

In Augustinum: Maximinus of Durostorum and his Dispute with Augustine

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Abstract: The publication presents one day of the life of Maximinus of Durostorum, mainly his public dispute with Augustine of Hippo. A comparison is made between the two bishops and the available information about Maximinus of Durostorum has been analyzed. Neglected for a long time, the bishop of Durostorum appears as a well-educated leader with authority and erudition not only to face one of the greatest theologians of the Christian world but to dominate the verbal encounter. As a result, we contributed to the image of the Arian bishops from the Balkans, revealing their importance in the process of development of the Church as an institution in the 4th and 5th centuries.

Keywords: Late Antiquity, Balkans, Arianism

Ключови думи: Късна античност, Балкани, арианство



In the last quarter of the 4th c., the Arians lost the right to perform their religious practices within the city limits (CTh. 16.5.6). Nevertheless, in the following centuries, the heresy continued to exist and develop not only in the barbarian states and North Africa but also in the Balkans¹. Evidence of this is the surviving collection *Dissertatio Maximini contra Ambrosium*², compiled by the Arian bishop of Durostorum Maximinus.

The purpose of this publication is to present a day in the life of Maximinus, placing it in the context of his theological dispute with Augustine of Hippo that took place in Hippon Regium in 427/428. The comparison of the two bishops and the analysis of the available

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¹ Meslin 1967; Zeiller 1918; Mathisen 2014.

² MS lat. 8907 from the National Library of Paris is a collection of connected with the Arian controversy texts. The collection is made in the first half of the 5th c. Its first publication is by Kauffmann 1899, the last edition is that of Gryson 1980.

information about the public disputation will help to complete the image of the Arian bishops from the Balkans and their importance in the process of development of the Church as institution in the 4th and 5th centuries.

Maximinus was born probably in the second half of the 4th century, he received a Christian education from the bishop of Ratiaria, Palladius, or one of his students, and he was among the followers of the bishop of the Goths – Wulfila³. Most likely, at the beginning of the 5th century, he was ordained as a bishop of Durostorum⁴. Bearing in mind that already in 383 AD, Arianism was ‘banished’ from the cities (CTh. 16.5.6.), Maximinus should have been an Arian bishop of an existing Arian community and not of the Christian diocese officially recognized by the state. Maximinus is supposed to be of Roman origin⁵, not a Romanized native⁶ or Goth⁷. This assumption is based solely on his name, and we have no information as to whether this was his birth name or it was acquired after he became a Christian.

Maximinus is our last known Arian bishop from the Balkans and one of the few we have information about in the East⁸. Like the rest of the Balkan bishops, information about him is limited, but the person described to us once again raises the question of the place and role of the Balkans in the history of Christianity in the 4th and 5th centuries and the influence that the local communities had on the development of the Eastern parts of the Roman Empire.

As already mentioned, the information we have about the life and work of Maximinus of Durostorum is very little, namely his commented

collection of texts of and about Arian bishops (*Dissertatio Maximini*), as well as the information about his debate with Augustine of Hippo (*Collatio cum Maximino Arianorum Episcopo; Contra Maximinum Haereticum Arianorum Episcopum*). This article aims to present and study only the dispute between the two bishops. However significant the compilation made by Maximinus is, since it is the only surviving text of Arian bishops from the eastern parts of the empire, his debate with Augustine allows us to gain a much clearer picture of the Arian Balkan bishops—for education, behavior, and for their self-esteem and awareness of their importance.

In the year 428, in the city of Hippo Regius in North Africa, a public disputation between Augustine, the retired from active duty bishop of the town, and Maximinus ‘bishop of the Arians,’ took place. Given the limited information, a few problems should be pointed out beforehand. First, scholars still debate whether Maximinus of the debate with Augustine and the bishop of Durostorum are the same person or this is another Arian bishop⁹. For the moment the arguments in favor of the bishop of Durostorum prevail, given the general nature of the evidence of the other theses. Second, the appearance of Maximinus in North Africa has not yet found an universally accepted explanation. I adhere to the logic that when Sigismund left for North Africa¹⁰, Maximinus joined him in the capacity of an army bishop¹¹. The last consisted mainly of Gothic Arians. His main tasks were to maintain the army’s morals and faith and when possible, to preach Arianism to the local population¹², especially since they were in an extremely

³ This connection is assumed by all scholars because of the content of *Dissertation Maximini*.

⁴ About the long discussion on the age of Maximinus see *Sumruld* 1994: 91-92.

⁵ Meslin is one of the believers that Maximinus is of Roman origin, he even identifies his place of birth in the province of Valeria in Illyricum – *Meslin* 1967: 92-94; The other supporters of the Roman origin are *Gryson* 1980: 67 and *Thompson* 1966: 119, n. 2.

⁶ *Mathison* 1999: 177. *MacLynn* 1996: 484, 488.

⁷ Ronald Teske and Ralf Mathisen assume that Maximinus is of Gothic origin *Teske* 2009, 237; *Mathisen* 2014: 173. For earlier studies on the Gothic origin see *Zeiller* 1918, 441, mm.1, *Bardenheuer* 1962: 479 and *Courcelle* 1965: 137.

⁸ *Gerdzhikova* 2022.

⁹ For the debate see *Gryson* 1980. In one of the last extended publications about the Western Arianism Maximinus, the 5th century Arian bishop who debated with Augustine and Maximinus, the author of the *Dissertation Maximini* are described as two different people – *Mathisen* 2014.

¹⁰ *Jones* 1968: 177.

¹¹ *Meslin* 1967: 94. Ralf Mathisen does not agree with Meslin that Maximinus performed only as an army bishop – *Mathisen* 2014: 158-160

¹² *Mathisen* 2014: 158-161.

strong Catholic environment¹³. Sigismund's choice of Maximinus is hardly accidental, bearing in mind the preaching he implemented to the population in the regions they visited¹⁴. At the beginning of the 5th century, the clash between the barbarian Arians and the Christian communities subordinate to the bishops of Rome was at its peak. Arianism attracted more and more followers, and the bishop of Rome appealed to the clergy to challenge every Arian bishop to a public dispute, in which they would point out all their blasphemous views¹⁵. In the context of what was happening, Maximinus has been entrusted not only with the extremely important task of preserving the faith of Sigismund and his people but also to face the challenges that the local bishops will present to him.

The information for the dispute between Maximinus and Augustine comes from three sources – the minutes of the debate (*Collatio cum Maximino Arianorum Episcopo*); the two texts Augustine prepared for Maximinus, in which the bishop of Hippo continued his attempts to defend his position (*Contra Maximinum Haereticum Arianorum Episcopum*), and Possidius referenced the dispute several times in his *Vita Augustini* (Possid. *Vita Aug.* 17.7). However small in numbers, the testimonies that have come down to us are extensive and provide enough information not only to reconstruct the course of the dispute but also to assess the theological views of the two participants¹⁶.

The dispute was not a random event but was provoked by unfavorable statements made by Augustine and his clerics, in all probability the result of Maximinus' active pro-Arian policy in Carthage and the region, as well as the already mentioned appeal of the Roman bishop every Arian bishop's faith to be challenged to a public dispute. Maximinus did not remain indifferent to his designation as a blasphemer and headed to Ippon to meet with the local bishop. Heraclius, the cleric left to act for

Augustine after he retired from active service¹⁷, challenged him to a public debate.

And so, at the appearance of Maximinus at Hippo Regius, the bishop of the city was absent, whereupon his deputy Heraclius was publicly humiliated by the Arian, which necessitated the appearance of Augustine in defense of the Catholic faith (*Coll. cum Max.* 1). According to the recorded words of Maximinus, in the course of a 'friendly' discussion, Heraclius became very nervous and called Augustine in his anger. I will not comment on the situation thus described and the reasons why the first dispute was between a bishop and a deacon or presbyter because they will be purely speculative and highly subjective on my part. What we need not to speculate on, however, are the subsequent events. Augustine confronted Maximinus by first insisting that the upcoming discussion be documented (*Coll. cum Max.* 1). In practice, the minutes of the Debate that has reached us is precisely the notes of the notaries. At the very beginning of the dispute, Augustine stated that he would only accept reasonable arguments and quotations from the Scriptures.

The purpose of the ensuing dispute was for both sides to present their theological views, and in the course of the discussion, the expectations were for one of the two to out-talk the other. Augustine immediately proceeded to question Maximinus' belief concerning the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The following hours of discussion became a verbal battle between two well-educated and well-read opponents.

Based on the stenographic records the debate could be split into two parts. In the first part, the two opponents asked each other short questions and gave simple answers (*Coll. cum Max.* 2-12). We can assume that this was the time when they got familiar with and evaluated their knowledge and qualities as speakers. Somewhere in the middle of this part of the debate, bargaining began, which is evident

¹³ Sumruld 1994: 30-31.

¹⁴ Bonner 1963: 141. Mathisen studies the activities of Arian bishops among the barbaric people – Mathisen 2014.

¹⁵ Revillout 1850: 51, 54-55, 111.

¹⁶ Theological part of the dispute is not the focus of this publication. For more information see Sumruld 1994: 93ff.

¹⁷ Nuffelen 2011: 247, 253.

from the ever-increasing amount of time each of them spent talking. The second part began when Augustine expounded his views at great length, his volume-occupying nearly one-sixth of all that has been said before him (*Coll. cum Max.* 13-14). Maximinus replied to the Bishop of Ippon with an even longer and more detailed exposition (*Coll. cum Max.* 15). He was so spacious and persuasive that Augustine puts an end to the debate on the pretext that the time advanced and one day is not enough and that whatever he has to say he should write it down and send it to Maximinus. At the end both bishops sign the minutes of the debate¹⁸.

I will not dwell on the essence of the dispute and will only present the significant, in my opinion, moments. First, Maximinus did not yield to the provocation of Augustine, who made him answer the same question, claiming that the latter was not exhaustive. The bishop of Ippon several times resorted to reading the notaries' records to show the lack of specificity in Maximinus' answer¹⁹. Second, Maximinus skillfully managed not only to avoid the traps set for him but also to lure Augustine into stating his views on whether or not there is a hierarchy among the Trinity, thereby turning the tide and accusing him in some form of heresy. Thus, Augustine found himself in the situation of explaining and defending his Orthodox views. For the latter, however, he either does not have enough time or needs to think further, as will become clear from the continuation of our story²⁰.

The debate ended and, according to Augustine, was won by him. However, the record shows that Maximinus dominated the discussion most of the time, and eventually, Augustine refused to continue the debate. Despite the claims that he won, Augustine prepared two books as a reply to the Arian Maximinus (*Contra Maximinum Haereticum Arianorum Episcopum*). Augustine's

motive was the lack of sufficient time during the dispute and the need to present his personal views in opposition to those of Maximinus. The two books are Augustine's commentaries on the first part of the debate (Book One) and Maximinus' extensive exposition (Book Two). Apart from constant complaints that Maximinus failed to provide a single adequate answer, Augustine analyzes everything that Maximinus stated, presenting not only the theological treatment of the Arians but also his own views on the oneness.

As previously mentioned, I will not dwell in detail on the debate and the theological side of it, that is a separate and extremely interesting topic, especially considering Augustine's views on the Holy Spirit²¹. However, we can focus on the conclusions we can draw based solely on the skeleton on which it happened.

First, the bishop of Durostorum was one of the most respected Christian leaders among the Arian community at the beginning of the 5th century. Sigisvult called him his religious leader to help him in North Africa, one of the bastions of Catholicism, but with an already established Arian influence²².

Second, Maximinus' education and quality were comparable to Augustine's. It is hardly necessary to introduce the latter – the most significant and long-lasting Christian author of the Latin-speaking world of Late Antiquity. Augustine's writings have been transcribed, translated, and analyzed for 16 centuries, and in the last 5 years alone more than 8 monographs, of his research work, have been published. Of course, we are only talking about the Christian context here, since the debate does not include references to pagan texts, and then we cannot compare the knowledge of Maximinus with that of Augustine, the latter being a long-time teacher²³.

Third, Maximinus' self-confidence clearly

¹⁸ More about the theological part of the dispute in *Sumruld* 1994.

¹⁹ This argument is used by Ambrosius in 381 against Palladius of Ratiaria in a very different but in a way quite common situation, see *Gerdzhikova* 2021.

²⁰ For Augustine theology see *Barnes* 2023, *Gerber* 2012.

²¹ *Barnes* 2023.

²² Discussing the authorship of the *Anonymi in Iob commentarius* Parvis comments on Maslin's tendency to assign every text with no certain author but of Arian origin to Maximinus. *Parvis* 2020: 237–238, *Meslin* 1967: 223.

²³ In comparison we can provide Barnes's observation that for more than 100 years Augustine's texts to Maximins had not been published and analyzed as part of the Trinitarian theology of Augustine. For a really long time they have been treated as unimportant. *Barnes* 1995: 248.

shows the position he held in society and among the other bishops. Augustine's authority and his place among the foremost theologians of his time were well-known in Christendom. Maximinus, however, is still neglected and underestimated. Although some decades after the dispute the winning of Maximinus had to be 'changed' and a story about his lost from the

Catholic bishop Ceresitus was made²⁴.

In conclusion we can say with certainty that the dispute between Maximinus the Arian and Augustine of Hippo Regius is valuable source not only for the fifth-century Arian theology but for the authority of the Arian bishops, their education and their place in the establishment of church structure and Christian dogma.



Figure 1. Figure1 Remains of Late antique Durostorum
Фигура 1. Останки от късноантичния Дуросторум



Figure 2. Reconstruction of Hippo Regius, by Jean-Claude Golvin
Фигура 2. Реконструкция на Ипон Реги, направена от Жан-Клод Голвин
Source: <https://jeanclaudegolvin.com/en/project/north-africa/afrique-algerie-annaba-hippone-quartier-chretien-jc-golvin-2/>



Figure 3. Charles-André van Loo, Augustine arguing with Donatists, 18th c.
Фигура 3. Дебат на Августин с Донатисти, XVIII в., автор Шарл-Андре ван Лу
Source: Wikimedia, PD-Old-100.

²⁴ Whelan 2018.

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In Augustinum: Максимин, епископ на Дуросторум, и дебатът му с Августин

Златомира Герджикова

Публикацията представя един ден от живота на Максимин, епископ на Дуросторум. Целта ни е чрез съпоставяне на Максимин и Августин Блажени и анализиране на достигналата до нас информация за проведения между тях дебат да допълним образа на арианските епископи от Балканите и тяхното значение в процеса на формиране на Църквата като институция през IV и V в.

