbis antistite et tali eo gaudente collegio. Se quid non ille fervor lacrimarum certamine et blandimentorum ambitione vinceret? Alacrius ergo, tanquam novo admoniti periculo, maria transmittunt».

<sup>69</sup> Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism*, pp. 48-60.

<sup>70</sup> *VHon.*, XII, 3, p. 102: «ubicumque itur, ibi alia, velint nolint, fama pariatur». On the *fama* effect in hagiographical narratives see Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity*, pp. 102-108.

<sup>71</sup> While analysing the textual tradition of the text Bouhot states that this allusion was a direct

Hilary unmistakably connected Honoratus with the circle of ascetics of Marseille, this obscure mention to Proculus cleverly eluded a potentially divisive connection.

Hilary showed the same cautious attitude when narrating Honoratus' trip to the East. He described how, «in order to avoid their trip to be considered an immature audacity», they joined Caprasius, an old and saintly man whom they called «father»<sup>72</sup>. In this way, Hilary distinguished Honoratus from the radical image of the *gyrovagues*, the wandering monks of the desert<sup>73</sup>. The author, however, employed a great deal of rhetorical élan in order to present the trip in the fashion of model ascetic pilgrimages, despite the fact that Honoratus and Venantius did not head towards the Egyptian dessert or the Holy Land, but to Achaëa. A much more modest place from the point of view of spiritual geography, Hilary deployed a substantial amount of geographical imagery in order to present Achaëa as a desolated biblical desert, a barbarian land battered by the winds, where Latin was unknown. The untamed landscape of Achaëa helped to intensify the brothers' detachment from their aristocratic past, and Hilary triumphantly trumpeted how Honoratus and Venantius, «who had been educated in sophistication and comfort, triumphed against such an unpredictable variety of waters and winds»<sup>74</sup>. Later in his sermon, Hilary described how this spiritual trip had been God's plan «who made him [*Honoratus*] travel over land and sea for the benefit of those who witness the grace of his servant»<sup>75</sup>. The allusion comes after Hilary had repeatedly asked his Arlesian audience who convinced them choose Honoratus as bishop. The author linked in this way Honoratus' ascetic withdrawal with his future as bishop of Arles, and explained both as part of God's own agenda<sup>76</sup>.

Despite Honoratus' centrality in the first half of the sermon, Hilary's readers soon perceive that the other main character of the narrative is Hilary himself. The author had first jumped into the scene at the beginning of the sermon, where he explained his familiar connections with Honoratus. Hilary resorted here to his typical rhetorical strategy of understating an aspect in order to focus the attention of his audience on that particular detail: «on the

criticism against bishops who keep foreigners in their entourage, see Bouhot, *Le texte du Sermo*, p. 137.

<sup>72</sup> *VHon.*, XII, 1, p. 100: «Ne quid tamen iuvenili ausu temere ab ipsis inceptum putaretur». Other contemporary criticism to the wandering monks can be found in John Cassian, *Conférences*, XVIII, 7 (Jean Cassian, *Conférences*, pp. 18-21); Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, pp. 82-88.

<sup>73</sup> Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, pp. 67-78.

<sup>74</sup> *VHon.*, XIII, 2, p. 104: «Expetunt litora quibus Barbara esset»; *VHon.*, XIV, 1, p. 100: «Illud commemorasse sufficiat intrepide ab illis pro Christi desiderio maris reuma toleratum, squalorem ac sterilitatem Achaici litoris expetitam et tam delicate, tam molliter educatos contra tantas aquarum et aurarum varietates decertasse». Labrousse, *Saint Honorat*, pp. 21-24. About the importance of the dessert in the construction of ascetic authority see Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, pp. 105-110; Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>75</sup> *VHon.*, XXV, 3, p. 142: «ille qui eum et patriae suae, quamdiu congruum videbat, indulset et per maria et per terras, ad utilitatem videntium hanc tantam cultoris sui gratiam circumegit».

<sup>76</sup> *VHon.*, XXV, 2-3, p. 142. The passage has been quoted *in extenso* above.

other hand, I won't fear to be seen as speaking maybe too favourably of one of my relatives (...) there is no one who did not count Honoratus among his relatives, who did not see or consider him as one of his relatives»<sup>77</sup>. Later in the text, however, Hilary blatantly stole the limelight and devoted three paragraphs to drawing parallels between Honoratus' flight from the world and his own life story. He thus explained to his audience how, like Honoratus, he had enjoyed an easy aristocratic life until the old and sick abbot of Lérins had made a long journey to his homeland with the sole purpose of converting him to the monastic life. Honoratus spent days trying to persuade his reluctant relative until Hilary eventually yielded. Just like Honoratus, Hilary had then given up his properties, family, and homeland, and joined the monastery of Lérins, where he benefitted from the abbot's direct instruction: «Although it is true that he radiated benevolence for everyone, allow me to say without arousing envy, how much he had for me»<sup>78</sup>. The excursus on his life helped Hilary to present himself as Honoratus' alter ego, an ascetic who had renounced to all his earthly ties and had fled to Lérins, far from the corruption of the aristocratic world. Most of his audience, however, was probably aware of the involvement of the praetorian prefect and the imperial troops in Hilary's episcopal election only a year before<sup>79</sup>. Appropriately, Hilary devoted the second half of his sermon to explaining how he and Honoratus had been snatched from ascetic retirement as part of a divine plan for the greater good of the community of Arles.

#### 4. *Building a community*

Despite Hilary's triumphant description of Honoratus' pilgrimage, Venantius did not survive the trip and died in Achaëa. After his brother's death, Honoratus decided to return to Gaul and start a new life as an ascetic in Lérins. His return splits Hilary's narrative into two opposing sections. Up to this moment, Honoratus' life has been a process of personal deconstruction and the rejection of his social roles, in which he had given up his aristocratic family, his homeland and the church. Stripped of his earthly ties, Honoratus showed his spiritual superiority and special connection with God<sup>80</sup>.

In opposition to the first section, the second half of the sermon describes the reverse process, the reconstruction of Honoratus' social roles and identity.

<sup>77</sup> *VHon.*, III, 3, p. 74: «Nec verebor ne nimis forsitan favorabiliter de meo loqui credar quia, praeterquam quod nihil non inferius dici suis virtutibus potest, nemo est qui illum non suum computet, suum senserit suumque crediderit».

<sup>78</sup> *VHon.*, XXIV, 3, p. 140: «Iam vero illam sui in omnes profluam caritatem, quod sine invidia dixerim, quantum in me adiecerat».

<sup>79</sup> Honoratus of Marseilles, *Life of Hilarius*, IX (Honorat de Marseille, *Vie d'Hilaire d'Arles*, p. 108).

<sup>80</sup> On the spiritual authority of the monk-bishop see Rousseau, *The Spiritual Authority of the Monk-Bishop*; Alciati, *Monaci, vescovi e scuola*, especially pp. 62-121.

This part of Honoratus' life was a trip back to his origins, both in geographical and social terms, in which the bishop retraced all the steps of his ascetic withdrawal. In successive episodes, Honoratus returned to Gaul, built his own family of monks, successfully managed the most important episcopal see in the region, and found his new homeland, first in Lérins and later in Arles. In this section Honoratus is no longer presented as a committed ascetic, fleeing from his earthly obligations, but as the ideal bishop, fostering peace and harmony in his community, and effectively managing the resources of his church<sup>81</sup>. Interestingly, although Honoratus had shown a very proactive determination when pursuing his ascetic goals, his return to the world is characterised by a lack of agency, an inertia that directed him towards his destiny in Lérins. Attracted by his exceptional moral and social qualities, people around Honoratus progressively dragged him into more responsibilities that he accepted as a sacrifice for his community. His new public life, however, did not change Honoratus; quite the opposite, preserving the same sanctity, Honoratus was able to modify the places he dwelled in, making his way back into a self-tailored world<sup>82</sup>.

This can be seen, for instance, in the way Honoratus was said to have civilised the uninhabitable wilderness of Lérins. Using different hagiographic *topoi*, Hilary described the island as a desert, hostile to human presence, deprived of water and infested by snakes and scorpions. In one of the few miracles contained in the sermon, Honoratus, domesticated the untamed nature of Lérins, expelling the snakes and making water to spring<sup>83</sup>. Although Honoratus had made Lérins his home as he looked for a life of solitude, he was soon surrounded by monks who wanted to follow his example: «Honoratus established there a divine camp and the place, which up to that moment had been hostile to human presence, shined with the brilliance of angelical works»<sup>84</sup>. Honoratus as a result had found himself unwillingly enmeshed in the responsibilities of monastic life: «For the first time he is forced to assume the obligations of the ecclesiastical office that he had long rejected»<sup>85</sup>. Hilary, however, provided hints that show how Honoratus' involvement in the church had not been as involuntary as he emphatically stated. According to Hilary, Honoratus had chosen the island of Lérins because it was isolated, but «blessed with the nearness of a saintly, heavenly man in Christ, the bishop Leontius, who is linked to him [Honoratus] with deep love»<sup>86</sup>. Fleeing to a desert close to civilisation is a hagiographic motif, and Turner has rightly pointed out that

<sup>81</sup> Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, pp. 156-160.

<sup>82</sup> Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity*, p. 106.

<sup>83</sup> *VHon.*, XV, 4, p. 109; Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>84</sup> *VHon.*, XVI, 1, p. 110: «Honoratus vester castra illic quaedam Dei collocat et, qui locus dudum homines a sua commoratione reppulerat, angelicis illustratur officiis».

<sup>85</sup> *VHon.*, XVI, 2, p. 112: «Hic primum illigatur diu evitati clericatus officio, hic refugam suum sacerdotialis infula innectit».

<sup>86</sup> *VHon.*, XV, 2, p. 108: «sancti ac beatissimi in Christo viri Leontii episcopi oblectatus vicinia et caritate constrictus».

the reference was part of Honoratus' self-conscious construction of his identity as a saint<sup>87</sup>. But in the specific context of Arles, the reference to Leontius was both intentional and meaningful. As explained above, Leontius of Frejus was linked to Cassian and to a powerful episcopal network. Much less divisive than Proculus, Leontius allowed Hilary to emphasise Honoratus' episcopal connections without opening old wounds in his disunited community.

After describing the establishment in Lérins, Hilary went on to detail Honoratus' management of his monastic community. A major point of interest for the author, Hilary put in this section much more emphasis than his hagiographical models, devoting fourteen long paragraphs to describing Honoratus' managerial virtues. Hilary depicted Honoratus as a loving father, concerned about the happiness of his monks «because he feels everyone's sufferings and he cries as if they were his own»<sup>88</sup>. The metaphor of the monk and bishop as a «father» for his community is a well-established topos in the hagiographic literature<sup>89</sup>. Yet, In Hilary's narrative, Honoratus was more than just a father; he was also the head of an aristocratic household. In contrast to the image of the solitary ascetic displayed in the first half of the sermon, Honoratus is here portrayed as a competent leader, who provided justice and fostered harmony and cohesion among his monks, who interestingly called him *dominus* as well as *pater*<sup>90</sup>:

Here, therefore, that community of people eager to serve God and gathered together from all the parts of the world by his name [Honoratus'], although diverse in customs and languages, acted in unison in the same love for him [Honoratus]. Everyone called him master (*dominus*), everyone called him father, because they know they have found in him their country, their family and all their possessions<sup>91</sup>.

Complying with the ideal of a traditional aristocratic «*dominus*», Honoratus was a skilful manager of the resources of his community<sup>92</sup>. According to Hilary, Honoratus «made sure that no one was burdened with too much work and no one should become idle through excessive rest»<sup>93</sup>. A charitable Christian, Honoratus asked his monks to give up all their belongings before joining the

<sup>87</sup> Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity*, pp. 90-92.

<sup>88</sup> *VHon.*, XVII, 7, p. 116: «Omnium enim ille passiones suas credit et tamquam suas flevit».

<sup>89</sup> *Hom. Hon.*, II, p. 775; Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 191 and *Poverty and Leadership*, pp. 24-30; Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft*, p. 155; Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, pp. 66-73.

<sup>90</sup> *VHon.*, XVIII, 4, p. 122; Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, pp. 201-217; Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, pp. 155-156.

<sup>91</sup> *VHon.*, XIX, 1, p. 124: «Hinc illud erat quod omnis congregatio illa divinae cupida servitutis ad nomen ipsius ex diversis terrarum partibus collecta, tam moribus quam linguis dissona, in amorem illius conspirabat. Omnes dominum, omnes patrem vocabant, in illo sibi patriam ac propinquos et omnia simul reddita computantes».

<sup>92</sup> On the importance of patrimony in aristocratic households see Salzman, *Symmachus and his Father*; Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household*, especially pp. 37-44. On the importance of administrative skills for bishops see Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, pp. 23-55.

<sup>93</sup> *VHon.*, XVIII, 1, p. 121: «providerit ne quem nimius labor gravaret, ne quis nimia quiete torpesceret».

monastery<sup>94</sup>. But far from the carefree asceticism of his youth, the abbot Honoratus wisely managed the common property of the community, saving enough money «in consideration of the community that keeps growing everyday»<sup>95</sup>. The emphasis on the economic management of the monastery in Hilary's sermon contrasts with the silence about the topic in *Homil. Hon.*, despite the fact that the latter was preached in front of the monastic community of Lérins. The message of peaceful coexistence and efficient management was surely more relevant for Hilary's Arlesian audience, who suffered a scarcity of public spaces for the cult and had endured frequent conflicts for the last thirty years<sup>96</sup>.

Hilary, moreover, went on to describe Honoratus' episcopacy in the same terms of the efficient management of the resources and conciliatory leadership, a formula that according to the author had made the church of Arles flourish, «just as the monastery had previously flourished under his leadership»<sup>97</sup>. Hilary thus explained how, Honoratus had conveniently distributed the offerings accumulated by his predecessors in acts of charity, saving «just enough for the necessities of his ministry»<sup>98</sup>. Nonetheless, most of Honoratus' efforts were invested in governing the difficult community of Arles: «From the moment he received the command of this church, his first concern was to keep the harmony and his main task to join in mutual love a brotherhood divided by the angry passions aroused by the succession of their bishop»<sup>99</sup>. Honoratus «knew that it was not easy to rule over quarrelling individuals», and so he put a remarkable effort «into ruling with love rather than dominating with terror»<sup>100</sup>. Later in his sermon Hilary provides an example of how Honoratus' love had brought together the conflicting parties of the city, as he described how «the current and some former prefects» had visited Honoratus in his deathbed<sup>101</sup>.

After having gone through Honoratus' accomplishments, and almost at the end of his sermon, Hilary stepped into the spotlight again and, for the second time in his text, made explicit the connections between his life and that of Honoratus:

<sup>94</sup> Hilary used the biblical words «sold all your properties, donate them to the poor and then come to me», *VHon.*, XX, 3, p. 126: «vende omnia tua et da pauperibus et veni, sequere me» (*Ephesians*, IV, 2).

<sup>95</sup> *VHon.*, XX, 4, p. 128: «respectu sibi creditae et crescentis quotidie congregationis».

<sup>96</sup> Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism*, pp. 48-60; Loseby, *Arles in Late Antiquity*, p. 52.

<sup>97</sup> *VHon.*, XXVIII, 3, p. 148: «Floruit igitur sub illo Christi ecclesia sicut monasterium ante floruerat».

<sup>98</sup> *VHon.*, XXVIII, 4, p. 149: «Hoc solum quod ministerio sufficiens erat reservavit».

<sup>99</sup> *VHon.*, XXVIII, 1, p. 146: «Denique ut primum ecclesiae huius regimen accepit, prima ei cura concordiae fuit et praecipuus labor fraternitatem, calentibus adhuc de adsumendo episcopo studiis, dissidentem mutuo amore conectere».

<sup>100</sup> *VHon.*, XXVIII, 1-2, pp. 146-148: «noverat non facile quicquam discordantibus imperari. Studebat praeterea amore potius regere quam terrore dominari». A similar image is provided in the *Homilia*, see *Homil. Hon.*, X, p. 779: «Regnabat in patre pietas, quia in subiectis totum oboedientia, totum humilitas possidebat». The Homily, nonetheless, shows a remarkable emphasis on the concepts of obedience and humility as monastic virtues, see *VHon.*, VII and X, pp. 777-779; against *superbia* and *invidia*, see *VHon.*, VIII, p. 778.

<sup>101</sup> *VHon.*, XXXII, 1, p. 156.

By inciting your minds to elect me despite my insignificance, the Good Lord has granted that I should not be away from his [Honoratus'] tomb for long and that, through your prayers, he will not let me stray far from his path... It is for you, I realise, that with his help I was *reborn in Christ*; it is for you that he educated me despite my indignity; it is for you that he unknowingly sought me out with great effort; it is for you that he generously instructed me with so much attention and consideration, seeking in me the vein of faith as well as the vein of his own blood. It is for you that he put so much effort into writing me letters, and made a detour in his trip just to visit me, and unknowingly, I dare to say, but maybe foreseeing the future, he managed to convince me to come back from the island where I dwelled for love of the desert, after having separated from him in the first times of his episcopate; and all this in order to help me to find a homeland in your love and close to his tomb<sup>102</sup>.

In this paragraph Hilary finally reveals for his audience the implicit meaning of his speech, namely, that the big hero of the story, Honoratus, had only been instrumental insofar as a bigger narrative was concerned, whose main character was Hilary himself. According to the author, thanks to Honoratus Hilary had left his aristocratic life and his retirement in Lérins and had eventually fulfilled his destiny as bishop of Arles. Hilary recalled for his audience all the steps of his ascetic withdrawal and boldly presented them as a sacrifice for the benefit of the Arlesians, repeating no less than five times the expression «it is for you (*vobis*)». The anaphoric repetition of «*vobis*» directed towards the audience contrasts here with the one discreet reference to the community's involvement in Hilary's election at the beginning of the excerpt<sup>103</sup>. Hilary did not present his election as an enthusiastic acclamation, most probably because it was not the case, but he justified his appointment by claiming to be part of the same divine plan that had guided Honoratus from the desert to the church of Arles.

## 5. Conclusions

Hilary was not only an elegant writer, but also a great storyteller. In *VHon.*, Hilary offered his audience the detailed account of how Honoratus had left his self-indulgent aristocratic life and triumphed in the «desert»

<sup>102</sup> *VHon.*, XXXVI, 1-2, pp. 166-168: «Pius Dominus qui stimulando animos vestros ad electionem parvitatatis meae dedit ne a sepulcro illius longius abessem, illud etiam vobis orantibus dabit ne a viis illius longe recedam sed, ut quicquid illum egisse cognovero, id sine exploratione, aliqua aut disceptatione factorum agere festinem. Vobis enim me, ut video, iam tunc per illum *Deus genuit* (*Psalms*, II, 7). Vobis licet indignum praeparavit vobis ille me nesciens tanto labore quaesivit; vobis tam propensa sollicitudine et cura utcumque erudit, quaerens in me fidei, sicut sanguinis sui venam. Vobis me tanto labore per litteras, tanto per excursus suum ambitu, ab insula, cui me derelictis episcopatus sui principiis secreti amore reddideram, non audio dicere nesciens, fortasse praescius, amovere satagebat, ut mihi iuxta sepulcri sui sedem in amore vestro patriam collocaret».

<sup>103</sup> Honoratus of Marseilles, *Life of Hilarius*, X (Honorat de Marseille, *Vie d'Hilaire d'Arles*, pp. 110-112) describes the joy and unanimity of the Arlesians during Hilary's election. Written around 480, however, the *Vita Hilarii* contains a substantial amount of hagiographical topoi of dubious credibility, see Honorat de Marseille, *Vie d'Hilaire d'Arles*, pp. 75-81.

before becoming an abbot, a bishop and finally a saint<sup>104</sup>. As the story of a saint, however, Hilary's sermon is striking for its paucity of miracles, a quality that the historiography focusing on the hagiographical dimension of the text has consistently emphasised. Hilary had two good reasons for such a prudent attitude. First, he preached this sermon in front of an audience that had personally met Honoratus before his death, just a year before. Hilary's goal, furthermore, was not to portray Honoratus as a spectacular wonder-worker, but as an efficient, harmonising bishop, who combined the opposing virtues of ascetic charisma and aristocratic resourcefulness.

To this end, Hilary put all his rhetorical skills to work and described Honoratus' life as a return journey both in geographical and social terms, in which Honoratus first got rid of all his earthly ties and then reconstructed a new social identity as an abbot and bishop. Throughout his narrative, Hilary constructed Honoratus' image through a complex and largely contradicting amalgam of social clichés. Honoratus was thus an aristocrat, who rejected his well-off origins but had all the managerial skills of a patrician paterfamilias. Simultaneously, the bishop was an enthusiastic ascetic, who became bishop of one of the most problematic and powerful churches in the West and ruled it with the caring love of a monk. Despite its inconsistencies, Hilary's model succeeded in presenting Honoratus as the ideal bishop, not a small achievement considering that he had been in office less than three years. Honoratus was a charismatic ascetic with a special connection with God, who also had the entrepreneurial expertise of an aristocrat. Honoratus' outstanding capacities for the office legitimated his episcopacy, despite his lack of popular support.

Yet despite appearances, Honoratus was not the centre of the sermon. Although he only stepped onto the stage twice, Hilary dominated most of the argumentation, setting himself up as the only one who knew the details about Honoratus' life and could decode the saint's past. In different occasions, Hilary manifested his indignity and ineptitude compared to Honoratus: «If only my limited spirit had assimilated as much as he wanted to teach me! He would have prepared me for you, who listen to me today, and made me worth of your consideration, and he would have educated, without noticing it, a suitable successor»<sup>105</sup>. But his whole argumentation undercut this statement. Using Honoratus as his alter ego, Hilary described their lives in parallel, making both part of the same divine plan that forced them to leave their country and family and to adopt an ascetic life before being appointed bishops of Arles.

Hilary's episcopacy also proved his emphatic self-belittlement wrong. In the following years, Hilary became one of the most powerful bishops of Gaul, standing out for his remarkable attitude and ambition<sup>106</sup>. In the *Life of Hi-*

<sup>104</sup> *VHon.*, III, 3, p. 74.

<sup>105</sup> *VHon.*, XXIV, 1, pp. 138-140: «Atque utinam tantum angustiae spiritus mei recepissent quantum ille studebat infundere! Praeparasset me profecto vobis et desiderio vestro dignum dedisset et successorem sibi idoneum nesciens erudisset».

<sup>106</sup> Heinzelmann, *The 'affair' of Hilary of Arles*, pp. 239-51.

*lary*, however, Hilary is described with the same combination of ascetic, and pragmatic authority he had used for depicting Honoratus<sup>107</sup>. Hilary is thus portrayed as a resolute bishop who was able to confront the prefect and the pope, but also as an ascetic and a saint with healing powers who protected his city and his flock. To a great extent, Hilary's image in the *Life of Hilary* was based on the stylisation of his own life that he had provided in *VHon.*<sup>108</sup>, where Hilary had even predicted that one day he would become a saint<sup>109</sup>. Hilary's posthumous sanctification perfectly instantiated his self-construction as Honoratus' second self, ultimately proving that the Honoratus he described in his sermon had been his most suitable predecessor.

<sup>107</sup> See Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, especially pp. 42-55; 66-73.

<sup>108</sup> About the close relationship between both hagiographic texts see Honorat de Marseille, *Vie d'Hilaire d'Arles*, pp. 1-19. Although the *Life of Hilarius* is not analysed in Turner's monograph, the author provides many illuminating examples of the formative character of hagiography and biography, see Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity*, especially pp. 84-85 (on Martin of Tours), 113-115 (on Plotinus).

<sup>109</sup> *VHon.*, XXVIII, 1, p. 146, n. 4, Hilary called Honoratus «Israelis agitator» (*Vetus Latina, IV Kings*, II, 12), the driver of Israel, the same expression Elisha used for referring to Elijah when the latter was lifted up to heaven in a chariot of fire. Comparing themselves with the biblical couple, Hilary was implicitly assuming the role of the prophet Elisha.

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