

# TESIS DOCTORAL



**UCAM**

UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA  
DE MURCIA

## ESCUELA INTERNACIONAL DE DOCTORADO

*Programa de Doctorado Ciencias Sociales*

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*Autor:*

Roberto Montefinese

*Directores:*

Dr. D. Miguel Pablo Sancho Gómez

*Murcia, mes de 2025*



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Development and Influence between Paganism and Christianity  
from 380 to 600 AD

*Autor:*

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*Directores:*

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*Murcia, mes de 2025*





## AUTORIZACIÓN DEL DIRECTOR DE LA TESIS PARA SU PRESENTACIÓN

El Dr. D. Miguel Pablo Sancho Gómez como Director<sup>(1)</sup> de la Tesis Doctoral titulada “Development and Influence between Paganism and Christianity from 300 to 600 AD” realizada por D. Roberto Montefinese en el Programa de Doctorado de Ciencias Sociales, **autoriza su presentación a trámite** dado que reúne las condiciones necesarias para su defensa.

Lo que firmo, para dar cumplimiento al, Real Decreto 99/2011, de 28 de enero, modificado por el R.D. 576/2023, de 4 de julio, por el que se regulan las enseñanzas oficiales de doctorado.

En Murcia a 2 de septiembre de 2025.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Miguel', is written over a horizontal line.

*(1) Si la Tesis está dirigida por más de un Director tienen que constar y firmar ambos.*



## ABSTRACT

This research project explores the complex dynamics of interaction, conflict, and transformation between Paganism and Christianity from 380 to 600 AD, a critical period in Late Antiquity marked by religious, cultural, and political shifts. The transition inaugurated by the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 AD, which established Nicene Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, initiated a prolonged and uneven process of Christianization throughout imperial territories.

In this research project, particular emphasis is placed on the fact that this transformation was neither uniform nor immediate. Pagan cults continued to be practiced in various regions, especially in rural environments, well into the sixth century. The analysis has been conducted across different provinces of the Roman Empire to highlight regional variations and the socio-religious factors that conditioned the pace and form of Christian expansion.

A central objective of the project is to investigate not only the resistance of pagan traditions but also the internal plurality of Christian expression during this era. Far from being monolithic, late antique Christianity manifested itself in diverse and sometimes conflicting theological, liturgical, and social forms, leading many scholars to speak of "Christianities" rather than a single unified entity.

This research also considers the significant role played by rhetoric, law, and violence in the Christian construction of the category of "pagan" and the discursive strategies used by ecclesiastical writers to differentiate Christianity from its religious competitors. By examining doctrinal controversies, ecclesiastical politics, and local practices, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of the religious transformation of the empire.

Methodologically, this research project adopts a multidisciplinary approach, integrating literary sources with archaeological and archaeometric data. This allows for a richer, more nuanced reconstruction of religious life in Late Antiquity. Special attention is given to the interplay between urban religious policy and rural religious persistence, acknowledging that both environments contributed to the evolving religious landscape.

The original contribution of this study lies in its integrative analysis of how Christianity and Paganism influenced each other in both ideological and practical terms, across various provinces of the Roman Empire. By contextualizing doctrinal disputes and local religious continuities within broader imperial dynamics, this project seeks to offer new insights into the gradual transformation of religious identities and practices from the classical to the medieval world.

## RESUMEN

Este proyecto de investigación analiza las complejas dinámicas de interacción, conflicto y transformación entre el Paganismo y el Cristianismo desde el año 380 hasta el 600 d.C., un período clave de la Antigüedad Tardía caracterizado por profundos cambios religiosos, culturales y políticos. La transición iniciada con el Edicto de Tesalónica en el 380 d.C., que estableció el cristianismo niceno como religión oficial del Imperio romano, dio lugar a un proceso prolongado y desigual de cristianización en los territorios imperiales.

En este proyecto de investigación, se subraya especialmente que esta transformación no fue ni uniforme ni inmediata. Los cultos paganos continuaron practicándose en varias regiones, especialmente en los entornos rurales, hasta bien entrado el siglo VI. El análisis se ha realizado en diversas provincias del Imperio romano para poner de relieve las variaciones regionales y los factores socio-religiosos que condicionaron el ritmo y la forma de expansión del cristianismo.

Uno de los objetivos centrales del estudio es investigar no solo la persistencia de las tradiciones paganas, sino también la pluralidad interna del cristianismo durante este periodo. Lejos de ser una realidad homogénea, el cristianismo tardoantiguo se manifestó en formas diversas y, a veces, conflictivas desde el punto de vista teológico, litúrgico y social; por ello, muchos estudiosos prefieren hablar de "cristianismos" en plural.

Este proyecto de investigación también considera el papel fundamental de la retórica, la legislación y la violencia en la construcción cristiana de la categoría de "pagano", así como las estrategias discursivas utilizadas por los escritores eclesiásticos para diferenciar el cristianismo de sus competidores religiosos. A

través del estudio de las controversias doctrinales, las políticas eclesiásticas y las prácticas locales, la investigación ofrece una comprensión global de la transformación religiosa del imperio.

Metodológicamente, este proyecto adopta un enfoque multidisciplinario que integra fuentes literarias con datos arqueológicos y arqueométricos, lo cual permite una reconstrucción más rica y matizada de la vida religiosa en la Antigüedad Tardía. Se presta especial atención a la interacción entre las políticas religiosas urbanas y la persistencia de prácticas rurales, reconociendo que ambos contextos contribuyeron a configurar el panorama religioso de la época.

La contribución original de este estudio consiste en un análisis integrador de cómo el cristianismo y el paganismo se influyeron mutuamente, tanto en el plano ideológico como en el práctico, en diversas provincias del Imperio romano. Al contextualizar las disputas doctrinales y las continuidades religiosas locales dentro de las dinámicas imperiales más amplias, este proyecto pretende ofrecer nuevas perspectivas sobre la transformación gradual de las identidades y prácticas religiosas desde el mundo clásico hasta el medieval.

### **KEYWORDS**

Late Antiquity, Religious Transformation, Paganism-Christianity Interaction, Roman Empire

### **PALABRAS CLAVE**

Antigüedad tardía, Transformación religiosa, Interacción entre paganismo y cristianismo, Imperio romano



## **AGRADECIMIENTOS**

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Miguel Pablo Sancho Gomez, who has always supported my interests and natural inclinations in research. Through his invaluable guidance, he has helped me grow tremendously and improve as both a researcher and historian. With his kindness and availability, he has enabled me to express my abilities to their fullest, always encouraging me to give my best in every situation. I thank him with deep affection.

I thank my family, Angela, and my little Alice, for the support and help they have given me through every moment of difficulty, encouraging me to never give up. Finally, but certainly not least, I thank God, who keeps the flame of knowledge alive within me, inspiring me to remain always curious and interested in investigating the deeper and spiritual aspects of life.







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**SIGLAS Y ABREVIATURAS**

*Cod. Theod.*, Codex Theodosianus

Lactant, Lactantius

De mort. pers., De mortibus persecutorum

Euseb., Eusebius

*Hist. eccl.*, Historia ecclesiastica

*Vit. Const.*, Vita Constantini

*HA*, *Historia Augusta*

Zos., Zosimus

Eutr., Eutropius

*Hist. Aug.*, *Historia Augusta*

*Aurel.*, Aureliano

Cyp., Cyprian

*Ep.*, Epistle

Pac., Pacianus

*De paen.*, De paenitentia

*Hist. Franc.*, *Historia Francorum*

Hom., Homer

*Od.*, *Odyssey*

Plin., Pliny

*HN*, *Naturalis Historia*

Amm. Marc., Ammianus Marcellinus

Apul. Apuleius

*Apol.*, *Apologia*

Philostr., Philostratus

*Her. Heroicus*

*Praep. Evang, Praeparatio Evangelica*

*Plin., Pliny*

*Ep., Epistulae*

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# I – INTRODUCTION

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## I - INTRODUCTION

This research project aims to analyse the dynamics of development and influence between paganism and Christianity between 380 and 600 a.C. This period is called Late Antiquity. It is the transition from the Classical world to the Middle Ages, generally spanning from the Third to the Seventh Centuries. Why is this period so important? Because changes and transformations took place in society, politics and even religion<sup>1</sup>. In the historical period analysed, the Christianisation of the Roman Empire began. This phenomenon will have repercussions on the populations of subsequent periods, right up to the present day.

The Roman Empire underwent far-reaching political, social and cultural transformations. Significant events include the division of the Roman Empire into two parts, the growing influence of barbarian populations, economic transformations and the rise of Christianity as the dominant religion.

From a religious point of view, this period was characterised by an interesting intersection between traditional paganism, which had deep roots in ancient Roman religiosity, and emerging Christianity, which was gaining more and more followers and influence. This religious convergence had significant consequences for European and world history. Paganism and Christianity were two dominant forces in the religious landscape of Late Antiquity. While paganism was historically rooted in the identity and institutions of the Roman Empire, Christianity, despite being a relatively young religion, was growing rapidly in popularity and influence. The study of the relationship between these two religious traditions is fundamental to understanding the cultural, social and political dynamics of this crucial period in Western history. The relations between paganism and Christianity during Late Antiquity were not simple or unidirectional. On the contrary, they were characterised by a complex interplay of conflict, adaptation and syncretism.

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, A.D. (2000). *Pagans & Christians in Late Antiquity. A Sourcebook*. Routledge. London and New York, p. 1

## 1.1. STATE OF THE ART

The relationship between paganism and Christianity during Late Antiquity reflects a period of profound transformation in the religious identities of the peoples of the Roman world and beyond. While paganism represented the oldest and most deeply rooted religious traditions, emerging Christianity brought with it new doctrines, practices and institutions. Studying how these two traditions interacted allows us to better understand how people of the time conceived the sacred, and what significance they attributed to them for social life. Moreover, the analysis of the relationship between paganism and Christianity allows us to explore the complexities of religious identities in a context of religious pluralism. Many individuals and communities were faced with difficult choices regarding their religious affiliation and worship practices. At the same time, religious syncretism, that is, the fusion of elements of the two traditions, was widespread and testifies to the fluidity of religious identities in this era of change. The relationship between paganism and Christianity is not limited to the religious realm, but also has significant implications for the culture and society of the time. The adoption of Christianity as the state religion in the Roman Empire, for instance, led to profound changes in political institutions, art, literature and social practices. At the same time, paganism continued to exert an influence, both as a living religious tradition and as a source of inspiration for the thought and culture of the time. The study of the relationship between paganism and Christianity is not only of academic interest, but also has important implications for understanding the history and identity of modern societies. The religious dynamics of Late Antiquity have left an indelible imprint on subsequent civilisations, influencing the religious, cultural and political traditions of the Western world to the present day. Understanding the historical roots of these traditions and their interactions with each other helps us to better interpret the contemporary world and manage the multicultural and interreligious challenges of our time.

### 1.1.1. Research approaches

Over the years, scholars have approached the topic of the relationship between paganism and Christianity during Late Antiquity from different perspectives. Some have focused on the analysis of primary sources, such as

religious texts, the works of historians and archaeological evidence, to better understand the practices and beliefs of the two traditions. Others have adopted a more theoretical and conceptual approach, attempting to explain the dynamics of conflict and adaptation between paganism and Christianity through sociological, anthropological or psychological models.

However, despite the vast existing literature, some interpretative divergences and gaps in our knowledge persist. Some aspects of the relations between paganism and Christianity may have been overlooked or underestimated, while others may require more in-depth analysis. Since it is a very broad subject, requiring analysis on several aspects, including theological, historical, anthropological and even psychological, it is obviously impossible to give a picture at the same time that is exhaustive and encompasses all these aspects. All research involving people, ways of life, beliefs, etc. has an inherent difficulty to be studied, which is always very high.

To get an overall idea of the topic, let us summarise the various approaches that have been taken by scholars.

- Historical Approach: historians have examined the relationship between paganism and Christianity through the analysis of primary sources such as religious writings, legal documents, inscriptions and archaeological finds. This approach focuses on the specific historical context of Late Antiquity and attempts to reconstruct the religious and social dynamics of the time<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Cameron, A. (1993). Christianity and the rhetoric of empire: The development of Christian discourse. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 83, pp.107-108; Drake, H. A. (2002). Constantine and the bishops: The politics of intolerance. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 92, pp.285-286; Fox, R. L. (1986). Pagans and Christians. *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 9(3), 396-397; MacMullen, R. (1981). Paganism in the Roman Empire. *Yale University Press*; Humphries, M. (2018). Christianity and Paganism in the Roman Empire, 250-450 CE. In *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*, pp. 61–80. John Wiley & Sons; Brenot, M. (2001). Les conflits de l'antiquité tardive entre christianisme et paganisme: Points de vue historiographiques. *Revue des études augustiniennes*, 47(1), pp. 121-140; Smith, M. S. (2007). *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook*. Routledge; Barnes, T. D. (2011). *Constantine: Dynasty, Religion and Power in the Later Roman Empire*. Wiley-Blackwell.

- Theological approach: some scholars have examined the relationship between paganism and Christianity through a theological lens, examining the doctrines and beliefs of the two traditions and analysing how they compared and influenced each other. This approach can lead to a deeper understanding of the theological and doctrinal issues at stake during this period of religious transition<sup>3</sup>.
- Anthropological and sociological approach: some scholars have adopted an anthropological or sociological approach to examine the relationship between paganism and Christianity by examining the religious practices, rituals, beliefs and social identities of the communities involved. This approach helps to understand how people of the time conceived and practised their religion and how religious identities were integrated into the wider society<sup>4</sup>.

Some limitations in these searches might be the following. Many previous researches have emphasised Christianity as the 'winning' faith, while they have underestimated or neglected paganism, regarding it as an archaic tradition destined to disappear<sup>5</sup>. This binary narrative fails to take into account the complexity of the relationships between the two religious traditions and the

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive studies see: Corrigan, K. (2009). *Evagrius and Gregory: Mind, Soul and Body in the fourth Century* (1st ed.). Routledge; Holt, L. (2002). *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order: Concepts and Images of Authority in Paganism and Early Christianity before the Age of Cyprian*. By Allen Brent. *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae*, 45. Leiden: Brill, 1999. *Church History*, 71(4), 867–870; Humfress, Caroline (2007), *Orthodoxy and the Courts in Late Antiquity*. Oxford; Rapp, Claudia (2005). *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*. Oakland, CA.

<sup>4</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Gassman, Mattias P. (2020), *Worshippers of the Gods: Debating Paganism in the Fourth-Century Roman West*. New York; Kahlos, Maijastina (2020). *Religious Dissent in Late Antiquity, 350-450*, Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity. New York; Wisniewski, Robert (2020). *Christian Divination in Late Antiquity*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam. University Press; Brown, P. (1982). *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*. University of California Press. Berkeley & Los Angeles.

<sup>5</sup> Some authors, including Giancarlo Rinaldi, have tried to revive surviving testimonies left by pagan authors. See: Rinaldi, Giancarlo (1998). *La Bibbia dei pagani, 2 voll.* EDB. Bologna; Cook, J. G. (2015). Research on the Bible among the Pagans since Rinaldi's *Biblia Gentium*. In *Henoch*, vol.37, Issue 2, pp.167-190.

nuances present in the process of religious transformation in Late Antiquity. Other limitations include analyses conducted only on certain geographical areas. For instance, while much research focuses on the Roman Empire, other geographical contexts, such as North Africa, the Middle East or Northern Europe, may have been overlooked. Much research has focused on specific geographical areas or limited time periods, thus neglecting the diversity and variety of religious experiences within the Roman world and beyond. Examining the relations between paganism and Christianity in a broader context can lead to a richer and more multifaceted understanding of the religious and cultural dynamics of Late Antiquity. For instance, the accounts of minority Christian communities or non-Roman pagan groups, such as the Egyptians, Celts or Germans, may not have been sufficiently considered. Examining the testimonies of these marginalised realities can provide a more complete and diverse view of the religious dynamics of the time.

In order to overcome the limitations of previous research, it is necessary to adopt new approaches that lead to an integration of the knowledge acquired in the various fields. Addressing the gaps and limitations of previous research requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines conceptual and methodological tools from different disciplines, including history, archaeology, archaeometry, theology and sociology. This allows scholars to gain a more complete and accurate understanding of the relationship between paganism and Christianity during Late Antiquity. The use of archaeological sources can greatly enrich our understanding of the religious practices, rituals and beliefs of communities at the time. The analysis of archaeological finds such as temples, altars, inscriptions and religious objects can provide valuable information on daily religious life and the interactions between paganism and Christianity. For instance, interdisciplinarity may involve history, archaeology, theology, sociology, anthropology and other relevant disciplines. Historical analysis can provide a temporal and contextual framework for understanding religious dynamics, while archaeology can offer material evidence of religious practices and beliefs. Similarly, theology can examine the doctrines and beliefs of the two traditions, while sociology and anthropology can explore religious practices and social interactions. An interdisciplinary approach can enable one to deal more effectively with methodological and interpretative challenges in dealing with heterogeneous and complex sources, encouraging critical evaluation of the available evidence and in-depth reflection on the

implications of one's conclusions. Finally, the interdisciplinary approach can encourage dialogue and collaboration between scholars from different disciplines, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, perspectives and methodologies. This can lead to greater richness and complexity in the analysis of the relations between paganism and Christianity and foster a more integrated understanding of the phenomenon.

## 1.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of this project is to study the dynamics of development and influence between paganism and Christianity from 380 to 600 AD. The beginning of this period is very important, because the Christianisation of the empire began in a more intense way. But to consider only the dynamics of the development of Christianity would be somewhat reductive and misleading. We know that paganism did not suddenly disappear and that this did not happen homogeneously in the territories of the empire. The old Roman rites were still followed for a long time. The main objective, therefore, is to analyse the complex interreligious dynamics between paganism and Christianity in Late Antiquity, with a focus on the interactions, adaptations and conflicts between these two religious traditions. The aim is to examine how these dynamics influenced the religious, cultural and social life of the communities involved, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the religious history of the time. Another objective of the research is to explore the religious transformations that took place during this period of transition and change. We aim to investigate how the transition from paganism to Christianity influenced religious beliefs, practices and institutions, as well as the individual and collective identities of the people involved. We also aim to understand how paganism and Christianity interacted and influenced each other over time. Finally, an attempt will be made to assess the long-term impact of these interreligious dynamics on the subsequent history of the Western world and beyond. This may include the analysis of the cultural, social and religious legacies of Late Antiquity and their role in the formation of modern societies.

### 1.2.1. Methodology

An interdisciplinary approach was adopted for the research, integrating conceptual and methodological tools from different disciplines, including history, archaeology, archaeometry, theology, sociology and anthropology. This approach made it possible to examine the phenomenon of relations between paganism and Christianity from different perspectives and through multiple sources, thus contributing to a more comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the subject. Of fundamental importance was the critical analysis of primary and secondary sources relevant to the topic, assessing their reliability and authenticity. Particular attention was given to evidence from the historical period under consideration, including religious texts, legal documents, inscriptions, archaeological finds and works by modern scholars, in order to accurately reconstruct the interreligious dynamics of Late Antiquity. The research considered regional and temporal dynamics in the relations between paganism and Christianity. Particular importance was given to the geographical and chronological diversity of the available sources and evidence, in order to obtain a more complete and contextualised view of the phenomenon. One aspect of the research of great importance was comparative analysis. This aspect made it possible to compare the interreligious dynamics between paganism and Christianity in different geographical regions and time periods during Late Antiquity. This approach made it possible to identify both similarities and differences in the religious practices, beliefs and attitudes of the communities involved. Interactions between paganism and Christianity were examined in various areas of the Roman Empire and beyond, including urban and rural settings, central and peripheral regions, as well as border areas where the two religious traditions overlapped and influenced each other in unique ways.

### 1.3. THESIS STRUCTURE

This doctoral dissertation presents a comprehensive examination of the complex relationship between Christianity and paganism in the late Roman Empire, focusing on the period from 380 to 600 CE. The thesis is structured to provide a systematic and in-depth analysis of this multifaceted subject matter across various regions of the Empire.

Chapter I serves as an introduction, delineating the scope and objectives of the study. It begins with a thorough review of the state of the art, discussing various research approaches that have shaped the field. The chapter then outlines the specific research objectives and the methodology employed in this study, providing a clear roadmap for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter II offers a critical evaluation of the historical sources pertinent to the period under investigation. It meticulously assesses both literary and documentary sources from 300 to 600 AD, with specific sections dedicated to the Third, Fourth, and Fifth-Sixth Centuries. This chapter also examines key secondary sources, particularly those focusing on Late Antiquity and the interplay between paganism and Christianity, establishing a solid foundation for the analytical chapters that follow.

The third chapter embarks on an extensive exploration of the Christianization process within the Roman Empire. It begins with a focused discussion on Constantine's role and his Christian legislation, followed by an examination of Theodosius I's reign, including the pivotal Edict of Thessalonica (380 AD). The chapter then delves into the Codex Theodosianus, analyzing its anti-pagan legislation, and concludes with a section on Christianization in the Eastern Empire.

Chapter IV provides a nuanced discussion of paganism, tracing the evolution of the concept and examining the philosophical debates between pagan philosophers and Christian apologists. This chapter is crucial in contextualizing the subsequent comparative analyses, as it illuminates the shifting perceptions and definitions of non-Christian religious practices during this transformative period.

Chapters V and VI form the core of the thesis, presenting detailed comparative studies of paganism and Christianity in the Western and Eastern provinces of the empire, respectively. Chapter V covers Italy, Roman Britain, and the Iberian Peninsula, examining topics such as the Christianization of the Roman elite, religious practices in Roman Britain, and pagan survivals in Spain. Chapter

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VI focuses on Palestine, Egypt, and Africa, exploring subjects like the role of synagogues in Late Antiquity, Egyptian cults, and the dynamics between paganism and Christianity in these regions.

The final chapters, VII and VIII, synthesize the findings from the preceding analyses, offering overarching conclusions about the complex religious landscape of the late Roman world. These chapters reflect on the long-term implications of this religious transformation, its impact on social, political, and cultural spheres, and its enduring influence on the subsequent historical trajectory of Europe and the Mediterranean world.

This comprehensive structure allows for a sophisticated exploration of regional variations in religious practices, beliefs, and the dynamics of religious change across the Roman Empire during this critical period of transition.



## **II – HISTORICAL SOURCES**

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## II - HISTORICAL SOURCES

Any historical research should start with a consideration of the primary sources related to the area of investigation. The use of sources requires a critical judgment of their degree of reliability. For teaching convenience, historical sources can be divided into two categories: literary sources and documentary sources. Literary sources are the work of collecting, elaborating and reflecting that ancient authors did on the events they experienced. Their knowledge of events may be direct or indirect. It is direct when, in the narration of events, there is no use of other sources. It is indirect when it is mediated by other sources. Documentary sources can be classified into: monumental remains, iconographies, inscriptions, papyri, coins, etc. These types of sources, although in most cases they are very partial and incomplete, allow us to have portraits of past daily life and real situations.

### 2.1. LITERARY AND DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

Useful sources for the history of early Christianity, we can consider literary sources in the genre of *chronicles*, and *ecclesiastical histories*.

*Chronicles* are very limited listings of events. They usually paralleled data from biblical history with data from profane Greco-Roman history, sometimes also with references to the events of eastern peoples. These works had an apologetic nature. However, the Christian chronicles have a great importance, namely the broadening of the historiographical perspective. Indeed, classical historiography was more limited to Greece and Rome. In contrast, Christian chroniclers included in their horizon of interest those peoples who were heirs to a millenary civilisation and would have been considered "barbarians"<sup>6</sup>. For the historical period

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<sup>6</sup> Rinaldi, G. (2019). *Cristianesimi nell'antichità. Sviluppi storici e contesti geografici (Secoli I- VIII)*. GBU. Chieti. pp. 18-19. Further details in: Croke, B. (1983). The origin of the

considered in this research, there is the Chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea, dated 303 AD. The work was divided into two parts: the first included compendia of the history of ancient peoples, including the Chaldeans, Hebrews, Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. In the second, the events of biblical and Christian history were paralleled with those of profane history. The original Greek of the work is lost. We have an Armenian translation dated to the Sixth Century. The second part of the work is preserved in a Latin translation edited by Jerome, who expanded the text by inserting further information from Roman history and extending the narrative until the death of Emperor Valens in 378<sup>7</sup>.

In the Byzantine East, the Chronography of John Malàla is worth mentioning, which collects information up to 563. The work, consisting of eighteen volumes, took information mainly from Julius Africanus<sup>8</sup>. In the Latin West, Quintus Julius Illarianus, wrote his chronicle in 397 entitled *De cursu temporum*. In general, Latin authors attempted to complete the Chronicle of Eusebius-Girolamus. Among the

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Christian world Chronicle. In B. Croke and A.M. Emmett (Eds.), *History and historians in late Antiquity*. Sydney, pp. 116-131; Inglebert, H. (2004). Les chrétiens et l'histoire universelle dans l'Antiquité tardive. In Jeanjean, B. & Lançon, B., *Saint Jérôme, Chronique: continuation de la Chronique d'Eusèbe, années 326-378. Suivie de quatre études sur Les Chroniques et chronographies dans l'Antiquité tardive (IVe-VIe siècles)*. Presses universitaires Rennes, pp. 123-136; Vessey, M. (2010). Reinventing history: Jerome's *Chronicle* and the writing of the post-Roman West. In S. McGill & C. Sogno (Eds.), *From the Tetrarchs to the Theodosians. Later Roman History and culture, 284-450 CE*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 265-289.

<sup>7</sup> Prieur, J.M. (2005). Saint Jérôme, Chronique. Continuation de la Chronique d'Eusèbe années 326-378. Suivie de quatre études sur les Chroniques et chronographies dans l'Antiquité tardive (IVe-VIe siècles). Texte latin de l'édition de R. Helm, traduction française inédite, notes et commentaires par Benoît Jeanjean et Bertrand Lançon, (Collection « Histoire ») Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes 2004. In *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*, 85e année n°3, Juillet-Septembre 2005. pp. 477-478.

<sup>8</sup> Whitby, M. (1988). Malalas. The chronicle of John Malalas. Trans. E. Jeffreys and others. (Byzantina Australiensia, 4.) Sydney: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies (with Melbourne University), 1986. In *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*. pp. 108, 270-271.

most important authors are Sulpicius Severus, Prosperus of Aquitaine, Cassiodorus and Marcellinus Comes and Isidore of Seville<sup>9</sup>.

Ecclesiastical histories are important because they give importance to the affairs of people from lower social classes. Classical historiography has always given priority importance to illustrious figures. Christian historiography has authentic and innovative characteristics: its protagonists are not necessarily emperors or the rich, but often those who distinguished themselves for their faith. In general, we can recall the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius of Caesarea, which recounts the period from the foundation of the Church to Constantine's victory over Licinius in 324<sup>10</sup>. As a continuation of Eusebius' work, we have the *Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates Scholasticus and the works of Sozomenus and Theodoret of Cyrus. In addition to the works that are part of the historical genre, there is the literary production of the ancient Christians that is an important source of information.

Documentary sources are very important to complement literary sources<sup>11</sup>. Christian archaeology through the study of the remains of buildings and objects of a cultic nature belonging to Christians, in their architectural, artistic and symbolic aspect, has allowed us to make notable steps forward in the history of Christianity. For this purpose, the studies of the catacombs and sarcophagi are worth mentioning. The father of Christian archeology is Giovan Battista De Rossi, scholar and explorer, who dedicated three volumes to the Roman catacombs<sup>12</sup>. Other important documentary sources are the papyri. They are divided into literary and

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<sup>9</sup> On these authors see: Sulpice Sévère. *Chroniques*. Ed. G. de Senneville-Grave (SC 441, 1999); Theodorvs Mommsen (ed.) (*Monum. Germ. Hist.*, Auct. Ant. IX 1). Berolini 1892; Patrologiae cursus completes (PL 69, 1213-1250); Humphries, M. (1996), Chronicle and chronology: Prosper of Aquitaine, his methods and the development of early medieval chronography. In *Early Medieval Europe* 5 (2), pp.155-175

<sup>10</sup> Further details see: Hollerich, M.J. (2021). *Making Christian History. Eusebius of Caesarea and His Readers*. University of California Press.

<sup>11</sup> A general work on Christian epigraphy: Mazzoleni, D. (2002). *Epigrafi del Mondo Cristiano antico*. Lateran University Press. Roma, pp. 11-20.

<sup>12</sup> The title of his work is: *La Roma sotterranea Cristiana descritta e illustrata*, Roma 1864-1877.

documentary. Literary Papyri are the finds that give us, partially or entirely, works of ancient authors. Documentary papyri are transcriptions of contracts, receipts, archival records, etc. Finally, other important documentary sources are inscriptions and coins.

## 2.2. LITERARY AND DOCUMENTARY SOURCES FROM 300 TO 600 AD

In this section we will consider the primary historical sources useful for the specific historical period of this research. The period under study goes from 380 to 600 AD. These Centuries are very important, full of events and changes at a social, economic, political and religious level. The starting point of our research is the Third Century, a period characterized by the presence of the emperor Constantine. The age of Constantine acts as a union between the history of the Roman Empire and that of the Christian Roman Empire.

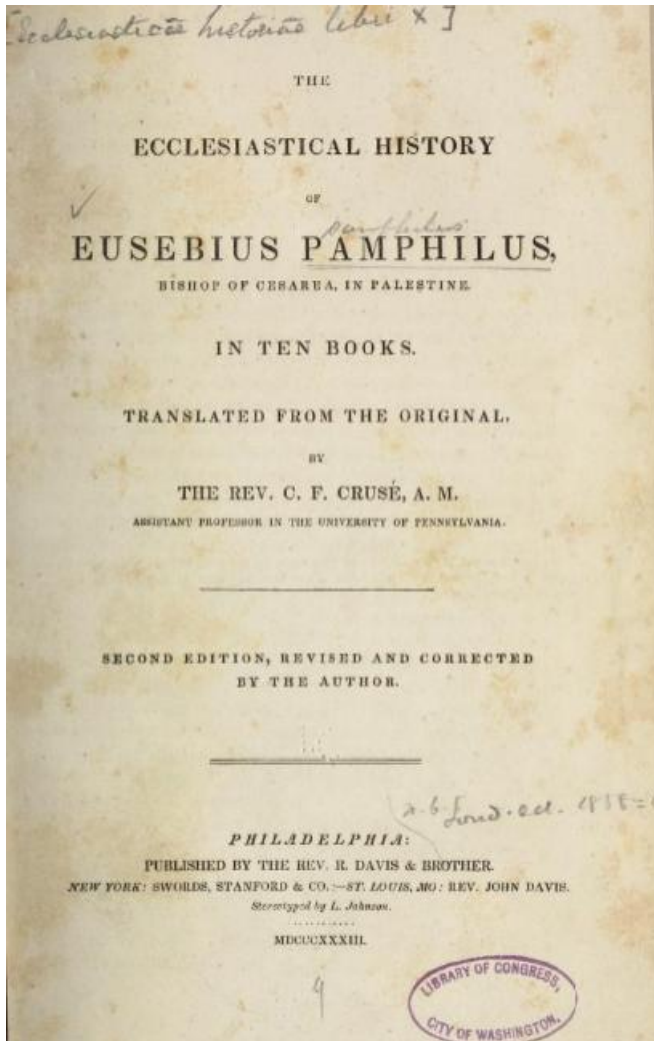
### 2.2.1. Third Century

The primary sources for the knowledge of Constantine and his era are the tenth and last book of *Ecclesiastical History* by Eusebius of Caesarea (Fig.1) and the very important work, by the same author, *Life of Constantine*<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Further details see: MacMullen, R. (1969). *Constantine*, New York; Mazzarino, S. (1974). *Antico, Tardoantico ed età costantiniana*. Città di Castello; Pohlsander H.A. (2004). *The emperor Constantine*. Routledge. London and New York; Odahl C.M. (2010). *Constantine and the Christian Empire*. Routledge. London and New York; Marcone, A. (2013). *Costantino il Grande*. Laterza. Bari; the digitised Greek text of *Ecclesiastical History* can be accessed at the Perseus Digital Library, curated by Tufts University. (Access 31-01-2024) <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a2008.01.0640>

Figure 1. Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius of Caesarea. English edition of 1833. From Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcmassbookdig.ecclesiastic00euse/?sp=9&r=-1.24,0.03,3.479,1.585,0> (Accessed 07-02-2024)



Another important historical source for this period is Lactantius with his work *De mortibus persecutorum*. In this work, albeit brief, the persecutions inflicted on Christians since the time of Nero are recounted<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, it is necessary to

<sup>14</sup> Parts of the original works can be found on the site: <https://thelatinlibrary.com/lactantius/divinst1.shtml> (Access 30-01-2024); Another important site on Christian historical sources is: <https://ccel.org/> (Access 30-01-2024).

consider the documentary sources including: the arch of Constantine and the coins of that period. The latter, with the changing symbols they have, allow us to outline the evolution of the emperor's religious thought in a pro-Christian direction. The historical sources describing some aspects of Constantine's religious development are the Latin Panegyrics<sup>15</sup>. Other important information comes from pagan sources, Eunapius of Sardis and Zosimus, who give a negative account of Constantine, even accusing him of causing the decline of the Roman empire. The *History* of Eunapius came fragmentary, and was used extensively by Zosimus<sup>16</sup>. Considering Constantine's relations with the pagan world, it should be emphasised that he wanted to control rather than repress traditional cults, which he viewed with scepticism. In 315, for the *decennalia* of his reign, he refused to go up to the Campidoglio to celebrate sacrifices to the gods. It is worth mentioning the two edicts of 319-320, the purpose of which was to suppress haruspicin in private homes<sup>17</sup>. On Constantinian coins, after 310, there is the *Sol invictus*. Pagan images disappeared in the constantinian territories around 322. In 315, when the medallion of Ticinum was coined, on the occasion of the emperor's tenth anniversary, the *Chrismon* appeared embossed on the emperor's helmet<sup>18</sup>. At the time of Constantine, the Roman world was predominantly pagan. Especially in the West, while in parts of the East, including Asia and Syria, the Christian religion was much more widespread among the population. During this period, however, the transformation of the area began to be evident with the appearance of Christian cult buildings. Numerous basilicas were built, places suitable for liturgical gatherings.

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<sup>15</sup> Texts can be consulted on the website. The Digital library of late-antique Latin texts - digilibLT - is the digital library of Latin prose texts of secular content dating back to late antiquity (II to VII century AD). <https://digiliblt.uniupo.it/xtf/view?docId=dlt000386/dlt000386.xml;query=Panegyrici%20latini;brand=default> (Access 31-01-2024).

<sup>16</sup> Rinaldi, G. (2019). *Cristianesimi nell'antichità. Sviluppi storici e contesti geografici (Secoli I- VIII)*. GBU. Chieti. p. 646.

<sup>17</sup> *Cod. Theod.* IX 16,1; XVI 10,1.

<sup>18</sup> Further details on Constantinian coinage see: Maurice, J. (1908-1912). *Numismatique constantinienne*, 3 voll., Paris E. Leroux.

In the Constantinian era, in the eastern territory of the empire, Eustathius of Antioch was a prominent figure of antiochian christianity. From what remains of his works, one can see a polemic against Arianism and allegorism that characterised Origen's exegetical method. In his treatise, *On the Soul*, he addressed the issue of the Arian's Christology<sup>19</sup>. In the area of eastern Syria, James of Nisbis, who will be important for hagiographic legend, was active. In addition to him, there was also the pagan philosopher Iamblichus. The school of Iamblichus, which was inspired by the master Plato, formed figures who engaged on the pagan front in the last resistance to christianity.

During the time of Constantine, Africa was troubled by the Donatist schism. In the course of this religious controversy, Constantine saw his function as one entrusted by God to ensure the concord of the church<sup>20</sup>. The Donatist movement is to be linked to the rigorist and intransigent soul of African Christianity. In addition, there was a conservative ecclesiology that conceived of the church as a community of the pure, circumscribed and estranged from the rest of the world. Another aspect that pitted Donatist Africa against Rome was baptism. For the Donatists, baptism also had to be done for heretics seeking admission into the church. For Rome, the character of the sacrament was unique and unrepeatable.

During the last years of Constantine's reign, Christianity also spread to Georgia. This name, of Byzantine origin, refers to the region between the Caucasus mountain range and Armenia. In ancient times it was called Iberia, or caucasian Iberia so as not to confuse it with Spain. The historical source that tells us about this phenomenon is Rufinus, who learned the story of evangelization from the king of Iberia Bacurius (394-421). Georgian Christianity was very close to Armenian Christianity. Subsequently it conformed to Byzantine orthodoxy.

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<sup>19</sup> Cartwright, S. (2015). Body and Soul. *The Theological Anthropology of Eustathius of Antioch*. Oxford. Early Christian Studies, pp. 75-139

<sup>20</sup> Fernández Ubiña, J. (2013). The Donatist Conflict as Seen by Constantine and the Bishops. In A. Fear, J. Fernández Ubiña & M. Mar (Eds.), *The Role of the Bishop in Late Antiquity. Conflict and Compromise*. Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 14-31

### 2.2.2. Fourth Century

The fourth Century was very important for Christianity<sup>21</sup>. From being a persecuted minority, it became the state religion. The imperial Church was not the same as the first Christian communities, which we can read about in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. The alliance between empire and Church brought about a change in religious legislation and the secularisation of the Church. In this period there is the struggle between Arianism and Orthodoxy. For the fourth Century we have plenty of historical sources. Pagan authors include: Ammianus Marcellinus, Anonymous Valesianus, Eunapius of Sardis and Zosimus. Ammianus Marcellinus wrote his *Res gestae* in Latin, with which he continued Tacitus' *Annals*. The work called Anonimo Valesiano is a short historical treatise named after its first editor, Henry Valois, who published it in 1636 as an appendix to the *Histories* of Ammianus Marcellinus<sup>22</sup>. Eunapius of Sardis (c. 345-420) composed a historical work in 14 books dealing with the period between 270 and 404. The work was dedicated to Oribasius, personal physician to the emperor Julian. Only a few fragments of the History of Eunapius have come down to us<sup>23</sup>. Zosimus wrote a New History, which, according to Photius, followed the anti-Christian thesis of Eunapius of Sardis. Furthermore, during the fourth Century, a number of concise Latin-language treatises (epitomes) on Roman history were composed.

Among Christian authors we have: Rufinus of Aquileia, Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomenus, Theodoret of Cyrus, Gelasius of Caesarea, Philostorgius,

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<sup>21</sup> For the study of the complete historical sources and other complementary material from the fourth century, it is very important to be aware of the enormous work done by Wisconsin Lutheran College and Asian Lutheran Seminary, under the direction of Prof. Glen L. Thompson, in the creation of the following site: <https://www.fourthcentury.com/> (Accessed 01-02-2024)

<sup>22</sup> For a complete reading of both works see: <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2007.01.0082> (Accessed 01-02-2024)

<sup>23</sup> Fragments of his stories can be read with the original text on the site: <https://www.dfhgproject.org/DFHG/digger.php?what%5B%5D=author%7CEUNAPIUS+SARDIANUS&onoffswitch=on> (Digital Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum) (Accessed 01-02-2024); Mullerus, C. (1851). *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum. Collegit, Disposuit, Notis et Prolegomenis Illustravit Vol.4*. Editore Ambrosio Firmin Didot. Paris.

Philip of Side and Marcellinus Comes. Rufinus translated the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius of Caesarea into Latin, continuing the narrative from 324 to 395. This work has the merit of broadening the historical horizon by including territories as far away as Ethiopia, Arabia and Caucasian Iberia. Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomenus and Theodoret of Cyrus are called 'synoptics', who continued Eusebius' story into the fourth Century. Gelasius of Caesarea wrote a continuation of the *History* of Eusebius. His work is almost completely lost. Philostorgius, who was an arian, wrote a twelve-book *Ecclesiastical History* in Constantinople between 425 and 433. The narrative ran from 300 to 425. Philip of Side, a friend of John Chrysostom, wrote the work *Christian History* in thirty-six books. It also contained scientific and erudite information. The work is lost. Marcellinus Comes in his chronicle, composed in Constantinople, in Latin, told more about the events in the *pars Orientis* of the empire between 379 and 534<sup>24</sup>. In addition to all these authors, another important work for this Century is the *Historia Acefala*, so called because the text is missing its initial part. It is an important document because the author discusses the Arian controversy and was able to draw on the records of the Church of Alexandria.

Other important sources for the fourth Century are: Sextus Aurelius Victor and Eutropius. Sextus Aurelius Victor, also known simply as Victor, was a Latin author of the fourth Century AD, best known for his work "*De Caesaribus*," which dealt with the biographies of Roman emperors up to his time. The exact dates of his birth and death are not precisely known. His most famous work, "*De Caesaribus*," is a series of biographies of Roman emperors from the time of Julius Caesar to his own period. However, much of the information about this work comes from a later compilation by an anonymous author, who appears to have integrated and modified Victor's original text. In addition to "*De Caesaribus*," Victor seems to have been the author of other works, including a treatise on rhetoric. However, many of his works have not survived to the present day or have only survived in fragments. Sextus Aurelius Victor is important for modern historians as he provides valuable insights into the history and politics of the Roman Empire

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<sup>24</sup> Rinaldi, G. (2019). *Cristianesimi nell'antichità. Sviluppi storici e contesti geografici (Secoli I- VIII)*. GBU. Chieti. p. 686.

in the fourth Century, although his works must sometimes be treated with caution due to possible interpolations and later modifications<sup>25</sup>.

Eutropius was an ancient Roman historian of the fourth Century AD, primarily known for his work "*Breviarium ab Urbe Condita*" (A Brief History from the Founding of the City), a summary of Roman history from the founding of the city to his time. Very little is known about Eutropius' personal life, but it is presumed that he served as a secretary (*comes rerum privatarum*) under Emperor Constantius Gallus between 354 and 361 AD. His work, "*Breviarium*," is divided into ten books and provides an overview of Roman history up to his era<sup>26</sup>.

Finally, of great importance for the historian of christianity is the Codex Theodosianus (Fig.2-3).

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<sup>25</sup> Barnes, T. D. (1984). Sesto Aurelio Vittore e la datazione del *De Caesaribus*. *Athenaeum*, 62(1/2), pp. 188-201; Hohl, E. (1964). Neue Gedanken zu S. Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus*. *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 13(2), pp.141-157; Jones, A. H. M. (1954). The Date of S. Aurelius Victor. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 44(1-2), pp. 40-45; Matthews, J. (2004). Sesto Aurelio Vittore e il "*De Caesaribus*": La costruzione di una biografia imperiale. *Athenaeum*, 92(1), pp. 229-257; Paschoud, F. (1984). S. Aurelius Victor: Nouvelles découvertes. *L'Antiquité Classique*, 53, pp.367-372.

<sup>26</sup> Potter, D. S. (1994). The Career of Eutropius. *The Classical Quarterly*, 44(2), pp. 563-572; Campbell, B. (1973). The Authors of the *Historia Augusta* and the *Breviarium*: Eutropius. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 63, pp. 156-170; Hartmann, L. (2005). Eutropius' Exemplary Role in Late Antiquity: Images and Receptions. *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 54(4), pp. 466-488; Salway, B. (1993). Eutropius, Paulus, and the Introduction to the *Breviarium*. *Classical Quarterly*, 43(2), pp. 527-536; Matthews, J. (1983). Eutropius: The Liber Exemplorum. *Phoenix*, 37(3), pp. 215-223.

Figure 2. Theodosian Codex: Sixth Century manuscript. From Library of Congress [https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl\\_20003/?sp=18&r=-1.03,-0.024,3.06,1.394,0](https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_20003/?sp=18&r=-1.03,-0.024,3.06,1.394,0) (Accessed 07-02-2024)

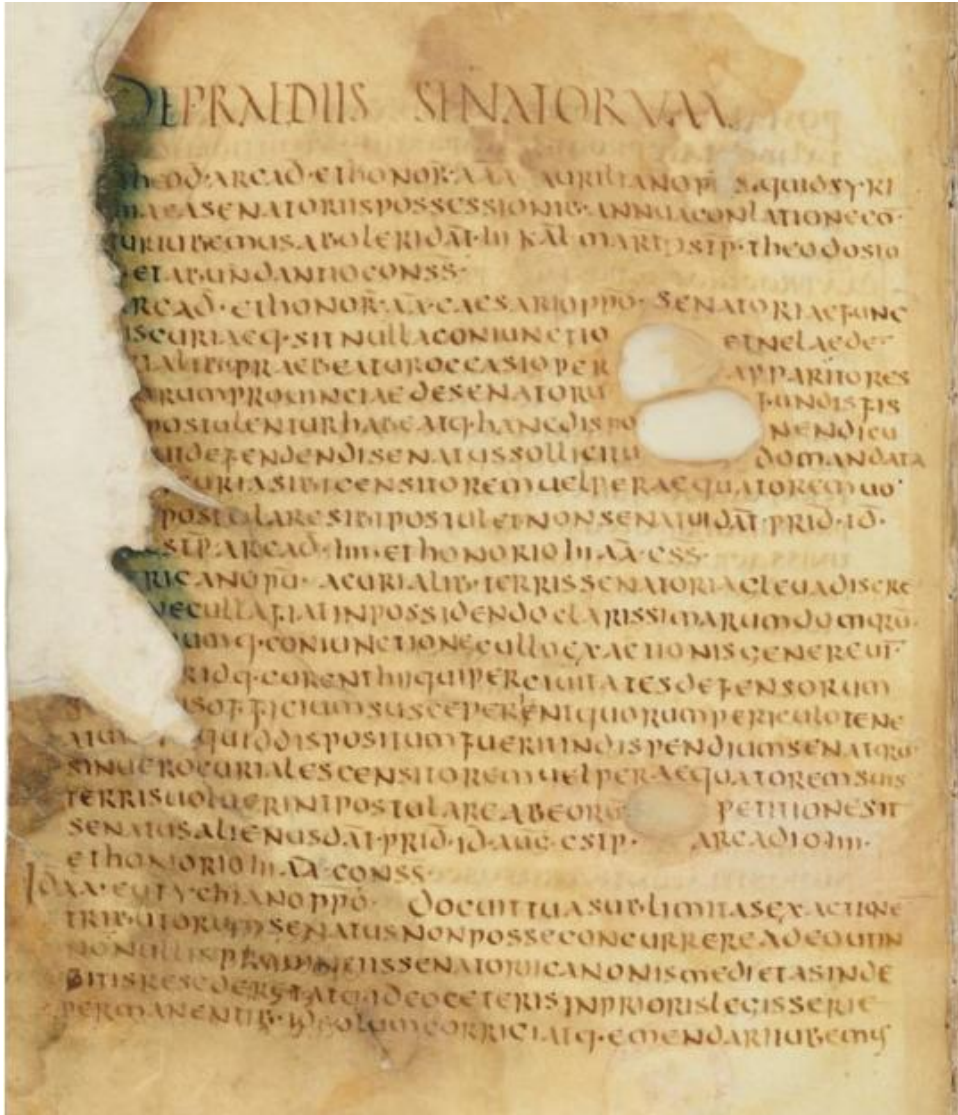
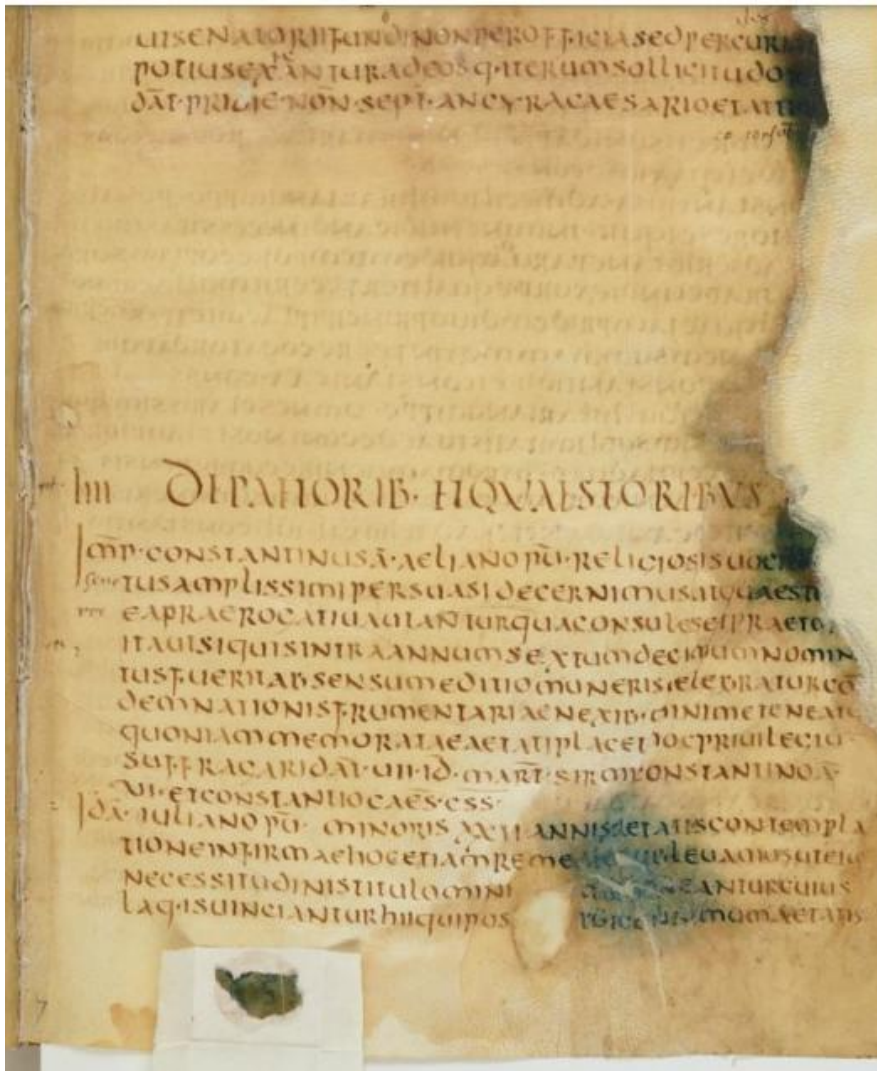


Figure 3. Theodosian Codex: Sixth Century manuscript. From Library of Congress [https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl\\_20003/?sp=20&r=-0.868,0,2.736,1.246,0](https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_20003/?sp=20&r=-0.868,0,2.736,1.246,0) (Accessed 07-02-2024)



This collection was commissioned by Theodosius II and published on 15 February 438<sup>27</sup>. For the fourth Century, Book 16 is of fundamental importance. The

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<sup>27</sup> Further details on Theodosius II see: Kelly, C. (Ed.) (2013). *Theodosius II. Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge University Press.

code contains the legislation enacted in the fourth Century on religious matters<sup>28</sup>. Book XVI is divided into several *tituli*, each of which groups the laws according to the following thematic order: 1) on the definition of *catholica fides*; 2) the discipline and privileges of the clergy; 3) *de monachis*; 4) on dissensions in religious matters; 5) *de haereticis*; 6) on the non-repeatability of baptism; 7) on punishments for apostates from Christianity; 8) particularly against the Jews; 9) on the civil superiority of christians over the Jews; 10) the repression of paganism; 11) on powers in religious matters. Many of these laws continued to be valid afterwards, when *Justinian Code* was promulgated<sup>29</sup>.

### 2.2.3. Fifth and Sixth Century

By 394 Theodosius I had succeeded in reunifying the two parts of the empire. The following year the emperor died and assigned the territories of East and West to his sons: Arcadius (395-408) reigned in the East, under the guardianship of the Gothic minister Rufinus, Honorius (395-423) reigned in the West, under the guardianship of the Vandal general Stilicho.

In 476, there is the fall of the Roman Empire in the West and the rise of the romano-barbaric kingdoms. In the East, the empire is still firmly established. In the Byzantine history of the Sixth Century, a very important emperor was Justinian (527-565). He provided for the reinforcement of the empire's borders and built ecclesiastical buildings, including the basilica of St Sophia in Constantinople and that of San Vitale in Ravenna. Justinian's name is also linked to the work of legal

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<sup>28</sup> The full text of the Codex Theodosianus can be read on the site: <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/theodosius.html> (Accessed 01-02-2024); On the history of the Codex Theodosianus text see: Coma Fort, J. M. (2014). *Codex Theodosianus. Historia de un texto*. Universidad Carlos III De Madrid

<sup>29</sup> Bibliography for further reading see: Mommsen, Theodor & Meyer, Paul Martin (Eds.) (1905). *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis et leges novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*. 2 voll. Berlin; Matthews, John. F. (2000). *Laying down the law: a study of the Theodosian Code*. New Haven.

codification, the *Corpus iuris civilis*, completed by a commission of ten jurists chaired by Quaestor Tribonianus. These Centuries were very eventful, both religiously and politically. Worth mentioning are the Christological controversies that led to the various councils, including Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).

As for historical sources from these Centuries, we have Eunapius and Zosimus, already mentioned for the fourth Century, whose narratives end in 404 and 409. Eunapius' narration was continued until 425 by Olympiodorus of Thebes (in Egypt), a pagan, whose fragments narrate the years 407 to 425.

For the Fifth and Sixth Centuries, the ecclesiastical histories, specifically those who continued the work of Eusebius of Caesarea, are of fundamental importance. These include: Socrates, Sozomenus, Theodoret of Cyrus, whose narratives end at 439, 425 and 428<sup>30</sup>. Another historian who continued the work of Eusebius was Evagrius Scholasticus, for the period from 431 to 594. Evagrius was secretary to the Patriarch of Constantinople Gregory (570-593). Theodorus Lector, so called because of the role he held at the Church of St. Sophia in Constantinople, wrote the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in about 530, in which he condensed the accounts of the three historians who continued the work of Eusebius. This history is called *Historia tripartita*. This work covers the period from 323 to 439. The second part of the work, which was an original contribution of the author and narrated events from 439 to 518, few fragments remain. Another important work, which has survived only in fragments, is the Byzantine History of Priscus of Panion, which narrates events that took place roughly from 425 to 472. In addition, we have John Diacrinomenus (429-518) and Zacharias Rhetor (450-491). From the West Syriac area, John of Ephesus is worth mentioning. He wrote a work titled *History* that narrated from the time of Julius Caesar to 585. Only fragments from the period from 571 to 585 remain today.

In addition to all these historians, there are the African historians: Paul Orosius, whose account ends in 417; Liberatus of Carthage, who wrote the work *Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychnianorum* in about 560, in which he included

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<sup>30</sup> Rinaldi, G. (2019). *Cristianesimi nell'antichità. Sviluppi storici e contesti geografici (Secoli I- VIII)*. GBU. Chieti. p. 794.

documents collected during his travels. The narrative proceeds from the Nestorian episode (428) to Justinian's condemnation of the 'three chapters' (553). Another African historian is Victor of Tunnuna, who wrote the *Chronicon*, which narrates events from 444 to 566, the year of Justinian's death.

For the age of Justinian (527-565), mention must be made of the three works of Procopius of Caesarea: *History in Six Books*, *Secret History* and *De aedificis*. The first recalls the war exploits of Justinian's armies commanded by the commander Belisarius. The second is a collection of disparaging anecdotes about Justinian and his wife Theodora. The third work recounts the emperor's architectural achievements. The narrative of the Justinian Age finds a continuation in the *Chronicle of Agazia Scolasticus*, which narrates from 552 to 558. Subsequent to this is the work of Menander Protector, which narrates from 558 to 582.

Theophylact Simocatta narrated the age of Emperor Maurice (582-602) with his work *Histories*, in eight books. In the West, Gennadius of Marseilles, who integrated and continued Jerome's *De viris illustribus*. The Spaniard Idatius did the same, who narrated from 379 to 468.

### 2.3. SECONDARY SOURCES

Historical sources are a very useful tool for historical research. When analyzing secondary historical sources, it is necessary to do so in a comprehensive and possibly complete way. This is because each author may favor a specific point of view, and even if he cites a considerable amount of sources in his work, it is possible that he has selected only those that support his point of view and not the others. For these reasons, it is important to have a complete overview of secondary historical sources so that we have our own critical thinking on the subject. For our research, the historical sources that were considered concern two macro areas. The first is that of the Late Antiquity period, as our research object focuses precisely on this period. The second, is that of the relationship between Paganism and Christianity, which is our specific focus.

### 2.3.1. Late Antiquity

The historical period considered in this research is Late Antiquity. This periodisation is used by modern historians to describe the transition period from the ancient to the medieval world. In modern historiography, interest in Late Antiquity has mainly expressed itself as an investigation into the 'decadence' of the ancient world<sup>31</sup>. An initial reaction against this orientation occurred in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century on the part of art historians: A. Riegl and other exponents of the 'Viennese school' valorised the art of Late Antiquity, understanding it no longer as a deterioration of classical experience, but as a new artistic form<sup>32</sup>. After the Second World War, the need to investigate the specific features of Late Antiquity led to a change in perspective with significant consequences: the Late Antique period has been studied less as a decline of classical civilisation and more as a culture with its own identity. Two Italian scholars made important contributions to Late Antiquity studies, Santo Mazzarino and Arnaldo Momigliano<sup>33</sup>. Santo Mazzarino's work, which can be regarded as the foundation of Italian studies on Late Antiquity, is *Stilicone*, which he published during the World War. In this work, the young Mazarino was fascinated by the problem of the crisis of the Roman Empire. At the same time, he was very sensitive to the issues set out by the Russian historian Rostovtzeff, in his work *Social and economic History of the Roman Empire*. Ten years later, he published the book *Aspetti sociali del IV secolo*. In this work he makes some economic history considerations through the related interpretation of two texts, *Historia Augusta* and the Anonymus *De Rebus Bellicis*. In particular, he analysed the

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<sup>31</sup> Marcone, A. (2008): «A long late Antiquity?: considerations on a controversial periodization», *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Giardina, A. (1999). Esplosione di Tardoantico. In *Studi Storici*, Anno 40, n.1. Fondazione Istituto Gramsci. pp.157-180; Giardina, A. (2004). Tardoantico: Appunti sul dibattito attuale. In *Studi Storici*, Anno 45, n.1. Fondazione Istituto Gramsci. Pp. 41-46.

<sup>33</sup> Marcone, A. (2001). Gli studi italiani sulla Tarda Antichità nel secondo dopoguerra. In *Studia Historica. Historia Antigua*, n. 19, pp. 77-92.

phenomenon of *adaeratio*<sup>34</sup>. Mazarin's conception of Late Antiquity remained fundamentally pessimistic. This view is evident in his essay *La fine del mondo antico*, the only work that has been translated into English<sup>35</sup>.

Arnaldo Momigliano, on the other hand, was trying to understand where the research had reached, trying to analyse the various hypotheses with their relative difficulties. One of his important works is *An Unsolved Problem of Historical Forgery: the Scriptorum Historiae Augustae*. Reading this work, together with other later essays, provides insight into Momigliano's thinking. One can understand the interpretative key of Momigliano's thought that sees Christianity as the cause of the Christianity of the Roman state in the West<sup>36</sup>. These ideas will be developed and deepened in the miscellaneous essay entitled *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*. This work was published in 1963, but is the work of several contributions that took place at the Warburg Institute in 1959 (Fig. 4)<sup>37</sup>.

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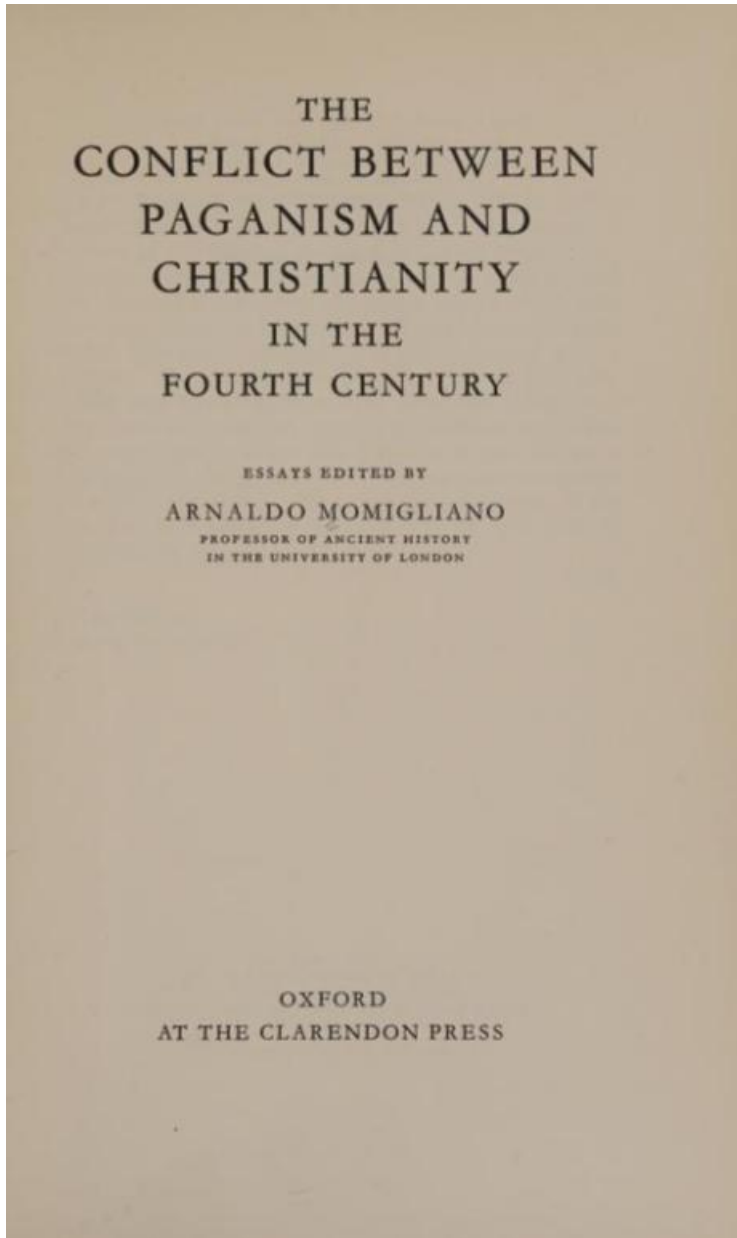
<sup>34</sup> As reported in Adams, C.E.P. (2012). *Adaeratio*. In The Encyclopedia of Ancient History (eds R.S. Bagnall, K. Brodersen, C.B. Champion, A. Erskine and S.R. Huebner). "In the Roman Empire, *adaeratio* was the term used to describe the process of commuting tax payments in kind into cash equivalents. There seems to have been no formal procedure, as practices varied over time and place. It is a process normally associated with the later Roman period, for which the traditional view of taxation holds that more taxes in kind were collected as part of the *Annona*. Commutation was normally into gold, and decisions about it were made by government officials and tax collectors, although it seems that taxpayers could make application for *adaeratio*. The commutation of tax payments in staple goods - grain, wine, oil, and meat- was more carefully controlled, so as to avoid potential supply difficulties. *Adaeratio*, while certainly a feature of the later empire, was present in earlier periods, as is shown by Greek papyri from Egypt. Here it was carefully controlled, and permission to commute was taken at a high administrative level, rather than by local *strategoï*, to ensure adequate grain supply."

<sup>35</sup> The book was published in 1959 and was reprinted by Rizzoli in Milan in 1988.

<sup>36</sup> Marcone, A. (2001). Gli studi italiani sulla Tarda Antichità nel secondo dopoguerra. In *Studia Historica. Historia Antigua*, n. 19, p. 80.

<sup>37</sup> Momigliano A. (Ed.) (1963). *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*. Oxford.

Figure 4. Cover of Mazzarino's book published in 1963. From <https://archive.org/details/conflictbetweenp0000momi/page/n5/mode/2up?view=theater> (Accessed 15-02-2024)



In the wake of these two great scholars, Santo Mazzarino and Arnaldo Momigliano, many other scholars continued their studies on Late Antiquity in the following years. It is necessary to mention Arnaldo Marcone. He published a work

summarising the state of studies on Late Antiquity, in particular the historical profile and historiographical perspectives<sup>38</sup>.

In the mid-1970s, it was Peter Brown who brought a renewal to research on the late antique period. His approach was influenced by anthropological experiences and historical psychoanalysis<sup>39</sup>. Momigliano was also greatly influenced by Peter Brown. Thanks to Momigliano, it was possible to translate two works by Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* and *The World of Late Antiquity* (Fig. 5), into Italian<sup>40</sup>.

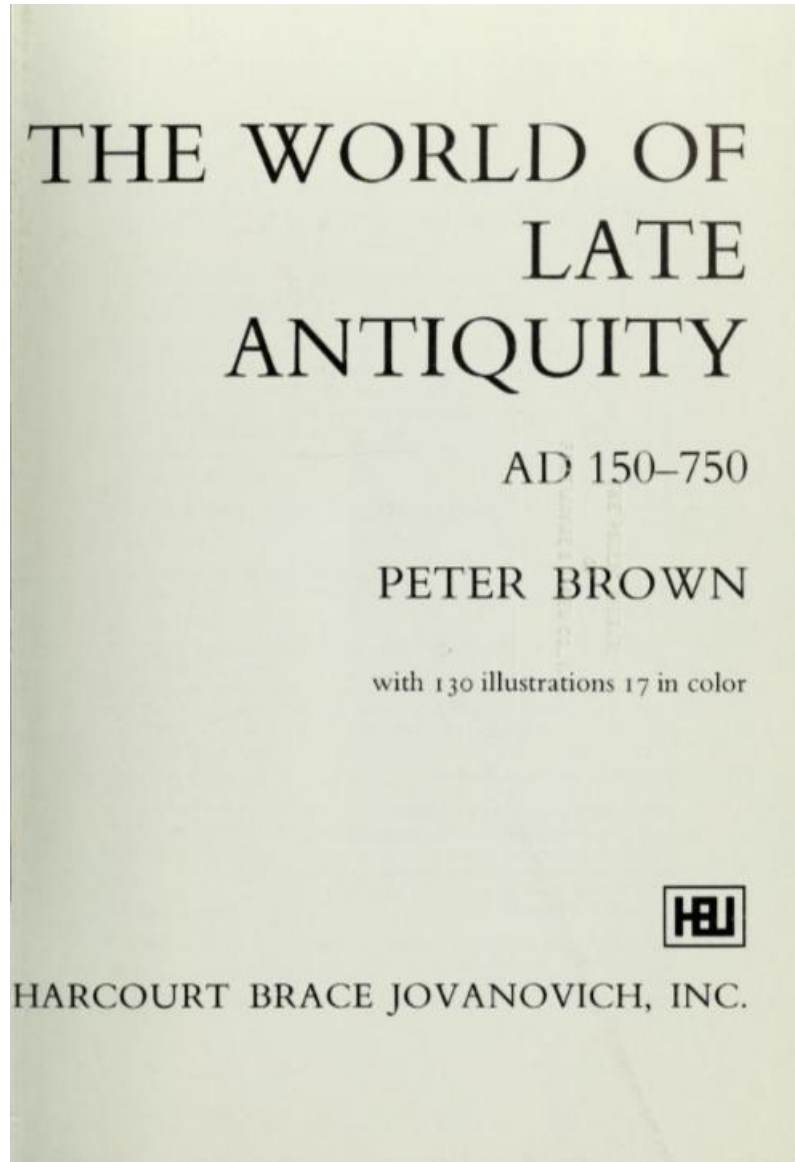
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<sup>38</sup> Marcone, A. (2021). *Tarda Antichità. Profilo storico e prospettive storiografiche*. Carocci. Roma.

<sup>39</sup> Marcone, A. (2001). Gli studi italiani sulla Tarda Antichità nel secondo dopoguerra. In *Studia Historica. Historia Antigua*, n. 19, p. 83.

<sup>40</sup> The first Italian publication of *Augustine of Hippo* was in 1971. *The World of Late Antiquity* was in 1974. In Marcone, A. (2001). Gli studi italiani sulla Tarda Antichità nel secondo dopoguerra. In *Studia Historica. Historia Antigua*, n. 19, p. 83

Figure 5. Cover of Peter Brown's book published in 1971. From <https://archive.org/details/worldoflateantiq00brown/page/n5/mode/2up?view=theater> (Accessed 14-02-2024)



Momigliano realised that Brown was profoundly renewing Late Antiquity studies with an analysis that was both cautious and condescending. Peter Brown soon became the reference for many young scholars. In Italy, starting in the 1970s, a period of great interest in Late Antiquity began, which manifested itself in several lines of research. We remember the Turin school of Lellia Cracco Ruggini and her

direct students Marcella Patrucco, Sergio Roda, Domenico Vera and Rita Lizzi<sup>41</sup>. Also the Messina school of Salvatore Calderone and Lietta De Salvo, the Catania school of Mario Mazza and Concetta Molè. Finally, the Rome school with Santo Mazzarino and Andrea Giardina. Obviously, since the 1970s, the history of Italian studies has joined that of other scholars around the world, who have made some important contributions. An important scholar is Averil Cameron. For our research work, of fundamental importance are his works: *The Later Roman Empire AD 284-430*, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395-700*, *Images of Woman in Antiquity* and *From the Later Roman Empire to Late Antiquity and Beyond*.

One final author, not in importance, who has significantly contributed to the study of Late Antiquity is Alan Cameron. His most important works include: *The Later Roman Empire: A.D. 284–430* and *he Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity: AD 395-700*<sup>42</sup>.

Studying a historical period also means considering material culture. Man living in a society, in an economic, political and religious system, necessarily uses objects that may have different meanings. In the religious field these objects can be linked to rituals. A comprehensive analysis on material culture gives us a more complete view of the lives of people and in many cases even ordinary people, who did not hold political or religious offices, about whom we very often do not know much through historians. In this regard, a miscellaneous work of great importance to our research is *A Companion to the Archaeology of religion in the Ancient World*. This work presents a comprehensive overview of a wide range of topics relating to the practice, expressions, and interactions of religion in antiquity.

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<sup>41</sup> An excellent work edited by Rita Lizzi on the contemporary debate on Late Antiquity is: Lizzi Testa R. (Ed.) (2017). *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Newcastle.

<sup>42</sup> A complete list of the author's most important books: Cameron, A. (1993). *The Later Roman Empire: A.D. 284–430*. Harvard University Press; Cameron, A. (2004). *Greek Mythography in the Roman World*. Oxford University Press; Cameron, A. (2010). *The Last Pagans of Rome*. Oxford University Press; Cameron, A. (1993). *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*. University of California Press; Cameron, A. (2011). *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity: AD 395-700*. Routledge.

Last but not least, mention must be made of the work of Professor Dorothy Watts, *Christian and Pagans in Roman Britain* and *Religion in Late Roman Britain. Forces of change*. These works are very important because they give us specific information on the dynamics of Christianisation and pagan survivals in Roman Britain.

All secondary sources considered so far, are an indispensable tool in historical research, because through the study of material culture in its various forms, they allow us to fill in the gaps, or supplement, the information that comes to us from primary historical sources. I consider this approach to the study of history to be of considerable importance. Today, also thanks to the use of many dating techniques from fields not strictly related to history, it is possible to obtain useful information that can be integrated and used in historical research.

### **2.3.2. Paganism and Christianity**

Over the years, important works have been written about the development of Christianity and paganism. Being a very complex subject, it has been developed in different ways by scholars. After the rise of Christianity, it was very difficult to find traces of the survival of pagan cults. This is because, being illegal, many cults began to be practised in natural places. For this reason, the work of many authors analyses material evidence that has survived, of whatever kind. Other authors, have attempted to collect all that remains of the surviving pagan literary historical sources, trying to give a complete overview. Finally, other scholars have devoted themselves to the study of pagan religions in specific areas of the Roman Empire.

In Italy, an important contribution in the late 1990s was made by Professor Giancarlo Rinaldi, who specialised in the History of Christianity. He published a

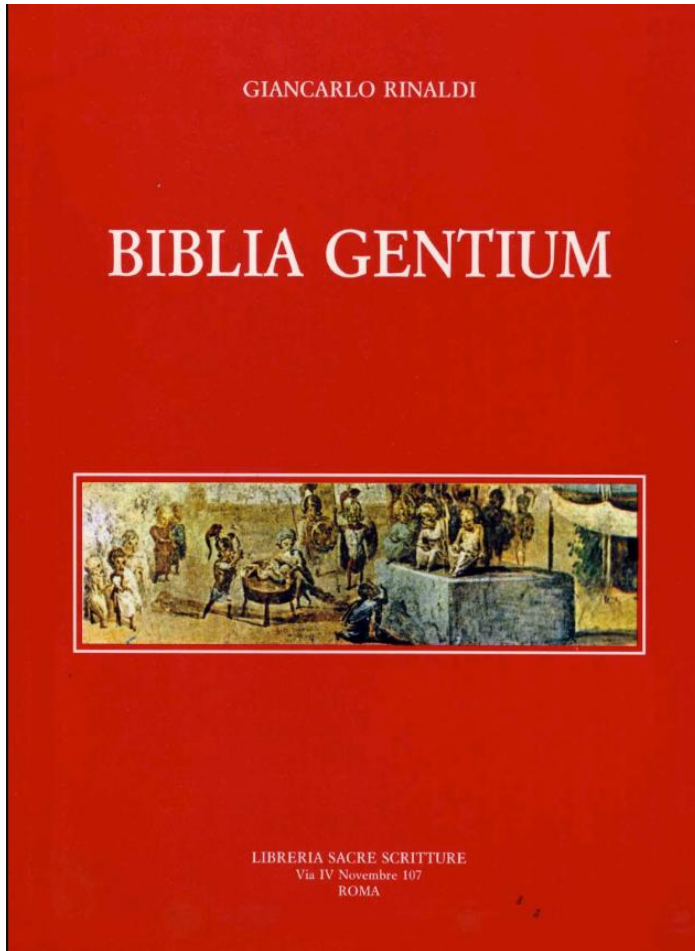
two-volume work entitled, *The Bible of the Pagans*<sup>43</sup>. This work was a continuation and expansion of his earlier work entitled *Biblia gentium* published in 1989 (Fig. 6)<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> The title of the original work is: Rinaldi, G. (1998). *La Bibbia dei pagani, 2 voll.* EDB. Bologna; a more recent work by the same author is: Rinaldi, G. (2020). *Pagani e cristiani. La storia di un conflitto (secoli I-IV)*. Carocci. Roma

<sup>44</sup> Personal interview with the author. "This work met with some opposition. Professor Rinaldi's university strongly advised them against publishing it. But two Italian scholars, Prof. Manlio Simonetti and the Italian Cardinal and theologian Carlo Maria Martini, encouraged Prof. Rinaldi to publish the work." Carlo Maria Martini wrote the introduction to the book. Professor Cook of LaGrange College wrote an article dedicated to Prof. Rinaldi's pioneering studies. See: Cook, J. G. (2015). Research on the Bible among the Pagans since Rinaldi's *Biblia Gentium*. In *Henoch*, vol.37, Issue 2, pp.167-190.

Figure 6. Cover of Giancarlo Rinaldi's book published in 1989. From the author's blog <http://www.giancarlorinaldiblog.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/biblia-gentium-copertina-copia.jpg> (Accessed 15-02-2024)



The aim of his research was to analyse the documents and testimonies that have been passed on from the arguments used by pagans against Christians, and in particular, against their use of the Bible. The first volume of *The Bible of the Pagans*, profiles the main pagan opponents to Christianity and the arguments they developed. The second, is a collection of 715 passages by pagan authors, enriched with bibliographical indications, historical-literary setting and Italian translation.

Another great work worth mentioning are the Cambridge Histories volumes on the History of Christianity. For our specific period, consider the

volume entitled, *Constantine to c. 600*<sup>45</sup>. The importance of this work is twofold; on the one hand, the dynamics of the spread of Christianity in the various regions of the empire are described. Knowing this is very important, because it helps to understand the economic, social and political particularities of the various regions of the Roman empire. On the other hand, the interactions between the last pagan persistences and Christianity are analysed. Both historical and documentary sources are analysed in this work.

With the various anti-pagan legislative decrees by the emperors and the spread of Christianity in its most radical forms, the phenomenon of the destruction of pagan temples began. A very important work in which this phenomenon was analysed is *The Archaeology of late Antique 'Paganism'*<sup>46</sup>. In this work, documentary evidence (coins, inscriptions and temples) is analysed in order to reconstruct the survival of pagan cults.

Regarding the religion of specific territories of the Roman Empire, important works are those of Professor David Frankfurter. His first work of interest to us, concerns the Christianisation of Egypt<sup>47</sup>. The second analyses religion in Roman Egypt, focusing on the dynamics of interaction between paganism and Christianity<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Casiday, A., Norris, F.W. (Eds.) (2008). *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Constantine to c. 600*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>46</sup> Lavan, L., Mulryan M. (Eds.) (2011). *The Archaeology of Late Antique 'Paganism'*. Brill. Leiden-Boston.

<sup>47</sup> Frankfurter, D. (2017). *Christianizing Egypt. Syncretism and local worlds in Late Antiquity*. Princeton University Press. Princeton and Oxford.

<sup>48</sup> Frankfurter, D. (1998). *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*. Princeton University Press. Princeton, New Jersey.

## **III- CHRISTIANIZATION**

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### III - CHRISTIANIZATION

In this chapter we will look at the milestones that led to the Christian Roman Empire and the legislation that was enacted against Christians and pagans. The key figure in this path of change of the empire is undoubtedly Constantine. For what concerns the consolidation of Christianity in the empire, Theodosius II and his very important Codex.

The Third Century was a time of great difficulties for the Roman Empire. The pressure of barbarian peoples on the borders, the overwhelming power of the armies, the conflict between the military component and the *ordines* of senators and knights, made the stability of the empire very precarious. This is also the Century of the great persecutions, which were no longer local and sporadic, but well-structured through edicts that had general validity in all regions of the empire<sup>49</sup>. The Church was getting bigger and more organised and because of this it was perceived as a danger. In this climate, the empire also had economic repercussion<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup>Humphries, M. (2018). Christianity and Paganism in the Roman Empire, 250-450 CE. In *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*, pp. 61–80. John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>50</sup> For comprehensive studies on the Roman Empire see: Clare, J. D. (1996). *Roman Empire*. Riverswift; Culpin, C. (1991). *The Roman Empire*. Collins Educational; Lancaster, S. (1991). *The Roman Empire*. Causeway; Michael, W. C. (1995). *The Roman Empire* (2nd ed.). Harvard University Press; Nardo, D. (2006). *The Roman Empire*. Lucent Books; Rodgers, N. (2008). *Roman Empire*. Metro Books; Ubl, K. (2018). Roman Empire. In *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy* (pp. 1–6). Springer Netherlands; Sear, F. (2020). The Late Empire. In *Roman Architecture* (pp. 260–282). Routledge; Orizaga, R. (2000). *Self-Presentation and Identity in the Roman Empire, ca. 30 BCE to 225 CE*. Portland State University Library; The Late Empire. (2002). In *Roman Architecture* (pp. 255–276). Routledge; Boer, S., Maierù, A., Simon, J. M. R., Erismann, C., Höpfl, H., Rupp, T., Bos, E., Cesalli, L., Long, R. J., Lahey, S. E., Jung, E., Lagerlund, H., Cross, R., Slotemaker, J. T., Wood, R., Sylla, E. D., Panti, C., Slotemaker, J. T., Silva, J. F., Cameron, M. (2011). Roman Empire. In *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy* (pp. 1164–1168). Springer Netherlands; Mazzarino, S. (1984). *L'impero romano, 3 voll.* Roma-Bari.

In 235, Maximinus the Thracian became emperor, who engaged on the Danubian *limes* against the Sarmatians and Dacians, and on the Rhine *limes* against the Germans.

Eusebius of Caesarea is the main source on the relationship between emperors and Christianity, for the years between the end of the Severan age and the great persecution that broke out at the time of Emperor Decius in 249-250.

In general, we can say that the Third Century is characterised by persecutions, or rather general persecutions, the only ones that Christianity faced. The first of these began with Decius from February 250, the second during the reign of Valerian, from 257 to the fall of the emperor, and the last under Diocletian, who came to the throne in 284. In 303, at the end of his reign and at the height of his power, he outlawed Christians and unleashed persecutions that would last until 312<sup>51</sup>.

### 3.1. CONSTANTINE

At the end of the Third Century AD, the Roman Empire found itself in a period of crisis and transformation, characterized by significant changes in historical, social, political, and religious contexts (Fig.7).

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<sup>51</sup> Chuvin, P. (2012). *Cronaca degli ultimi pagani*, p.28, Paideia. Brescia.

Figure 7. The Roman Empire under Constantine, 324-337 AD. From <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/19366/roman-empire-under-constantine-324-337-ce/> (Accessed 20-09-2024)



This period is known as the "Crisis of the Third Century," marked by political instability, internal and external disorder, barbarian invasions, and divisions within the empire. The Roman Empire was divided into two parts, the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantine Empire. Roman society was characterized by profound economic and social inequalities. The aristocracy held political and economic power, while the majority of the population consisted of peasants and slaves. Social inequalities fuelled discontent and tensions within the empire. The Roman Empire was ruled by a series of emperors, many of whom ascended to power through usurpations or military revolts. Central authority was weakened, and power was often held by military generals or provincial governors. Civil wars were common, and the empire's borders were constantly threatened by barbarian incursions. By the end of the Third Century, Christianity was emerging as a significant religious force in the Roman Empire. Despite persecutions in previous Centuries, Christianity continued to gain followers and attract the attention of Roman authorities. Emperor Constantine the Great emerged as a supporter of Christianity, ending persecutions and promoting its spread.

The age of Constantine characterises the transition between the history of the Roman Empire and that of the Christian Roman Empire<sup>52</sup>. Flavio Valerio Costantino, his real name, was born to Constantius Chlorus, one of the tetrarchs of the West, and Helena, around 280. His homeland was Illyria (Naissus, Serbia). He spent his youth in Nicomedia and then joined his father in Britain in 306. Constantius Chlorus died shortly afterwards and his troops proclaimed the young Constantine emperor, who formed an alliance with Maximian, marrying his daughter Fausta, and with Galerius<sup>53</sup>. In April 311, Galerius signed an edict of tolerance towards Christians and Constantine was among the signatories. His religious position evolved towards monotheism and he became increasingly tolerant of Christianity. The persecutions against Christians in the East came to an end on April 30, 311, with the edict issued by Galerius in Serdica, shortly before his death. This document holds extreme significance as it represented a step further than any Roman emperor had ever taken: it implicitly granted Christianity the status of "*religio licita*," or a recognized and accepted religion within the Empire. On 28 October 312, near the Milvian Bridge, there was a conflict with Maxentius, who was defeated. The insignia of the Constantinian army, as tradition has it, featured a symbol alluding to the Christian faith, although a reference to solar religiosity cannot be ruled out<sup>54</sup>. In the course of his conflicts, first with Maxentius and then with Licinius, Constantine changed his attitude towards the Christian communities. This phenomenon is mainly known from the pages of Lactantius and

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<sup>52</sup> For comprehensive studies on the Constantine see: Cowan, R. (2015). *Roman Legionary, AD 284-337: The age of Diocletian and Constantine*. Osprey Publishing; Potter, D. S. (2012). *Constantine the Emperor*. Oxford University Press; Pohlsander, H. A. (2004). *The Emperor Constantine*. Taylor & Francis Inc; Morgan, J. (2003). *Constantine: Ruler of Christian Rome*. Rosen Pub. Group; Michael, G. (1998). *The Emperor Constantine*. Phoenix Giant; James, E. (2012). *Constantine the Great: Warlord of Rome*. Pen & Sword Military; Fowden, G. (1994). The Last Days of Constantine: Oppositional Versions and their Influence. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 84, 146–170; Baynes, N.H. (1929). *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*. London; MacMullen, R. (1969). *Constantine*. New York.

<sup>53</sup> Hupchick, D. P., & Cox, H. E. (2001). The Division of the Roman Empire, Late third Century. In *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Eastern Europe*, pp. 12–13. Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>54</sup> Flower, R. (2012). Visions of Constantine. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 102, pp. 287–305.

Eusebius of Caesarea<sup>55</sup>. In the years prior to 312, the environment towards the Chrysitans was very hostile. In the years 311-12, large cities such as Tyre, Antioch on the Orontes, Nicomedia, the province of Lycia and Pamphylia, even smaller cities such as Colbasa in Pisidia, addressed petitions against the Chrysitans to Maximinus Daia, as reported by Eusebius<sup>56</sup> and Lactantius<sup>57</sup>.

### 3.1.1. Christian Legislation

The phenomenon of Emperor Constantine's conversion has been extensively discussed in scholarly literature. Various theses have been proposed, ranging from accusations of opportunism to interpretations portraying him as a divinely inspired

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<sup>55</sup> Euseb., *Vit. Const.* IV,24: << Hence it was not without reason that once, on the occasion of his entertaining a company of bishops, he let fall the expression, that he himself too was a bishop, addressing them in my hearing in the following words: You are bishops whose jurisdiction is within the Church: I also am a bishop, ordained by God to overlook whatever is external to the Church. And truly his measures corresponded with his words: for he watched over his subjects with an episcopal care, and exhorted them as far as in him lay to follow a godly life>>. From: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/25024.htm> (Accessed 28-02-2024).

<sup>56</sup> Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* IX, 2,7,9: 2 << For since he could not in any other way oppose the decision of his superiors, keeping the law which had been already issued secret, and taking care that it might not be made known in the district under him, he gave an unwritten order to his governors that they should relax the persecution against us. They communicated the command to each other in writing. 7 Thereupon the rulers of the provinces, thinking that the purpose of the things which were written was truly made known to them, declared the imperial will to the curators and magistrates and prefects of the various districts in writing. But they did not limit themselves to writing, but sought more quickly to accomplish the supposed will of the emperor in deeds also. Those whom they had imprisoned on account of their confession of the Deity, they set at liberty, and they released those of them who had been sent to the mines for punishment; for they erroneously supposed that this was the true will of the emperor. 9 And some of our people, who had faithfully and bravely sustained the conflict of persecution, again became frank and bold toward all; but as many as had been diseased in the faith and had been shaken in their souls by the tempest, strove eagerly for healing, beseeching and imploring the strong to stretch out to them a saving hand, and supplicating God to be merciful unto them.>>. From: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250109.htm> (Accessed 28-02-2024).

<sup>57</sup> Lactant., *De mort. pers.*, XXXVI,3.

figure. It can be argued that due to its profound and spiritual nature, the phenomenon of conversion eludes straightforward historical analysis. What the historian can endeavor to accomplish is to provide an overview of the Constantian measures that led to the Christianization of the empire<sup>58</sup>.

To comprehend the initial phase of Constantine's religious evolution, the Latin panegyrics concerning him are to be utilized. The panegyric VII, referring to the year 307, portrays Constantine as devoted to the cult of Hercules (Year 307). Panegyric VI, from the year 310, attests to his fervent devotion to *Sol Invictus*. In this document, there is a recounting of Constantine's vision of the god Apollo at the temple of Gand in Gaul. Apollo, identified with the Sun, appeared to him accompanied by Victory. From this moment onwards, Constantine's coins began to feature symbols related to Sol Invictus. Panegyric XII, referring to the year 313, celebrates Constantine's victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge, attributing the outcome of events to a vaguely defined divine inspiration, venerated under different names by the peoples of the earth. This presents analogies with the inscription found on the Arch of Constantine, near the Colosseum, according to which the victory came about "*instinctu divinitatis*," that is, by the inspiration of an undefined divinity.

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<sup>58</sup> For comprehensive studies on the Constantine's conversion: Elliott, T. G. (2019). The Religious Policy of Constantine. In *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 27(3) pp.381-401; Lenski, N. E. (2015). The Reinscription of Rome: Divine Agency and the Triumph of Constantine. In *Church History*, 84(1), pp. 1-20; Potter, D. S. (1999). The Date of Constantine's Conversion. In *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 50(1), pp. 1-23; Jones, A. H. M. (1949). Constantine and the Christians. In *The English Historical Review*, 64(251), pp. 1-17; Frend, W. H. C. (1969). Constantine's Conversion: Do We Really Need It?. In *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 20(1), pp. 1-15; Barnes, T. D. (1972). The Legislation of the Last Pagan Emperor. In *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 62, pp. 23-39; Drake, H. A. (2013). Constantine and Christ. Greece & Rome, 60(2), pp.253-269; Lenski, N. E. (2017). The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome. In *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 147(1), pp. 183-208; Brown, P. R. L. (2016). Constantine's Conversion: Do We Really Need It? In *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 9(2), pp. 318-332; Drijvers, J. W. (2014). Constantine's Conversion: Historiographical Controversies and the Sources. In *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 22(4), pp. 521-546; Markovic, M. (2020). Reconsidering the Conversion of Constantine: New Approaches and Interpretations. In *Journal of Religious History*, 44(3), pp. 401-421; Rees, R. (1979). The Coins of Constantine's 'Conversion'. In *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 139, pp. 64-85.

Regarding Christian sources, it is noteworthy to mention Eusebius and Lactantius, providing a chronological overview. Eusebius of Caesarea, in his work *Ecclesiastical History* (IX, 9, 2), circa 315 AD, recounts the eve of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. He asserts that Constantine prayed before the battle and that God's assistance led him to victory. Lactantius, in his work *De Mortibus Persecutorum* (Chapter 44), around 315-321 AD, presents a detailed recollection of the eve of the encounter with Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge. It is in this passage that we read about Constantine's famous vision. Finally, Eusebius, in his work *Life of Constantine* (I, 28), circa 337 AD, delves even further into the vision. In fact, according to the narrative, it is not only the emperor but his entire troop that, at sunset on the day before the battle, sees the vision of the cruciform sign in the sky. Constantine subsequently, during the night, allegedly dreamt of Christ instructing him to create military emblems in the shape of a cross to achieve victory<sup>59</sup>. Beyond the various conjectures regarding the events described by the mentioned historical sources, it is likely that during the Battle of Constantine, his religious perspective, although still imbued with syncretistic elements, also encompassed Christian elements, which he would soon further develop. This transitional phase can be historically situated through the study of material culture, particularly coins (Fig. 8-9). In coin emissions from 315 onwards, symbols associated with Christianity become increasingly prevalent, while those connected to solar worship decline. This parallel presence of coins with Christian symbols alongside others will persist until shortly after 324<sup>60</sup>. The first evidence of the presence of Christian symbols is

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<sup>59</sup> Jones, C.P. (2014). *Between Pagan and Christian*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge-London 2014, pp. 9-22; Rinaldi, G. (2019). *Cristianesimi nell'antichità. Sviluppi storici e contesti geografici (Secoli I- VIII)*. GBU. Chieti. pp. 645-658.

<sup>60</sup> For comprehensive studies of Constantine's coins: Sutherland, C. H. V. (1963). The coinage of the Roman Empire. In *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 3(23), pp.97-138; Kent, J. P. C. (1981). In *Roman imperial coinage: Vol. VII: Constantine and Licinius*. British Museum Publications; Butcher, K. (2004). *Coinage in the Roman economy, 300 BC to AD 700*. Routledge; Carson, R. A. G., Hill, P. V., & Kent, J. P. C. (1978). *Late Roman bronze coinage*. Spink & Son Ltd; Harl, K. W. (1996). *Coinage in the Roman economy, 300 BC to AD 700*. Johns Hopkins University Press; Ciani, L. (1999). *Monete romane imperiali*. In *Roma*

found in the medallion of Ticinum, coined in 315 on the occasion of the emperor's decennalia celebration. On this medallion, the *Chrismon* is impressed on the emperor's helmet. Similarly, the Christian sign appears on his helmet on coins from 317-318 from the mint of Siscia.

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Numismatica; Sutherland, C. H. V. (1967). *Coinage in Roman imperial policy, 31 BC-A.D. 68*. University of Michigan Press; Klawans, Z. H. (1991). *Handbook of ancient Greek and Roman coins*. F&W Media; Van Meter, D. (1991). *Handbook of Roman imperial coins: A complete guide to the history, types and values of Roman imperial coinage*. Whitman Publ; Butcher, K. (2004). *Roman provincial coins: An introduction to the Greek Imperials*. Routledge; Kent, J. P. C. (1987). *The Roman imperial coinage: Vol. 10: The Divided Empire and the Fall of the Western Parts AD 395-491*. Spink & Son Ltd; López, J. M. (2018). La numismática de la época constantiniana: una revisión de las últimas investigaciones. In *Revista Española de Numismática*, 75(2), pp. 123-140; Martin, P. (2021). La monnaie à l'époque constantinienne: Étude des émissions monétaires de Constantin I à Constantin II. In *Revue Numismatique*, 176, 287-310; García, A. (2019). La acuñación de monedas en la era de Constantino: análisis de los cambios y continuidades en la iconografía y el simbolismo. In *Boletín de la Sociedad Numismática Española*, 44(2), pp. 87-104; González, M. (2017). La Numismática de Constantino el Grande: Estudio de la acuñación imperial entre 306 y 337 d.C. Ediciones Numismáticas; Dubois, L. (2019). *La Monnaie à l'époque de Constantin le Grand: Étude des émissions monétaires et de leur contexte historique*. Presses Universitaires de France; Martínez, A. (2023). La acuñación de monedas en el período constantiniano: análisis de las emisiones monetarias en el contexto del Imperio Romano Tardío. In *Editorial Numismática Hispano-Francesa*; García, A. (2016). La Numismática de la Era de Constantino: Evolución y cambios en la acuñación imperial. Ediciones Numismáticas; Dubois, L. (2021). *Monnaies romaines de la période constantinienne: Catalogue raisonné des émissions de Constantin Ier à Théodose Ier*. Presses Universitaires de France.

Figure 8. Coin of 316/17 showing Constantine and Sol (the sun-god), Ticinum Italy. From Jones, C.P. (2014). *Between Pagan and Christian*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge-London 2014, p13.



Figure 9. Coin of 320 showing high crested helmet, cuirassed, spear over right shoulder, two Victories stg., facing one another, together holding shield inscribed, on altar decorated with wreath with equilateral cross inside, London, England. From <https://www.constantinethegreatcoins.com/symbols/> and <https://numismatics.org/ocrc/id/ric.7.lon.168?lang=en> (Accessed 05-03-2024).



To fully understand Constantine's growing favorable attitude towards the Church, it is necessary to analyze the legislation he promulgated regarding religious matters. Costantino's primary aim was to equate the rights of Christians with those of followers of traditional cults, thereby promoting religious freedom

for all. In this context, the Edict of Milan represents the principal document<sup>61</sup>. Constantine and Licinius met in Milan in 313 and discussed the relationship between the empire and Christian communities, invoking the precedent set by Galerius' edict, which had put an end to persecutions against Christians.

We report the text of Lactantius in *De Mortibus Persecutorum*:

*“When I, Constantine Augustus, as well as I Licinius Augustus fortunately met near Mediolanum (Milan), and were considering everything that pertained to the public welfare and security, we thought -, among other things which we saw would be for the good of many, those regulations pertaining to the reverence of the Divinity ought certainly to be made first, so that we might grant to the Christians and others full authority to observe that religion which each preferred; whence any Divinity whatsoever in the seat of the heavens may be propitious and kindly disposed to us and all who are placed under our rule And thus by this wholesome counsel and most upright provision we thought to arrange that no one whatsoever should be denied the opportunity to give his heart to the observance of the Christian religion, of that religion which he should think best for himself, so that the Supreme Deity, to whose worship we freely yield our hearts) may show in all things His usual favor and benevolence. Therefore, your Worship should know that it has pleased us to remove all conditions whatsoever, which were in the rescripts formerly given to you officially, concerning the Christians and now any one of these who wishes to observe Christian religion may do so freely and openly, without molestation. We thought it fit to commend these things most fully to your care that you may know that we have given to those Christians free and unrestricted opportunity of religious worship. When you see that this has been granted to them by us, your Worship will know that we have also conceded to other religions the right of open and free observance of their worship for the sake of the peace of our times, that each one may have the free opportunity to worship as he pleases ; this regulation is made we that we may not seem to detract from any dignity or any religion.*

*Moreover, in the case of the Christians especially we esteemed it best to order that if it happens anyone heretofore has bought from our treasury from anyone whatsoever, those places where*

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<sup>61</sup> Lenski, N. E. (2013). The Edict of Milan: Religion, Empire, and Political Culture in the Christian Roman Empire. In *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 103, pp. 210-236; Häberlein, M. (2017). The Edict of Milan: A Reassessment. In *Church History and Religious Culture*, 97(1), pp. 36-56; Drake, H. A. (2012). The Edict of Milan and the Beginnings of the Christian Empire. In *History Compass*, 10(10), pp. 788-800; Bowman, A. K. (2014). The Edict of Milan reconsidered. In *Journal of Roman Studies*, 104, 156-180; Lunn-Rockcliffe, S. (2015). The Edict of Milan and the Context of Early Christian Writing on Persecution. In *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 105, pp. 160-187; Odahl, C. M. (2018). Constantine and the Church. In *A Companion to Roman Religion*, pp. 373-387. Wiley-Blackwell; Maraval, P. (2012). Le passage de la persécution à la liberté religieuse sous Constantin. *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*, 124(2), pp. 453-476.

*they were previously accustomed to assemble, concerning which a certain decree had been made and a letter sent to you officially, the same shall be restored to the Christians without payment or any claim of recompense and without any kind of fraud or deception, Those, moreover, who have obtained the same by gift, are likewise to return them at once to the Christians. Besides, both those who have purchased and those who have secured them by gift, are to appeal to the vicar if they seek any recompense from our bounty, that they may be cared for through our clemency,. All this property ought to be delivered at once to the community of the Christians through your intercession, and without delay. And since these Christians are known to have possessed not only those places in which they were accustomed to assemble, but also other property, namely the churches, belonging to them as a corporation and not as individuals, all these things which we have included under the above law, you will order to be restored, without any hesitation or controversy at all, to these Christians, that is to say to the corporations and their conventicles: providing, of course, that the above arrangements be followed so that those who return the same without payment, as we have said, may hope for an indemnity from our bounty. In all these circumstances you ought to tender your most efficacious intervention to the community of the Christians, that our command may be carried into effect as quickly as possible, whereby, moreover, through our clemency, public order may be secured. Let this be done so that, as we have said above, Divine favor towards us, which, under the most important circumstances we have already experienced, may, for all time, preserve and prosper our successes together with the good of the state. Moreover, in order that the statement of this decree of our good will may come to the notice of all, this rescript, published by your decree, shall be announced everywhere and brought to the knowledge of all, so that the decree of this, our benevolence, cannot be concealed.<sup>62</sup> (Lactant., *De mort.pers.*)*

Constantine began his legislative activity as early as 313, which more or less directly concerned Christians, their faith, and their Church. In 321, certain special provisions were issued for the introduction of the Sunday holiday and to authorize the Church to receive contributions in the form of donations and inheritances. When Constantine became the sole emperor, after the conflict with Licinius in 324, his freedom in religious matters increased. On November 8, 324, he decreed the convocation of an ecumenical council to discuss Christian orthodoxy the following year. On December 16, 324, he formally repealed all anti-Christian measures previously adopted by Licinius<sup>63</sup>. It is worth considering that Constantine did not suppress pagan cults, but rather limited himself to regulating them, consistent with

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<sup>62</sup> Lactant, *De mort. pers.*, ch.40. From: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/edict-milan.asp> (Accessed 05-03-2024).

<sup>63</sup> Barzanò A. (Ed.) (1996). *Il Cristianesimo nelle leggi di Roma imperiale*. Paoline. Milano, pp.62-63.

his role as pontifex maximus, the official custodian of the religious soul of the empire. With two edicts, in 319-320, Constantine prohibited the practice of haruspicy in private homes<sup>64</sup>. Public practice was not prohibited. These provisions presumed the danger of practicing haruspicy outside of state control and equated it with harmful magic, which was greatly feared at the time, as it was also banned by Valens and Valentinian I, except when practiced to promote the prosperity of the fields.

### 3.2. THEODOSIUS I

During the period from Constantine the Great to Theodosius I, spanning from the fourth to the Fifth Century AD, the Roman Empire underwent significant political, social, and religious transformations. Constantine was the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity and played a crucial role in the transition of the Roman Empire towards Christianity as the state religion. In 313 AD, he issued the Edict of Milan, guaranteeing religious freedom to Christians in the Roman Empire. In 330 AD, he founded the new capital of the Roman Empire in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul). Following Constantine's death, the Roman Empire was divided among his three sons, Constantine II, Constans, and Constantius II, marking the beginning of a period of political and military division between the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire. Theodosius I was the last emperor to rule over the united Roman Empire. During his reign, he consolidated Christianity as the state religion and vigorously opposed paganism. In 380 AD, with the Edict of Thessalonica, Theodosius made orthodox Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. During the reign of Theodosius I, his religious policy

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<sup>64</sup> For comprehensive studies on Constantine's legislation: Drake, H. A. (2000). *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*. The Johns Hopkins University Press; Barnes, T. D. (2011). *Constantine: Dynasty, Religion, and Power in the Later Roman Empire*. Wiley-Blackwell; Odahl, C. M. (2004). *Constantine and the Christian Empire*. Routledge; Ritter, H. W. (2014). *Costantino e la Chiesa: Storia di una relazione difficile*. San Paolo Edizioni; Corbier, M. (2013). *Costantino il Grande e l'impero cristiano*. Carocci Editore; Baynes, N. H. (2018). *Constantine the Great and Christianity: Three Phases of the Religious Policy*. CRC Press; Bardill, J. (2001). *Constantine, Divine Emperor of the Christian Golden Age*. Cambridge University Press.

was characterized by strong support for orthodox Christianity and the persecution of followers of other faiths, including pagans and heretics. Theodosius regarded orthodox Christianity as the true faith and sought to promote it by excluding and repressing other beliefs. Theodosius enacted a series of laws aimed at promoting Christianity and limiting non-Christian religious practices. These laws prohibited pagan rituals, the construction of new temples, and other forms of religiosity that did not conform to Christian doctrine. As a result, many pagan temples were closed and destroyed, while traditional religious practices were suppressed. Theodosius's religious policy was marked by decisive action against non-Christian religions, aiming to consolidate Christianity as the sole acceptable faith within the Roman Empire. This policy had a lasting impact on society and culture of the time, contributing to the decline of paganism and the rise of Christianity as the predominant religion in the Roman Empire<sup>65</sup>.

### 3.2.1. Edict of Thessalonica (28 February 380)

At the end of the Fourth Century, the Roman Empire was undergoing a phase of demographic transition, with population movements and migrations due to the effects of barbarian invasions and external pressures. The economy of the Roman Empire was in crisis, with inflation, high taxes, and agricultural decline causing economic and social instability. This economic instability led to social tensions and unrest, with an increase in revolts and protests by the masses. Within the Empire, there were profound economic and social disparities between the dominant classes, such as the senators and aristocratic elites, and the working classes, such as farmers and peasants. Cities were centers of wealth and power, but also of social inequality and poverty, with increasing urbanization leading to tensions between urban and rural populations. Christianity was becoming increasingly dominant within the Empire, with a rise in the number of converts and a growing influence of the

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<sup>65</sup> Barzanò A. (Ed.) (1996). *Il Cristianesimo nelle leggi di Roma imperiale*. Paoline. Milano, pp.66-78; MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2011). *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*. Penguin Books, pp. 189-245; Pricoco S. (1997). Da Giuliano a Teodosio (361-395). In G. Giloramo and D. Menozzi (Eds.), *Storia del cristianesimo. L'antichità*. Laterza. Bari, pp. 305-329.

Christian Church in political and social institutions. At the same time, traditional paganism was losing ground, with a decrease in the number of practitioners and a decline in the influence of pagan temples and priests. In this complex social context, the Edict of Thessalonica reflected Emperor Theodosius' attempts to stabilize the Empire by promoting orthodox Christianity as the unifying state religion, in hopes of quelling social tensions and consolidating imperial authority<sup>66</sup>.

The works of contemporary historians such as Zosimus and Sozomen provide detailed accounts of the events and policies of the time, including the promulgation of the Edict of Thessalonica. The writings of ecclesiastics of the period, such as Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen, document the religious events and religious policies of the Empire, including sanctions against heretics and those who did not adhere to orthodox Christianity.

The Edict of Thessalonica, also known as the *Edictum Mediolanense secundum*, was a decree issued by Emperor Theodosius I in 380 AD. This edict was a significant legislative act that affirmed orthodox Christianity as the state religion in the Roman Empire. The edict established orthodox Christianity as the only permissible faith and prohibited other religious practices, including paganism. Non-Christian cults were banned, and sanctions were imposed against those who dissented from orthodox Christian doctrine. The Edict of Thessalonica had a profound impact on the society and culture of the time, further consolidating the power of the Christian Church and contributing to the decline of paganism in the Roman Empire. This decree also sanctioned the religious division within the Empire, as the West, under Emperor Gratian, and the East, under Theodosius, followed different religious policies. The edict significantly contributed to defining

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<sup>66</sup> López, R. (2017). Transición Demográfica y Movimientos de Población en el Imperio Romano. *Revista de Historia Antigua*, 10(1), pp. 45-60; Smith, J. (2018). Economic and Social Instability in the Late Roman Empire. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 42(3), pp. 325-341; García, M. (2019). La Crisis Económica del Imperio Romano y sus Consecuencias Sociales. *Anales de Historia Antigua*, 25(2), pp. 87-102; Dupont, A. (2016). Disparités Socio-économiques dans l'Empire Romain Tardif. *Revue d'Histoire Romaine*, 14(3), pp. 301-318; Martin, P. (2018). Urbanisation et Tensions Sociales dans l'Empire Romain. *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Histoire Ancienne*, 22(1), pp. 55-70; Conti, M. (2019). Crescita del Cristianesimo e Declino del Paganesimo nell'Impero Romano. *Studi di Storia Religiosa*, 14(3), pp.201-218.

the role of Christianity in the Roman Empire and marked the definitive transition from the ancient pagan religion to Christianity as the dominant religion.<sup>67</sup>

Below is an overview of the various points that were established for Roman religious policy<sup>68</sup>:

- Orthodox Christianity as State Religion: The edict confirmed Orthodox Christianity as the only acceptable religion in the Roman Empire and designated it as the state religion.
- Prohibition of Paganism: The edict banned pagan religious practices and prohibited non-Christian cults. This included pagan rites and rituals that were not in line with Orthodox Christian doctrine.
- Sanctions Against Heretics: The edict imposed sanctions against those who dissented from Orthodox Christian doctrine, deemed heretics. Heretics could be subject to legal punishments, including fines and property confiscation.

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<sup>67</sup> Rinaldi, G. (2019). *Cristianesimi nell'antichità. Sviluppi storici e contesti geografici (Secoli I- VIII)*. GBU. Chieti. pp. 706-720.

<sup>68</sup> Brown, P. (1972). The Death of Theodosius the Great. In *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 62, pp.131-137; Cameron, A. (1970). Theodosius the Great and the Regency of Stilicho. In *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 60, pp. 23-40; Matthews, J. F. (1989). Theodosius I and the Government of Spain. In *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 38(1), pp. 96-118; Williams, S. (1996). Theodosius I and the Ecclesiastical Policy of his Reign. In *Vigiliae Christianae*, 50(1), pp. 47-69; Grindle, G. (1900). Theodosius the Great, The Division of the Roman Empire, and the St. Ambrose and St. Augustine Episodes. In *The American Historical Review*, 5(3), pp. 413-429; Odahl, C. M. (2004). Teodosio I: L'imperatore e il suo mondo. *Guerini e Associati*; Baldovin, A. (2001). La politica religiosa di Teodosio I. In *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 55(1), 93-114; Andrea, A. J. (1997). Teodosio I e la fine del mondo antico. In *Storia e problemi contemporanei*, 29(124), pp. 125-140; Pons, J. (2011). Teodosio I: El emperador que definió el destino de Roma. In *National Geographic Historia*, 4(1), pp. 26-33; Santos, J. A. (1996). El Imperio Romano bajo Teodosio I. In *Historia: Instituciones. Documentos*, 23(1), pp. 49-68; Díaz, C. M. (2008). Teodosio I y la Cristianización del Imperio Romano. In *Revista Española de Teología*, 68(1), pp. 29-42; Rougé, Y. (1976). L'Empire sous Théodose Ier. In *Revue Historique*, 255(1), pp. 3-22; Monlezun, J. L. (2017). Théodose Ier et les moines de Chrysopolis: Récits hagiographiques et imaginaire impérial. In *Revue des Études Byzantines*, 75, pp. 319-350.

- **Exclusion of Other Religions:** The edict excluded other non-Christian religions and beliefs, establishing Orthodox Christianity as the only legitimate faith within the Roman Empire.
- **Ban on Pagan Practices:** The practice of pagan rites, the construction of new temples, and other non-Christian religious manifestations that were not in line with Orthodox Christian doctrine were prohibited.
- **Promotion of Christianity:** The edict actively promoted Orthodox Christianity and sought to suppress other forms of religion that were not in line with Orthodox Christian doctrine.

Essentially, the Edict of Thessalonica consolidated Orthodox Christianity as the dominant and official religion of the Roman Empire, resulting in restrictions and sanctions against other forms of religion and beliefs considered non-orthodox. This meant that all non-Christian religious practices were banned and deemed illegal within the Roman Empire. Consequently, paganism, which was the traditional religion of the Empire, was excluded and actively persecuted.

### 3.3. CODEX THEODOSIANUS

The compilation of the Theodosian Code was a meticulous process undertaken by two commissions commissioned by the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius II between 429 and 438. This monumental legal work was officially promulgated in February 438 and took effect on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 439. The Codex Theodosianus was designed to consolidate and organize imperial constitutions issued since 312 into a comprehensive legal code. Comprised of 16 books and approximately 450 titles, the Codex Theodosianus provides a condensed version of the laws governing the Byzantine Empire. While the text of books 6 to 16 has been relatively well-preserved over time, books 1 to 5 have suffered from loss, and their

content must be reconstructed using additional legal sources such as the *Lex Romana Visigothorum*<sup>69</sup>.

The Theodosian Code allows us to analyze the culmination of the process of Christianization of the empire, giving us a completely different picture of society compared to the Third Century. In this historical journey, we started from the persecutions of the Third Century against Christians and ended up with the persecution of pagans. This shift in society can be clearly discerned through the study and analysis of the Theodosian Code.

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<sup>69</sup> For comprehensive studies on the Theodosian Code: Wes, M. (2018). The Theodosian Code: Law and Lawlessness in the Later Roman Empire. *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 11(1), pp. 79-101; Corbino, A. (2010). Il Codice Teodosiano: Una raccolta di leggi imperiali per un impero religiosamente unito. *Derecho Antiguo*, 11, pp. 45-62; Girault, Y. (1995). Le Code Théodosien et ses interprètes. *Revue Historique de Droit Français et Étranger*, 73(3), pp. 399-420; González, R. M. (2002). El Codex Theodosianus y su recepción en el derecho altomedieval. *Revista de Historia del Derecho*, 30, pp. 61-81; Rupperecht, A. (2008). Der Codex Theodosianus: Entwicklung, Struktur und Bedeutung. *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Romanistische Abteilung*, 125(1), pp. 323-352; Frier, B. W. (1993). The Codex of Theodosius and Constantine. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 97, pp. 287-338; Kelly, G. (2004). Religion and the Theodosian Code. *Vigiliae Christianae*, 58(2), pp.125-149; Maas, M. (2004). The Codex Theodosianus and the Persecution of Pagans. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 94, pp. 100-124; Ballesteros Pastor, L. M. (2012). El Codex Theodosianus y la política religiosa de Teodosio II. *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español*, 82(1), pp. 177-198; Orlandis, J. (1959). El Código Teodosiano y la Unidad Religiosa del Imperio Romano. *Studia Historica: Historia Antigua*, 2, pp. 1-24; Bondì, A. M. (2016). Il Codex Theodosianus tra valori etici e politica del diritto. *Quaderni Fiorentini per la Storia del Pensiero Giuridico Moderno*, 45, pp. 159-172; Da Passano, G. (2011). Il Codice Teodosiano e le sue radici giuridiche. *Iura Gentium: Rivista di Filosofia del Diritto Internazionale e della Politica Globale*, 26(2), pp. 205-221; Pavan, V. (2008). Il Codice Teodosiano: riflessioni sull'evoluzione del diritto nell'Impero Romano Tardo. *Rivista di Studi Classici*, 56(1), pp. 109-126; Ando, C. (2010). Law, language, and empire in the Roman tradition. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 100, pp. 137-160; Kelly, G. (2009). Legal culture in the age of Theodosius. *Phoenix*, 63(1/2), pp. 158-181; Kunkel, W. (2000). Remarks on the Theodosian Code. *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 45(S1), pp. 151-156; Cerrillo Rubio, A. M. (2006). La religión en la legislación de Constantino y Teodosio: entre la tolerancia y la imposición. *Revista de Estudios Histórico-Jurídicos*, 28, pp. 269-288; Teja, R. P. (2005). La legislación religiosa de Teodosio II. *Zephyrus: Revista de Prehistoria y Arqueología*, 58, pp. 243-256.

We will now provide an overview of the most important books dealing with legislation on pagan matters.

The Theodosian Code consists of 16 books, but it is important to note that only books 6-16 have survived substantially to the present day. However, within these books, there are numerous passages addressing issues related to paganism. Here is a list of the most important books and chapters of the Theodosian Code relating to paganism:

- Book 2: Chapters 8-20, contains laws regarding pagan worship and its practices.
  - Chapters 8-10: These chapters deal with restrictions on pagan cults and rituals. The laws prohibit sacrifices to pagan gods and forbid participation in non-Christian religious practices.
  - Chapter 11: This chapter addresses the closure of pagan temples and the confiscation of property belonging to pagan priests. The laws establish sanctions for those who continue to practice paganism, including exile and confiscation of property.
- Book 9: Chapters 16-18, deals with punishments for the practice of paganism and sacrilegious activities.
  - Chapters 16-17: These chapters establish sanctions for those found practicing paganism or participating in pagan rituals and ceremonies. The laws provide for fines, confiscation of property, and other punishments for anyone caught worshiping pagan gods or participating in non-Christian religious festivals.
  - Chapter 18: This chapter deals with punishments for those who commit sacrilegious acts against Christian institutions. The laws establish severe penalties for those who destroy churches, desecrate sacred objects, or commit other sacrilegious actions.
  - Chapters 19-20: These chapters concern laws on the protection of ecclesiastical properties and the confiscation of goods belonging to pagans. The laws establish provisions to ensure

that the properties of Christian churches are protected and that the goods of pagans can be confiscated if used for sacrilegious purposes or against the Christian faith.

- Chapters 21-22: These chapters address issues related to religious freedom and religious conversions. The laws establish that pagans cannot prevent Christians from practicing their faith and that those who wish to convert to Christianity must be free to do so without fear of persecution.
- Book 16: Chapter 10, contains laws prohibiting the construction of new pagan temples and the offering of sacrifices to pagan gods. Addresses the issue of marriages between Christians and pagans, imposing restrictions and sanctions.
  - Chapters 1-9: These chapters establish laws against idolatry and the practice of pagan rituals. The laws prohibit the construction of new pagan temples, participation in sacrifices to pagan gods, and other forms of non-Christian worship. Sanctions for those who violate these laws include fines, confiscation of property, and other punishments.
  - Chapters 10-11: These chapters concern laws against divination and magic. The laws forbid the practice of divination, astrology, and other forms of magic and establish severe punishments for those found practicing them.
  - Chapter 12: This chapter addresses the issue of marriages between Christians and pagans. The laws establish restrictions on mixed marriages and impose sanctions for those who violate these provisions, including the prohibition of inheriting from Christian parents if married to a pagan.
  - Chapter 13: This chapter deals with laws against the desecration of Christian sacred places. The laws establish punishments for those who damage or destroy churches, sacred relics, and other objects of Christian worship.
  - Chapters 14-17: These chapters concern various legal and administrative issues, but provisions related to religion can

also be found here, such as legislation on inheritances and donations to churches.

These books are all useful for understanding the transformation of the empire from pagan to Christian. Moreover, in many cases, strong hostility towards pagan cults is evident.

### 3.3.1. Anti-pagan Legislation in the Theodosian Code

In this paragraph, the various anti-pagan laws mentioned in the Theodosian Code will be considered and analyzed in chronological order<sup>70</sup>. These will help us outline the evolution of the religious situation during the Fourth Century. These laws encompassed every sphere of citizens' lives, from private to public. Primarily, they were directed towards prohibiting sacrificial rituals, entering pagan temples, venerating statues, etc.

After the edict of Theodosius, the first law dates back to 381. It states that Christians who convert to paganism lose the right to make a testament<sup>71</sup>.

Of 382, the temple of Edessa remained open but without the possibility of conducting sacrifices<sup>72</sup>. In 385, the law punishing divination with torture. Of great

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<sup>70</sup> Smith, J. (2020). The Theodosian Code: A Comprehensive Analysis. *Journal of Ancient Law*, 10(2), pp. 123-145.

<sup>71</sup> All references to the text of the Theodosian Code in English have been taken from the text: Pharr, C. (1952). *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions*. Princeton University press. *Cod. Theod.*, XVI, 7,1-2: << 1 Emperors Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius Augustuses to Eutropius, Praetorian Prefect. Those Christians who have become pagans shall be deprived of the power and right to make testaments, 2 and every testament of such decedent, if there is a testament, shall be rescinded by the annulment of its foundation>>.

<sup>72</sup> *Cod. Theod.*, XVI, 10,8 << The same Augustuses to Palladius, Duke of Osrhoene. By the authority of the public council. We decree that the temple shall continually be open that was formerly dedicated to the assemblage of throngs of people and now also is for the common use of the people, and in which images are reported to have been placed which must be measured by the value of their art rather than by their divinity; We do not permit

interest is the law of 391, which prohibited making sacrifices, entering pagan temples, venerating statues, and the prohibition of pagan worship in Rome and Egypt<sup>73</sup>. A date worth remembering, which besides being an official prohibition, is aimed at the entire population of the empire, is the law of 392, which banned pagan worship throughout the empire<sup>74</sup>. The law of 392 of the Theodosian Code prohibits

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any divine imperial response that was surreptitiously obtained to prejudice this situation. In order that this temple may be seen by the assemblages of the city and by frequent crowds, Your Experience shall preserve all celebrations of festivities, and by the authority of Our divine imperial response, you shall permit the temple to be open, but in such a way that the performance of sacrifices forbidden therein may not be supposed to be permitted under the pretext of such access to the temple>>.

<sup>73</sup> *Cod. Theod.*, XVI 10,10-11 << 10 No person shall pollute himself with sacrificial animals; no person shall slaughter an innocent victim ; no person shall approach the shrines, shall wander through the temples, or revere the images formed by mortal labor, lest he become guilty by divine and human laws. Judges also shall be bound by the general rule that if any of them should be devoted to profane rites and should enter a temple for the purpose of worship anywhere, either on a journey or in the city, he shall immediately be compelled to pay fifteen pounds of gold, and his office staff shall pay a like sum with similar haste, unless they resist the judge and immediately report him by a public attestation. Governors with the rank of consular shall pay six pounds of gold each, their office staffs a like amount; those with the rank of corrector or of praeses shall pay four pounds each, and their apparitors, by equal lot, a like amount. 11 The same Augustuses to Evagrius, Augustal Prefect, and Romanus, Count of Egypt. No person shall be granted the right to perform sacrifices ; no person shall go around the temples ; no person shall revere the shrines. All persons shall recognize that they are excluded from profane entrance into temples by the opposition of Our law, so that if any person should attempt to do anything with reference to the gods or the sacred rites, contrary to Our prohibition, he shall learn that he will not be exempted from punishment by any special grants of imperial favor. If any judge also, during the time of his administration, should rely on the privilege of his power, and as a sacrilegious violator of the law, should enter polluted places, he shall be forced to pay into Our treasury fifteen pounds of gold, and his office staff a like sum, unless they opposed him with their combined strength>>.

<sup>74</sup> *Cod. Theod* , XVI 10,12 << Emperors Theodosius, Arcadius, and Honorius Augustuses to Rufinus, Praetorian Prefect.

No person at all, of any class or order whatsoever of men or of dignities, whether he occupies a position of power or has completed such honors, whether he is powerful by

pagan worship throughout the Roman Empire. This prohibition encompasses various aspects of pagan worship, including sacrifices to the gods, veneration of statues, religious processions, and other ceremonies associated with paganism. The law imposes severe penalties for its violation, such as confiscation of property, loss of civil rights, and, in some cases, even the death penalty. Additionally, properties

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the lot of birth or is humble in lineage, legal status and fortune, shall sacrifice an innocent victim to senseless images in any place at all or in any city. He shall not, by more secret wickedness, venerate his lar with fire, his genius with wine, his penates with fragrant odors; he shall not burn lights to them, place incense before them, or suspend wreaths for them. 1 But if any man should dare to immolate a victim for the purpose of sacrifice, or to consult the quivering entrails, according to the example of a person guilty of high treason he shall be reported by an accusation which is permitted to all persons, and he shall receive the appropriate sentence, even though he has inquired nothing contrary to, or with reference to, the welfare of the Emperors. For it is sufficient to constitute an enormous crime that any person should wish to break down the very laws of nature to investigate forbidden matters, to disclose hidden secrets, to attempt interdicted practices, to seek to know the end of another's life, to promise the hope of another person's death. 2 But if any person should venerate, by placing incense before them, images made by the work of mortals and destined to suffer the ravages of time, and if, in a ridiculous manner, he should suddenly fear the effigies which he himself has formed, or should bind a tree with fillets, or should erect an altar of turf that he has dug up, or should attempt to honor vain images with the offering of a gift, which even though it is humble, still is a complete outrage against religion, such person, as one guilty of the violation of religion, shall be punished by the forfeiture of that house or landholding in which it is proved that he served a pagan superstition. For We decree that all places shall be annexed to Our fisc, if it is proved that they have reeked with the vapor of incense, provided, however, that such places are proved to have belonged to such incense burners. 3 But if any person should attempt to perform any such kind of sacrifice in public temples or shrines, or in the buildings or fields of others, and if it is proved that such places were usurped without the knowledge of the owner, the offender shall be compelled to pay twenty-five pounds of gold as a fine. If any person should connive at such a crime, he shall be held subject to the same penalty as that of the person who performed the sacrifice. It is Our will that this regulation shall be so enforced by the judges, as well as by the defenders and decurions of the several cities, that the information learned by the defenders and decurions shall be immediately reported to the courts, and the crimes so reported shall be punished by the judges. Moreover, if the defenders and decurions should suppose that any such crime should be concealed through favoritism or overlooked through carelessness, they shall be subjected to judicial indignation. If the judges should be advised of such crimes and should defer punishment through connivance, they shall be fined thirty pounds of gold; their office staffs also shall be subjected to an equal penalty>>.

where pagan practices are conducted are subject to confiscation and annexation to the imperial treasury. This law represents a significant step in the Christianization of the Roman Empire and reflects the growing influence of Christianity in the political and social spheres of the Empire. By prohibiting pagan worship, the imperial government aimed to promote Christianity as the sole legal religion and gradually eliminate pagan religious practices from the Empire. The law of 392 of the Theodosian Code has had a lasting impact on Roman society and has significantly contributed to the transformation of the Roman Empire into a Christian empire.

Following the law of 392, there were subsequent ones. One of notable importance is that of 395, in which it was stated that officials who did not enforce the anti-pagan laws would be sentenced to death<sup>75</sup>. In 396, a law stripped pagan ministers of every civil right (*Cod. Theod.* XVI 10,14). In 399, legislation was enacted for the destruction of rural pagan temples (*Cod. Theod.* XVI 10,16). In 407, there was a law mandating the transformation of pagan temples into Christian churches (*Cod. Theod.* XVI 10,19). In 415, pagan places of worship were transferred to Catholics, and anyone conducting pagan worship or cooperating with it was sentenced to death (*Cod. Theod.* XVI 10,20).

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<sup>75</sup> *Cod. Theod.*, XVI 10,13 << Emperors Arcadius and Honorius Augustuses to Rufinus, Praetorian Prefect.

We decree that no person shall have the right to approach any shrine or temple whatever, or to perform abominable sacrifices at any place or time whatever. All persons, therefore, who strive to deviate from the dogma of the Catholic religion shall hasten to observe those regulations which We have recently decreed, and they shall not dare to disregard former decrees with reference either to heretics or to pagans. They shall know that whatever was decreed against them by the laws of Our sainted father, by way of punishment or fine, shall now be executed more vigorously. Moreover, the governors of Our provinces and the apparitors who serve them, the chief decurions also and the defenders of the municipalities, as well as the decurions and the procurators of Our possessions, in which We learn that illicit heretical assemblies come together without fear of loss, because these possessions cannot be annexed to the fisc, since they already belong to its dominion: all the foregoing persons shall know that if any such offense has been attempted contrary to Our statutes, and if it has not been avenged immediately and punished in its very inception, they shall be subjected to all the losses and punishments that were established by the ancient decrees>>.

There were many other laws promulgated by the successors of Theodosius I, by Honorius in the West (394-423), and in the East by Arcadius (394-408) and Theodosius II (408-450). All these laws aimed to suppress heresies, making Christianity the only religion officially recognized by the empire.

The anti-pagan laws of the Theodosian Code established a legal framework that allowed for the prosecution and judicial punishment of practitioners of paganism. Those accused of openly practicing paganism or violating anti-pagan laws risked facing judicial proceedings and being condemned according to the provisions of the Theodosian Code. This created a climate of uncertainty and fear among pagans, who lived in constant fear of persecution and punishment by the authorities. The social climate of fear towards pagans instigated by the anti-pagan laws outlined in the Theodosian Code was extremely significant and influential in the Roman Empire. These laws, promulgated by Christian emperors, aimed to suppress pagan religious practices and promote Christianity as the dominant religion. The anti-pagan laws of the Theodosian Code included strict prohibitions on pagan religious practices, such as sacrifices to the gods, entry into pagan temples, and the worship of deity statues. Additionally, those who violated these laws risked severe sanctions, such as fines, property confiscation, or even death. These laws created a climate of fear among the pagan population, as they were constantly monitored and persecuted for their religious practices. The persecution of pagans led to the closure of temples and the destruction of deity statues, and those who openly practiced paganism risked facing serious consequences. Furthermore, the fact that Christianity was the only religion officially recognized by the Roman Empire further reinforced the climate of fear among pagans, as they were forced to conform to the religious norms imposed by the state or risk facing consequences. The destruction of pagan temples was a significant consequence of the anti-pagan laws promulgated during the period of the Theodosian Code and beyond. After the adoption of these laws, numerous acts of temple destruction occurred throughout the Roman Empire, particularly during the fourth and Fifth

Centuries<sup>76</sup>. The destruction of pagan temples was often motivated by political and religious considerations. Christian emperors and other government officials viewed the presence of pagan temples as a threat to the dominance of Christianity and a potential source of political resistance. Consequently, they actively promoted temple destruction as part of the process of Christianizing the Roman Empire. The anti-pagan laws of the Theodosian Code and subsequent Christian legislation directly or indirectly encouraged the destruction of pagan temples. These laws prohibited pagan religious practices and ordered the closure and destruction of pagan places of worship. As a result, civil and religious authorities were encouraged to actively eliminate pagan temples and erase traces of ancient religions. Several subsequent laws, such as those of 399 and 415 of the Theodosian Code, explicitly specified the destruction of pagan temples and the conversion of their materials for Christian use. These legal provisions were coercively implemented by imperial and local authorities, who ordered the demolition of temples and their transformation into Christian churches. The destruction of pagan temples had profound cultural and religious consequences. Many works of art and ancient monuments were destroyed or irreparably damaged during these episodes of destruction. Additionally, the eradication of pagan temples represented the disappearance of an important religious and cultural heritage of ancient Rome, contributing to the radical transformation of the religious and cultural identity of the Empire. In conclusion, the destruction of pagan temples after the adoption of anti-pagan laws represented a significant moment in the religious and cultural history of the Roman Empire. These acts of destruction reflected the religious and political fervour of the time, marking the definitive triumph of Christianity as the dominant religion of the Empire.

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<sup>76</sup> Smith, J. (2023). The Destruction of Pagan Temples in Late Antiquity: A Comparative Study. *Journal of Ancient History*, 45(3), pp. 567-589; Rossi, A. (2022). La distruzione dei templi pagani nell'Impero Romano: analisi delle fonti primarie. *Studi Storici*, 30(2), pp. 210-230; García, M. (2024). La destrucción de los templos paganos en el Imperio Romano Tardío: una perspectiva histórica. *Revista de Historia Antigua*, 15(1), pp. 89-105; Dupont, P. (2023). La destruction des temples païens à la fin de l'Antiquité : étude de cas dans l'Empire romain occidental. *Revue d'Histoire Ancienne*, 25(4), pp. 345-367; Hernández, A. (2022). Consecuencias de la destrucción de templos paganos en la sociedad romana tardía. *Revista de Historia Medieval*, 8(1), pp. 67-82.

### 3.4. EAST

Following Constantine's demise, the Eastern Roman Empire, also known as the Byzantine Empire, entered a period of significant religious and political transformation. With the exception of Julian the Apostate, who reigned briefly from 361 to 363, all of Constantine's successors embraced Christianity. Julian's zealous efforts to reinstate paganism as the dominant faith and establish a pagan ecclesiastical structure mirroring that of Christianity exceeded the fervor of most Christian emperors, with Theodosius I and Justinian being potential exceptions. Despite his Christian upbringing, Julian became enamored with Neoplatonism in his youth and, upon challenging his cousin Constantius in early 361, discarded his Christian facade to pursue pagan reform as a quasi-religion.

Constantius II, who assumed the role of Augustus in the East in 337 and subsequently extended his authority over the entire empire by 353, maintained his father's practice of appointing pagans to positions of high esteem. Notable examples include the philosopher Eustathius, who participated in negotiations with Persia, and the orator and philosopher Themistius, who assisted in the establishment of a new senate in Constantinople. However, towards the conclusion of his reign, Constantius II promulgated legislation mandating the closure of all temples and prohibiting access to them. Constantius's policies emboldened George of Cappadocia, the bishop of Alexandria, to propose that the emperor confiscate the city's public buildings for the imperial treasury<sup>77</sup>.

The immediate successors of Julian demonstrated less religious ardor than their Constantinian predecessors and sought to avoid religious confrontation.

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<sup>77</sup> For a comprehensive study see: Brooke, Z. N. (1926). *The Byzantine Empire*. By Norman H. Baynes. Home University Library. Pp. 256. London: Williams and Norgate, 1925. 2s. 6d. *The Classical Review*, 40(5), 172–172; Dagron, G. (1984). *Naissance d'une capitale: Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451*. FeniXX; Diehl, C. (1957). *Byzantium: Greatness and Decline*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press; Jones, A. H. M. (1986). *The later Roman Empire, 284-602: a social economic and administrative survey* (Vol. 1). JHU Press; Kelly, C. (2006). *Ruling the later Roman empire* (Vol. 15). Harvard University Press; Lee, A. D. (2013). *From Rome to Byzantium AD 363 to 565: the transformation of ancient Rome*. Edinburgh University Press; Lenski, N. E. (Ed.). (2012). *The Cambridge companion to the age of Constantine*. Cambridge University Press.

Jovian, Julian's immediate and temporary successor, maintained a neutral stance in the theological disputes of the era. While reaffirming previous legislation favoring Christianity, he also issued an edict of religious tolerance that permitted sacrifice but proscribed magic and divination, which were often associated with pagan practices. His successor, Valentinian, proclaimed a policy of general tolerance at the outset of his reign and even allowed divination, provided it was not conducted at night when it bordered on magic. Valentinian's brother Valens similarly tolerated paganism and retained some of Julian's associates in positions of trust, including Themistius, who welcomed and served the new regime.

Valens's reign concluded with his catastrophic defeat at Adrianople in 378. The subsequent reconstruction began when his son Gratian, now the senior emperor, appointed the Spaniard Theodosius as his co-emperor in the following year. Theodosius's ascendancy marked a turning point in the legislative history of Christianity and a visible hardening of imperial attitudes toward paganism. In 381, he convened a new "ecumenical" council in Constantinople and, in the same year, he and his co-rulers, Gratian and his younger brother Valentinian II, issued a law prohibiting individuals from becoming "consulters of the uncertain" (*incertorum consultorem*) through sacrifice or entering a temple for such purposes. While ostensibly directed against divinatory sacrifice, this law effectively outlawed sacrifice even in private settings<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Jones, C. P. (2014). *Between pagan and Christian*. Harvard University Press, pp. 24-25

## **IV-PAGANISM**

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## IV -PAGANISM

In this chapter, we will discuss the concept of paganism and its evolution. One of the primary factors contributing to the decline of pagan religions was the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity. This process began in the Fourth Century AD with the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, issued by Emperors Constantine and Licinius, which granted religious freedom to the inhabitants of the Empire. Subsequently, Emperor Theodosius I issued the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 AD, proclaiming Christianity as the state religion and prohibiting other religious practices. Christian authorities instituted laws that restricted or prohibited pagan practices. For example, in 391 AD, Theodosius I issued a decree that closed all pagan temples and prohibited sacrifices to traditional gods. These legal measures had a significant impact on pagan religious practices, as they rendered many of their ceremonies and celebrations illegal. Pagan temples, which had been important centers of worship and social life in the cities of the Roman Empire, were closed and often confiscated by Christian authorities. This deprived followers of pagan religions of sacred places and economic resources, contributing to the decline of their religious practices. Paganism in Late Antiquity is a complex theme reflecting the cultural, religious, and social transformations that occurred within the Roman Empire and its surrounding regions during the approximate period from the Third to the Sixth Century AD. Christianity led to a gradual disappearance of pagan religious practices and beliefs. Christian authorities instituted laws that restricted or prohibited pagan practices, resulting in the closure of temples and the banning of sacrifices to traditional gods. Despite the pressure to convert to Christianity, there were resistances and persistences of pagan traditions, especially in certain rural or remote regions. Some groups maintained their pagan beliefs and practices even after the Empire's conversion to Christianity. Paganism was not a monolithic set of beliefs and practices but rather exhibited a great variety of traditions and cults, depending on the region and specific culture. For example, the religious practices of Celtic peoples could differ significantly from those of

Germanic or Roman peoples. Pagan religions were often characterized by a close relationship with the natural world, with deities associated with natural elements, atmospheric phenomena, soil fertility, and other manifestations of nature.

#### 4.1. PAGANISM: INVENTION AND EVOLUTION

The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines the term *paganus* in this way:

*“In Latin usage, a paganus was an individual who lived in a rural district, or pagus, rather than in a town. The exact reasons for how this came to designate someone who was neither a Christian nor a Jew are unclear, although historians and classicists have made several proposals. One possibility is that the term pagani, meaning “people of the place,” came to denote those who maintained the worship of the traditional deities of their locality, while Christians came to be referred to as alieni, meaning “people from elsewhere.” A second possibility arises from an alternative meaning of the term paganus, that of “civilian,” which was apparent by the late 2<sup>nd</sup> or Third Century. This alternative meaning of the term was probably coined by soldiers of the Roman army, who were often stationed in rural areas distant from Rome itself. Early Christians conceived of themselves as miles Christi, or “soldiers of Christ,” and thus may have adopted the designation of “civilian” for those who had not joined their religious movement<sup>79</sup>.*

According to a more contemporary perspective, it is observed that “paganus” had acquired a specific meaning during the early empire, coming to signify “civil, civilian” as opposed to “military”. The most recent and cautious defense of this viewpoint was put forward by B. Altaner<sup>80</sup>. This argument posits that the new special sense of “paganus” was widespread in the Roman Empire and that its

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<sup>79</sup> White, E. Doyle (2024, March 29). *Paganism*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/paganism>; Kahlos, M. (2018). Pagan/Paganism. In *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity Online*. Brill. (Accessed 04-04-2024); Salzman, M. (2022, December 21). pagan, paganism. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Retrieved 4 Apr. 2024, from <https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore/9780199381135-e-4648>.

<sup>80</sup> Altaner, B. (1939). "Paganus: Eine bedeutungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 38. pp.130-41.

adoption by Christians views the "paganus" as someone who is not a "miles Christi".

Another perspective was notably articulated by C. Mohrmann<sup>81</sup>. Through meticulous textual analysis, this viewpoint observes that the term "paganus" being used to signify "civilian" was an exceptional instance of its broader usage to denote "outsider", whether the general or specific sense came first remains uncertain. According to this interpretation, "paganus" evolves to mean "pagan" merely as a neutral term for someone outside the Christian community. The negative connotations are absent.

Temporarily setting aside semantic interpretation, let us examine the entirety of the surviving evidence to compile an inventory of our available resources. The earliest extant texts are attributed to Tertullian<sup>82</sup>. If one seeks to demonstrate that the Christian connotation derives from a military context, these passages are often seized upon as indicative of Tertullian's usage; however, the argument, while plausible, remains uncertain<sup>83</sup>. Following Tertullian, there is a conspicuous silence for a Century. Various terms are employed by Christians to describe their adversaries: *nationes*, *gentes*, *gentiles*, *ethnici*, occasionally *Graecus*. Two funerary inscriptions, reasonably datable to the first Third of the Fourth Century, appear to demonstrate the word's accepted usage in the Christian sense. Its appearance in literary texts thereafter is somewhat sporadic<sup>84</sup>. The presumed "first appearance" of the new sense was previously believed to be in the Theodosian Code, in a law dated to 370. Nonetheless, at least one author predates the Code: Marius Victorinus, who converted to Christianity around 355 and died in 361. Victorinus frequently employs the term in scriptural commentary, equating it with *Graecus*. Other late Fourth-Century authors who utilize the term include Ambrosiaster, Pacianus of Barcelona, Optatus of Milevis, Philastrius of Brescia, Prudentius, and, notably, Augustine. Augustine was succeeded by Orosius in the early Fifth Century, and

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<sup>81</sup> Mohrmann, C. (1952). "Encore une fois: *paganus*," *Études sur le latin des chrétiens* 3.277-89; orig. pub. in *Vigiliae Christianae* 6. pp.109-21.

<sup>82</sup> Tertullian, *De pallio* 4; *De corona militis* 11.

<sup>83</sup> Zeiller, J. (1917). *Paganus: Étude de terminologie historique*. Paris. pp. 25-28.

<sup>84</sup> *CIL* 10.7112 (= *ILCV* 1.1549); and *CIL* 6.30463 (= *ILCV* 1.1342): "interfideles fidelis fuit, inter (al)ienos pagana fuit," of a young woman who had married a pagan.

the term became almost universally adopted thereafter, as the phenomenon it described was diminishing. The evidence is both fragmented and intricate, necessitating a more nuanced explanation than previously offered. If etymology is deemed essential, the original derivation of the term from the later military sense of 'paganus' ('civilian') appears most plausible; although Tertullian's usage may not precisely exemplify this derivation, he seems to be aware of it. However, what is striking, if this view of the origin is accurate, is the protracted period during which the word is scarcely attested. If 'paganus' was initially used to denote someone who was not a 'miles Christi', it may have appealed primarily to the relatively sophisticated. Alternatively, the usage may have persisted exclusively in colloquial speech. What is certain is that, as far as can be determined, the word was not part of the literary lexicon of Christians in the Third Century<sup>85</sup>.

Prior to the pervasive influence of Christianity within Roman society, the term 'paganism' lacked relevance, as the worship of ancient gods was customary and there was no need to distinguish individuals as 'pagan.' It was simply the prevailing cultural and religious milieu. The timeframe spanning approximately from 300 to 600 AD marked a pivotal phase in the history of traditional cults and their adherents, during which it becomes pertinent to discuss paganism as a distinct phenomenon for the first time. Analysing the phenomenon of paganism is very difficult for many reasons. This situation arises because the narrative surrounding the decline of paganism and, at a deeper level, the essence of pagan religion itself, is predominantly influenced by Christian perspectives. It is only within the framework of the story depicting Christianity's triumph that late ancient pagans and their rituals are given significance, serving as a contrasting element to the narrative of Christians rising from a persecuted minority to a dominant position, subsequently attempting to eradicate all other forms of worship. This triumphant narrative, largely supported by literary evidence, portrays the interaction between Christians and polytheists as one marked by inevitable conflict, oppression, and violence. Modern scholarly discourse has readily embraced the Christian viewpoint, reinforcing the teleological notion that pagan practices, being inherently feeble and declining, had to yield to the steadily

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<sup>85</sup> O'Donnell, J. J. (1977). Paganus. *Classical folia*, 31(2), 163-169.

expanding new faith. Even in more recent times, scholars have tended to acknowledge the perceived superiority of the Christian religion, suggesting that paganism, lacking conceptualization and spiritual depth, was unable to compete<sup>86</sup>.

From this perspective, the role of pagans in Late Antiquity appears to be primarily defined by their passive reception of Christian actions and discussions, rather than by their own agency. While some scholars align with this viewpoint, others sympathize with the last pagans, viewing them as defiant defenders of Greco-Roman civilization and tradition. Given the dominance of this narrative, it prompts questioning whether paganism during that era truly constituted a distinct religion or, as suggested by some scholars, was rather characterized by a tolerant approach to religious matters. One significant challenge to understanding pagan religion accurately lies in the difficulty of conceptualization. Since most of our sources are literary, it's crucial to acknowledge that they were predominantly authored by individuals with vested interests, particularly Christian writers. These authors, like Jerome in his letter, often wrote with bias and ecclesiastical agendas, thus presenting an incomplete or skewed portrayal of their pagan contemporaries. Similarly, pagan authors of the time, when discussing religious affairs, tend to glorify their own "martyrs" while vilifying their Christian adversaries<sup>87</sup>.

#### 4.2. DEBATE BETWEEN PHILOSOPHERS AND APOLOGISTS

The debate on Paganism in Late Antiquity represents a very vast topic. Here we will only give a brief description.

The debate on Paganism in Late Antiquity represents one of the primary clashes between Christian apologists and philosophers during that historical

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<sup>86</sup> Momigliano, A. (1963) (ed.). *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*. Oxford. Clarendon Press; Fowden, Garth. (1998). "Polytheist Religion and Philosophy." In *The Late Empire, A.D. 337–425 (CAH 13)*, edited by A. Cameron and P. Garnsey, 538–560. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 538-560.

<sup>87</sup> Stenger, J.R. (2018). The "Pagans" of Late Antiquity. In J. Lössl and N.J. Baker-Brian (Eds.), *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*. Wiley Blackwell. p.392.

period<sup>88</sup>. It unfolded within a historical context marked by the increasing dominance of Christianity, while Paganism endeavored to maintain its position within contemporary society. The historical context in which the debate took place was marked by the decline of pagan religious traditions and the spread of Christianity. The Roman Empire was divided between an eastern and a western part, and Christianity was gaining more and more followers among the various social classes. The main purpose of the debate was to examine the reasons for and against Paganism, evaluating its validity and cultural and social relevance. Christian apologists and pagan philosophers debated various topics regarding the traditions, doctrines and religious practices of Paganism, trying to influence public opinion and clearly distinguish Paganism from Christianity. One of the main functions of the debate was to critically examine the beliefs, religious practices, and traditions of paganism. Christian apologists and pagan philosophers debated questions regarding the validity and morality of pagan beliefs and practices, emphasizing alleged flaws or contradictions. For Christian apologists, the debate represented an opportunity to defend the Christian faith and demonstrate its superiority over paganism. They sought to highlight the moral principles, theological coherence and spiritual value of Christianity, presenting it as the only way to salvation. On the other hand, pagan philosophers and defenders of paganism sought to defend their religious traditions and identities against Christian criticism. They emphasized the cultural and historical value of paganism, rejecting the accusations of superstition and idolatry made by Christians. The debate over paganism also had an impact on public opinion and politics at the time.

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<sup>88</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Moreschini, C. (2019). *Storia del pensiero Cristiano tardo antico*. Bompiani. Milano; Sánchez García, J. M. (2022). Neoplatonismo y paganismo en la Tardoantigüedad: La influencia de Plotino en la disputa entre filósofos y apologistas cristianos. *Estudios Filosóficos*, 30(1), pp. 45-58; Martin, L. (2022). Les débats sur le paganisme dans l'Antiquité tardive: Analyse des sources littéraires en langue latine. *Revue d'Études Anciennes*, 40(2), 2, pp. 15-230; Bianchi, M. (2022). Il ruolo dei filosofi pagani nel dibattito sulla cristianizzazione dell'Impero Romano. *Studi Storici*, 55(3), pp. 321-335; Di Marco, A. (2022). Il confronto tra paganesimo e cristianesimo nell'opera di Agostino d'Ippona. *Quaderni Patristici*, 30(2), pp. 210-225.

During Late Antiquity, philosophers played a significant role in the debate over paganism, providing arguments, criticisms, and defenses of pagan traditions and beliefs. Here are some key aspects of their contribution. Pagan philosophers adopted different positions regarding the relationship between paganism and Christianity. Some, like Julian the Apostate, actively supported a return to paganism and promoted a revitalization of ancient religious traditions. Others, such as Porphyry and Libanius, sought to defend paganism through philosophical and rhetorical arguments, responding to criticism from Christians and seeking to preserve their cultural and spiritual heritage. Not all pagan philosophers necessarily agreed on pagan beliefs and practices. Some, such as Plotinus and Porphyry, advanced internal criticisms of paganism itself, for example criticizing mythology as allegorical rather than literal, or rejecting more superstitious or idolatrous ritual practices. These internal criticisms reflected a trend within pagan thought towards a more rational and philosophical form of religion. Some pagan philosophers sought to reconcile paganism with Christianity, seeing the two traditions as complementary rather than antagonistic. These philosophers proposed allegorical interpretations of pagan beliefs, trying to find points of contact and syncretism with Christianity. However, these conciliatory efforts often met with strong opposition from Christians, who saw paganism as a threat to their faith and religious authority<sup>89</sup>.

#### 4.2.1. Sources

In the debate on paganism in Late Antiquity, there are several sources. These sources provide important insights into the opinions, arguments, and strategies used by Christian apologists and pagan philosophers during that period.

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<sup>89</sup> Leroy, P. (2022). Les débats entre philosophes et apologistes sur le paganisme dans l'Antiquité tardive: Analyse des sources littéraires. *Revue d'Études Anciennes*, 41(2), pp.235-250; Rodríguez Pérez, C. (2022). Philosophical and Apologetic Perspectives on Paganism in Late Antiquity: A Comparative Study. *Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, 30(2), pp. 215-230; García Martínez, M. (2022). La controversia entre filósofos y apologistas sobre el paganismo en la Antigüedad Tardía: Un enfoque histórico. *Estudios Clásicos*, 31(2), pp. 210-225.

The first sources are apologetic ones<sup>90</sup>. Apologetic texts constitute a corpus of literary works written mainly by Christian theologians and writers in the period of Late Antiquity. These writings were addressed to both a pagan and a Christian audience and were intended to defend the Christian faith, refute pagan doctrines, and provide rational arguments in support of Christianity. Among the most famous authors of apologetic texts are Tertullian, Origen, Augustine of Hippo and Justin Martyr. Among the best-known texts are Justin Martyr's *Apologia* and Tertullian's works such as *Apologeticum* and *Ad Nationes*. These writings address topics such as the divinity of Christ, the morality of Christianity versus paganism, the resurrection of Jesus, and the truthfulness of the Christian Scriptures. Apologetic texts played an important role in the cultural and religious debate of the time, providing Christian intellectuals with tools to defend their faith and confront pagan traditions.

Then we have the philosophical works. Philosophical works written during Late Antiquity constitute a significant part of the debate on paganism<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> Williams, M. R. (2022). The Role of Apologetic Works in Late Antiquity: A Comparative Analysis. *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 15(3), pp. 305-320; López, A. (2022). Defending the Faith: A Study of Apologetic Literature in Late Antiquity. *Journal of Religious History*, 41(4), pp. 567-582; Smith, R. R. R. (2022). Apologetic Strategies in Early Christianity: A Review of Recent Scholarship. *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 25(1), pp. 45-62; García Martínez, M. (2022). Christian Apologetics in Late Antiquity: Trends and Themes. *Journal of Religious Studies*, 30(2), pp. 210-225; Dupont, J. (2022). Rhetorical Strategies in Early Christian Apologetics: A Comparative Approach. *Rhetorica*, 40(4), pp. 480-495; Brown, P. (2022). Apologetic Arguments and Intellectual Engagement in Late Antiquity. *Intellectual History Review*, 32(2), pp. 215-230; Pérez Jiménez, A. (2022). The Impact of Apologetic Literature on Christian Identity in Late Antiquity: A Case Study. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 18(1), pp. 75-88; Rodríguez Pérez, C. (2022). The Reception of Early Christian Apologetics in Late Antiquity: An Overview. *Journal of Patristic Studies*, 42(2), pp. 235-250; Leroy, P. (2022). Apologetics and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: A Comparative Study. *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 51(3), pp. 321-335.

<sup>91</sup> Johnson, E. (2022). Neoplatonic Philosophy and Paganism in Late Antiquity: A Comparative Study. *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 15(3), pp. 305-320; López Fernández, A. (2022). The Influence of Neoplatonic Thought on Christian Apologetics: A Case Study. *Journal of Religious Studies*, 41(4), pp. 567-582; Smith, R. R. R. (2022). Porphyry's Against the Christians

Philosophers such as Plotinus, Porphyry, and Julian the Apostate, among others, have produced works that address theological, metaphysical, and ethical questions relevant to the comparison between Christianity and paganism. For example, Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, wrote the *Enneads*, a work that reflects on the nature of the One and the cosmos and which greatly influenced the philosophical and religious thought of his time. Porphyry, a student of Plotinus, wrote works such as *Against the Christians* and *Life of Plotinus*, in which he criticizes specific aspects of Christian doctrine and tries to defend Neoplatonism. These philosophical works not only contributed to theological debate, but also constituted a valuable resource for defenders of paganism.

Finally there are the epistolary correspondences<sup>92</sup>. Epistolary correspondences between the intellectuals of Late Antiquity provide a further window into the discussion of paganism. Letters exchanged between philosophers, theologians, rulers, and other influential individuals can reveal personal opinions, rhetorical tactics, and persuasion strategies used in cultural and religious debate. For example, letters between Augustine of Hippo and the pagan philosopher Symmachus offer a glimpse into efforts at dialogue and controversy between Christians and pagans in the context of the late Roman Empire. These correspondences not only highlight the differences of opinion between the two faiths, but also the possibilities for interaction and mutual understanding between their supporters.

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and Late Antique Philosophical Polemics. *Classical Quarterly*, 25(1), pp. 45-62; García Martínez, M. (2022). The Philosophy of Plotinus and Its Reception in Late Antiquity. *International Journal of the Platonic Tradition*, 30(2), pp. 210-225; Dupont, J. (2022). The Metaphysics of Proclus and Its Impact on Late Antique Thought. *Ancient Philosophy*, 40(4), pp. 480-495; Brown, P. (2022). The Ethical Philosophy of Epicurus and Its Influence on Late Antiquity. *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 32(2), pp. 215-230; Pérez Jiménez, A. (2022). The Skeptical Philosophy of Sextus Empiricus and Its Reception in Late Antiquity. *Classical World*, 18(1), pp. 75-88; Leroy, P. (2022). Julian the Apostate's *Against the Galileans* and Its Philosophical Context. *Journal of Ancient Philosophy*, 51(3), pp. 321-335.

<sup>92</sup> Johnson, E. (2022). Letters between Augustine of Hippo and Symmachus: Dialogue and Controversy in Late Antiquity. *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 15(3), pp. 305-320; Smith, R. R. (2022). Christian Letters and Paganism in Late Antiquity: An Investigation into Demonizing Practices. *Studies in Late Antiquity*, 25(1), pp. 45-62.



# **V – PAGANISM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE WEST**

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## V - PAGANISM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE WEST

### 5.1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The narrative of Western Christianities from Constantine to the conclusion of the Sixth Century is characterized by both expansion and the emergence of diverse Christianities (Fig. 10).

Figure 10. Roman and the West, c. 600. From *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Constantine to c. 600* Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, p. xvii



The process of expansion unfolds slowly and is challenging to trace: by the early Fourth Century, the Western regions of the Roman Empire were significantly less Christianized compared to the East, with only an estimated percent of the population adhering to Christianity<sup>93</sup>. While indicators such as archaeological

<sup>93</sup> Modéran, Y. (2005). 'La conversion de Constantin et la christianisation de l'empire romain. In <http://aphgcaen.free.fr/conferences/moderan.htm> (Accessed 08-05-2024).

findings, inscriptions, and the establishment of new bishoprics provide some insights, constructing a comprehensive overview remains elusive. It is presumed that rural areas resisted Christianization, potentially remaining less influenced by Christianity compared to urban centers, which likely embraced the faith earlier. Missionary endeavors by bishops or monks may have had limited impact. However, the conversion of Western aristocracies has received comparatively more scholarly attention. It was only in the latter half of the Fourth Century that Christianity developed a message aligned with the ideology and values of the elite social class, thus attracting many among them to the faith. Christian diversity can be attributed in part to significant political shifts within the later Roman Empire. One of the most notable transformations was the increasing division between the Western and Eastern regions of the empire. Following the death of Constantine, this division was shaped by administrative needs and the constant military conflicts along the Rhine, Danube, and Persian borders. Consequently, the political focus shifted to the East, centered on Constantinople. Throughout the Fifth Century, various Germanic tribes rose to prominence in the power vacuum left in the West. Furthermore, the religious policies pursued by many of Constantine's Christian successors also contributed to significant changes. Leaders such as Constantius II and, notably, Justinian, were deeply involved in theological disputes, believing that doctrinal unity was essential for maintaining peace and prosperity. However, ambitious efforts by rulers like Constantius II, Zeno, or Justinian to enforce doctrinal uniformity ultimately resulted in the fragmentation of Christianity into schismatic factions. In response to interventionist emperors, influential figures such as Hosius of Cordova in the Fourth Century or Pope Gelasius in the Fifth Century voiced objections, particularly when emperors supported opposing factions. From the Sixth Century onward, kings of the Ostrogothic, Visigothic, Burgundian, and Merovingian realms partly mirrored the religious policies of Christian emperors. Due to the smaller size and greater homogeneity of their kingdoms, they found it easier to control religious institutions. Furthermore, the religious policies pursued by many of Constantine's Christian successors also contributed to significant changes. Leaders such as Constantius II and, notably, Justinian, were deeply involved in theological disputes, believing that doctrinal unity was essential for maintaining peace and prosperity. However, ambitious efforts by rulers like Constantius II, Zeno, or

Justinian to enforce doctrinal uniformity ultimately resulted in the fragmentation of Christianity into schismatic factions. In response to interventionist emperors, influential figures such as Hosius of Cordova in the Fourth Century or Pope Gelasius in the Fifth Century voiced objections, particularly when emperors supported opposing factions. From the Sixth Century onward, kings of the Ostrogothic, Visigothic, Burgundian, and Merovingian realms partly mirrored the religious policies of Christian emperors. Due to the smaller size and greater homogeneity of their kingdoms, they found it easier to control religious institutions. During this era, the role of the Church of Rome emerged as another significant factor. It steadily asserted and solidified its dominance in the Western regions and even endeavored to extend its influence beyond. Pope Julius (337–352) established the authority to review synodal decisions made by Eastern churches, a stance supported by the Western Council of Serdica. Pope Innocent I (402–417) emphasized Peter as the source of both apostolic and episcopal authority, insisting that all Western churches must adhere to Roman church discipline. Pope Leo (440–461) further developed the Petrine ideology by asserting the pope's role as Peter's representative, both mystically and legally. In 495, a Roman synod hailed Pope Gelasius (492–496) as *vicarius Christi*. Rome's Petrine ideology clashed with Justinian's concept of a church structured hierarchically around the five patriarchates, including Rome and Constantinople, a notion Rome rejected. With blurred distinctions between Western and Eastern Christianities from the late Fourth Century onward, Rome and Constantinople vied for control over Balkan provinces, particularly Illyricum, where political and ecclesiastical. During the tenures of Popes Siricius (384–399) and Innocent (402–417), Rome claimed overarching authority in Illyricum orientale, centered in Thessalonica. Although the "vicariate of Thessalonica" diminished under Pope Leo and his successors, Rome continued to support the autonomy of Illyrian churches against Constantinople. These themes—political shifts, the rise of competing orthodoxies, the Christianization of Western elites, and the interaction between political and ecclesiastical institutions—were prevalent throughout the Christian West during this period<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>94</sup> Löhr, W. (2007). Western Christianities. In A. Casiday & F. W. Norris (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, pp.9-11

## 5.2. ITALY

Our understanding of the spread of Christianity in late antique Italy remains somewhat incomplete. Only a limited number of Italian bishops, around sixteen, participated in a council held in Rome in 313. However, it's likely that Christianity experienced growth in numbers during the Fifth Century. By the end of the Sixth Century, there were approximately 250 episcopal sees in Italy, with around one-fifth of them in the countryside. The expansion of Christianity into rural areas appears to have been bolstered by the emergence of rural monasticism during the Fifth Century. Yet, the instability following the collapse of Theoderic's Ostrogothic kingdom in the Sixth Century, particularly due to the Lombard invasion, may have hindered further Christianization of rural regions.

Italy's civil diocese was divided into two parts: *Italia suburbicaria*, centered around Rome, and *Italia annonaria*, centered around Milan, in the north. Initially, the Roman bishop held metropolitan authority over the bishops of *Italia suburbicaria*. However, during the fourth Century, Milan rose as the ecclesiastical hub of *Italia annonaria*. This changed when the imperial residence shifted from Milan to Ravenna at the start of the Fifth Century, diminishing Milan's prominence. Over time, this led to a tripartition of ecclesiastical authority in *Italia annonaria*<sup>95</sup>. The episcopate of Damasus (366–384) serves as a notable example of Rome's emergence as the leading church in Western Christianities. Its inception faced challenges, notably the schism between Liberius and Felix II, which divided the church. Following Liberius' death on September 24, 366, two factions emerged: one, possibly the minority, consecrated Ursinus in the *Basilica Iuli* in Trastevere, while

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<sup>95</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Morley, N. (2009). *Metropolis and Hinterland: The City of Rome and the Italian Economy, 200 BC–AD 200*. Cambridge University Press; Lo Cascio, E. (2005). The Supply of Grain to the City of Rome: The Case of the Annona Annonaria. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 95, pp. 126-131. Shaw, B. D. (2016). Economy. In *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*. Oxford University Press, pp. 185-204.

their opponents elected Damasus in S. Lorenzo in Lucina<sup>96</sup>. Damasus secured the Lateran church, where he was ordained bishop of Rome in early October. He enlisted the urban prefect Viventius to expel Ursinus and two deacons, but they found refuge in the *Basilica Liberii* on the Esquiline Hill. On October 26, Damasus' supporters, including clergy, charioteers, arena attendants, and gravediggers, besieged the church, setting it ablaze and killing 160 individuals. The conflict with Ursinus continued to overshadow Damasus' episcopate, leading to several Roman synods and the Council of Aquileia (381) addressing these issues. Damasus sought intervention from secular authorities to suppress the Ursinians. In 373, an individual named Isaac accused Damasus of murder, among other charges, but Emperor Valentinian, convinced of Damasus' innocence, halted the legal proceedings. In 378, a Roman synod acquitted Damasus and proposed detailed measures for ecclesiastical jurisdiction that bolstered the bishop of Rome's authority among the churches of Italy and the Western empire. Additionally, it recommended that the pope be exempt from the urban prefect's jurisdiction. This newfound patronage provided Damasus and his successors with the means to execute an ambitious construction program that significantly altered the urban landscape of Rome. Initially, Rome had benefited from the generosity of Constantine in 315, and for several decades, imperial projects surpassed those sponsored by the papacy. The popes began to establish a network of *tituli*, starting

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<sup>96</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Ward-Perkins, B. (1990). The Basilicas of Tardo-Antique Rome: Archaeology as Narrative. *American Journal of Archaeology*, 94(4), pp. 729-753; Lanciotti, L. (2014). The Urban Landscape of Late Antique Ostia: Basilicas, Churches, and the City's Transformation. *Mediterranean Archaeology*, 27(1), pp. 57-74. Lavan, L. (2011). Basilicas in Late Antiquity: Continuity, Imitation, and Innovation. *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 24, pp. 553-576; Marazzi, F. (1997). Le basiliche cristiane dell'età romana: la forma, la funzione, la costruzione. *Archeologia Medievale*, 24, pp. 205-236; Bonamente, G. (2004). Le trasformazioni delle basiliche paleocristiane nell'Italia tardo antica. *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Macerata*, 17, pp. 87-110; Brogiolo, G. P. (2005). La trasformazione delle basiliche cristiane tra tarda antichità e alto medioevo: il caso di San Pietro di Vicenza. *Archeologia Medievale*, 32, pp. 221-240; Macchioro, A. (2017). Trasformazioni delle basiliche paleocristiane in età tardo antica: il caso di San Lorenzo fuori le mura di Roma. *Archeologia dell'Architettura*, 22, pp. 149-158; Fiorillo, M. T. (2019). Le trasformazioni delle basiliche cristiane nell'Italia tardo antica: l'esempio di San Vitale a Ravenna. *Storia dell'Arte*, 144-147, pp. 315-329.

with modest beginnings such as the *titulus* Silvestri, *titulus* Marci, or possibly two basilicas erected under Pope Julius I. Building activities continued under Pope Liberius, who constructed a basilica on the Esquiline Hill, and gained momentum under Pope Damasus and his successors. Damasus adorned the apse of S. Anastasia and erected a baptistery in St. Peter, as well as the *titulus* Damasi (S. Lorenzo in Damasi), *titulus* Fasciolae (SS Nereo ed Achilleo), and *titulus* Pudentis (S. Pudenziana), likely during his episcopate. Despite economic challenges, a declining urban population, famines, and even the sack of the city, church construction persisted into the Fifth Century. During the episcopates of Coelestin I (422–432) and Sixtus III (432–440), the Christian transformation of the old city resumed on a larger scale. Notable basilicas like S. Sabina, S. Pietro in Vincoli, and S. Lorenzo in Lucina were erected, alongside renowned structures like the Lateran baptistery and S. Maria Maggiore. The impressive Constantinian facade of the Lateran church, destroyed by the Goths in 410, was reconstructed. Throughout, the church continued to benefit from aristocratic contributions. The expanding network of tituli, totaling around twenty-six churches by the close of the Fifth Century, played a crucial role in facilitating catechesis and pastoral care within the city, effectively transforming the plebs into the *populus Dei*. Damasus also actively promoted the cult of saints, collaborating with capable presbyters like Theodore, Verus, and Leo to establish oratories for venerating saints in nearly all the major Christian cemeteries along the roads leading into Rome. He revitalized the grand martyr-basilicas commissioned by Constantine, incorporating them into his new framework of Roman sainthood. These basilicas were adorned with magnificent inscriptions featuring metrical epigrams composed by Damasus himself, their elegant lettering crafted by skilled artists such as the librarian Furius Dionysius Filocalus and his disciples.

The Christianization of urban space was paralleled by a corresponding Christianization of time: it was in Rome, during Constantine's reign, that the celebration of Jesus Christ's birth on December 25 was first established, coinciding

with the pagan festival commemorating the birth of the sun god (sol invictus)<sup>97</sup>. This new feast gained popularity and had spread to Antioch by 386. Additionally, the Christian calendar now featured the dies natales of Roman martyrs, marking significant dates throughout the Christian year. By the mid-Fifth Century, Rome had transformed into a Christian hub, drawing pilgrims from across the empire and beyond. The once pagan city, founded by the mythical twins Romulus and Remus, had evolved into a Christian metropolis venerating the apostles and martyrs Peter and Paul in harmony.

Rome's transition from paganism to Christianity set a precedent for other cities in Italy, Gaul, and Africa. In spearheading the Christianization of Rome, Damasus and his successors received support from a hierarchically structured clergy, who, partly mirroring the military and imperial bureaucracy, underwent rigorous training from a young age with the prospect of advancing through a prescribed cursus. The principal clerical orders included the esteemed college of seven deacons, each overseeing a designated region of Rome, and the considerably larger college of presbyters associated with the urban titular churches<sup>98</sup>.

### 5.2.1. Christianisation of the Roman elite

It would be oversimplified to attribute the spread of Christianity and the decline of polytheism in Italy between 300 and 600 solely to imperial or episcopal influence. While religion and politics were closely intertwined, it's important to

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<sup>97</sup> Hijmans, S. E. (2009). The Sun which Did Not Rise in the East: The Cult of the Invincible Sun in the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire. *BABESCH*, 84, pp. 115-150; Mastrocinque, A. (2008). From Augustus to Constantine: The Poetics of Epiphany at Rome. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 98, pp. 70-92; Beck, R. (2017). The Cult of Sol Invictus. In *The Routledge Handbook of Identity and the Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds*. Routledge, pp. 93-105; Beck, R. (2015). The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire: Mysteries of the Unconquered Sun. Oxford University Press; Martínez Pereiro, C. (2005). Sol Invictus en el Mosaico de Óstia Antica: el programa iconográfico de la basílica de Annona. *Gerión: Revista de Historia Antigua*, 23(2), pp. 195-208; Turcan, R. (1986). Sol Invictus: le dieu invaincu des Romains. *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 203(1), pp. 3-17.

<sup>98</sup> Löhr, W. (2007). Western Christianities. In A. Casiday & F. W. Norris (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, pp. 23-30.

recognize that no emperor could govern in the fourth and Fifth Centuries as an autocrat, nor could any bishop exert control over their congregation without the legitimizing support of the senatorial, civic, and military elites who populated late Roman civic administration and imperial bureaucracies<sup>99</sup>. These individuals of high status continued to wield significant influence in Italy's political and social spheres long after the fall of the last Western emperor in 476. In fact, it was the municipal and senatorial elites who, more so than emperors, provided stability in Italy's civic life. Therefore, understanding the Christianization of Italy's upper echelons is crucial for grasping the spread, establishment, and evolution of Christianity in the region. The conversion of Italy's elite serves as a significant indicator of religious transformation; once the elite, particularly in Rome, but also across Italy, embraced Christianity, the empire could officially declare itself Christian.

Before 312, Christianity was a minority religion within the empire, estimated to comprise no more than 10 percent of the total population, with smaller numbers in the Western compared to the Eastern empire. Evidence suggests that Christianity initially spread in Italy's urban centers. However, in Rome, despite the presence of a Christian community and a bishop claiming the seat of St. Peter, there is scant evidence of large, public gathering places before 312. Few securely attested Christians are found among the senatorial aristocracy before Constantine, and while Christians do exist among Italy's municipal elites before 312, the majority of Italy's upper classes, like the general population, embraced Christianity in the Century and a half following Constantine's reign.

In the early fourth Century, the senatorial elite in Rome remained deeply committed to the worship of pagan deities. This allegiance persisted even after

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<sup>99</sup> For a comprehensive study on the bishops of Rome in Late Antiquity, see: Dunn, G.D. (Ed.). (2015). *The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity* (1st ed.). Routledge; Rapp, C. (2005). *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The nature of Christian leadership in an age of transition*. University of California Press. Berkeley. Los Angeles. London.

Constantine's public endorsement of Christianity<sup>100</sup>. On statues honoring aristocrats like Valerius Proculus, who served as consul in 340, pagan priesthods were prominently displayed alongside their public offices. The civic traditions of polytheism provided strong justification for maintaining public cults, as rituals, festivals, and construction projects dedicated to the state's gods were perceived as beneficial for the well-being of the state itself. For the senatorial aristocracy of Rome, adherence to pagan cults was integral to their social identity. They and their families maintained significant and public connections as patrons and priests of specific cults. For instance, the upper-class father, Aurelius Victor Augentius, and his sons embraced the cult of Mithras in Rome, with one son proudly declaring his involvement in building and financing a cult site dedicated to the deity. Certain families viewed holding a priesthood of Sol as a matter of honor and distinction.

The geographic distance between the Senate and the imperial court, now situated in Milan, fostered a sense of autonomy within the Senate, particularly in Rome, where it prided itself on its independence from imperial influence. Despite no longer serving as the capital of the empire, Rome retained its status as a prominent cultural and economic hub, with its Senate increasingly asserting control over its economic and political affairs. Fourth-Century emperors generally respected the autonomy of Rome's Senate because they relied on the senatorial aristocracy to help govern and manage the urban population. Additionally, as the senatorial aristocracy had limited access to military power, they were not perceived as potential threats to imperial authority.

These social and institutional dynamics shed light on why Rome experienced a relatively peaceful period of coexistence between pagan elites and Christianizing emperors and bishops during the First half of the Fourth Century, even as Christianity gradually integrated into Roman society. One notable indication of this accommodation is the fourth-Century Codex-Calendar of 354, a deluxe calendar

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<sup>100</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Machado, C. (2023). *Imperatori cristiani ed élite romane nella tarda antichità* di Rita Lizzi Testa. *Giornale dei primi studi cristiani*, 31 (3), 389-391; Testa, R. L. (2022). *Christian emperors and Roman elites in late antiquity*. Routledge; Brown, P. R. L. (1961). Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 51, 1-11;

designed for use in Rome<sup>101</sup>. A remarkable collection of documents and illustrations, attributed to 'the Chronographer of 354,' has been preserved from the mid-fourth Century<sup>102</sup>. This collection includes documents with a distinctly Christian nature, such as the *Feriale Ecclesiae Romanae*, the *Liber Generationis*, and the *Liberian Catalogue*. The Festival Calendar in the collection of the 'Chronographer' is a fourth-Century iteration of the ancient record of sacred festivals and holidays observed in Rome.

Reflecting the city's inclusive environment, the Codex-Calendar of 354 featured illustrations of pagan holidays and astrological symbols alongside lists of saints' and martyrs' feast days, catering to the diverse religious preferences of Rome's Christian elite. Similarly, the incorporation of pagan imagery in Christian burial sites, such as S. Costanza or the Via Latina catacomb, underscores the fluidity of ideas and the coexistence of diverse belief systems within Roman upper-class society<sup>103</sup>. Early scholars believed that these ancient ceremonies had lost their religious significance and had largely become neutralized. However, since the contributions of H. Stern (1953) and the pivotal work of Michelle Salzman (1990), the religious aspects of the calendar have been convincingly reaffirmed as reflective of fourth-Century practices. Evidence supports that the calendar of 354 accurately depicts contemporary cult practices and the civic holiday cycle still active in mid-fourth-Century Rome.

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<sup>101</sup> Salzman, M. R. (1990). *On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity*. University of California Press; Marcone, A. (1992). MR SALZMAN, On Roman Time. The Codex-calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity (Book Review). *Athenaeum*, 80, 542; Rüpke, J. (1995). On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity; Wells, C. M. (1993). On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity.

<sup>102</sup> [https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chronography\\_of\\_354\\_00\\_eintro.htm](https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chronography_of_354_00_eintro.htm)  
(Accessed 25-06-2024)

<sup>103</sup> Salzman, M. (2007). Christianity and paganism, III: Italy. In A. Casiday & F. W. Norris (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, pp. 210-214; C. Machado, C. (2011), 'Roman aristocrats and the Christianization of Rome', in R. Lizzi-Testa and P. Brown (eds), *Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire: The Breaking of a Dialogue*, pp. 493–516.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the later Roman aristocracy is the emergence of a distinct pursuit of religious truth alongside traditional class virtues. Numerous senators, both pagan and Christian, documented their quest for purity, which diverged from the conventional offices and accolades typical of a senator's career. Between 305 and 390 AD, twenty-two inscriptions were erected at the Vatican shrine dedicated to Magna Mater. These inscriptions record the involvement of senators and occasionally their wives in the rituals performed at the site. The rituals predominantly included *taurobolium* and *criobolium*, wherein a bull or a ram was sacrificed above an initiate standing beneath a grill, allowing the purifying blood to flow over them<sup>104</sup>. Some inscriptions explicitly mention the significance of the act, with initiates perceiving themselves as being reborn (*renatus*). Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, a pagan aristocrat, personally underwent the *taurobolium* and held priesthoods within the cults that conducted this ritual. He also introduced his wife, Fabia Aconia Paulina, to the same ritual along with several other lesser-known cults<sup>105</sup>. These concepts were remarkably mirrored in a text composed by a Christian woman for Sextus Petronius Probus, her Christian spouse who was notably accomplished in state service. The extensive inscription was installed at the family tomb adjacent to the Constantinian basilica on the Vatican.

The development of Christian Rome was a complex phenomenon, involving the social classes in different ways and at different times<sup>106</sup>. One of the most notable features of the conversion of Rome's elite during the post-Constantinian era is the absence of documented instances of direct physical conflict between pagans and

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<sup>104</sup> Gasparri, C. (1995). *Taurobolium e Criobolium: i riti del sangue e il culto di Cibele*. *Studi di Storia Antica*, 12(2), 57-78; Beard, M., North, J., & Price, S. (1998). *Religions of Rome: Volume I: A History*. Cambridge University Press; Stern, H. (1953). *The Taurobolium: A Study of the Origin, Evolution, and Meaning of the Ancient Blood Rite*. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 43, 27-48; Duthoy, R. (1969). *Le taurobole et le culte de Cybèle et d'Attis*. *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 47(1), 5-25.

<sup>105</sup> Curran, J. (2002). *Pagan city and Christian capital: Rome in the fourth century*. Clarendon Press, pag. 289; Gwynn, D. M. (2011). *The 'end' of Roman senatorial paganism*. *Late Antique Archaeology*, 7(1), 135-161.

<sup>106</sup> See, Pietri, C. (1976). *Roma Christiana. Recherches sur l'Église de Rome, son organisation, sa politique, son idéologie de Miltiade à Sixte III (311-440)*, 2 voll. Rome; Diefenbach S. (2007), *Römische Erinnerungsräume. Heiligenmemoria und kollektive Identitäten in Rom des 3. bis 5. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.*, Berlin.

Christians. While physical confrontations between pagans and Christians occurred in other cities, such as Alexandria, and among Christians within Rome itself, there is no recorded evidence of such clashes in the capital. However, this does not imply an absence of religious tension between pagans and Christians in Rome. A well-documented verbal exchange between these groups survives from the 380s in Rome, providing valuable insight.

In 382, Emperor Gratian decisively departed from the previous imperial policy of tolerating pagan cults. He seized the funds designated for supporting pagan rituals, diverted property bequeathed to priesthoods and the Vestals for these ceremonies to the imperial treasury, and eliminated the exemptions of pagan religious officials from mandatory public duties. Concurrently, he ordered the removal of the Altar of Victory from the Roman senate house<sup>107</sup>. Following Gratian's overthrow the following year and the ascension of his inexperienced thirteen-year-old brother, Valentinian II, to the throne, pagan aristocrats in the senate seized the opportunity to publicly defend the traditional state religion.

Symmachus, who served as the urban prefect of Rome at the time, on behalf of the senate, issued an official petition in July 384 to the ruling emperors requesting the reinstatement of the policy of tolerance toward pagan cults and the restoration of the Altar of Victory. The bishop of Milan, Ambrose, heard of this request and wrote letters in opposition to it. In the end, the pagan request was denied by the emperor resident in Milan. No violence erupted after this change in imperial policy, although some of Rome's pagan elite no doubt were angered and concerned. During the final decade of the fourth Century, under Theodosius's reign, there was a notable conversion among Rome's senatorial elite. According to historical accounts, this conversion was believed to have been prompted by the

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<sup>107</sup> Smith, J. D. (2010). The Altar of Victory: A Symbol of Roman Paganism. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 25(2), 112-130; Brown, A. M. (2015). Conflict and Continuity: The Altar of Victory in Late Antique Rome. *Studies in Late Antiquity*, 3(1), 45-62; Rossi, M. (2008). L'Altare della Vittoria nella Roma Tarda: Simbolo di Potere e Identità Religiosa. *Studi Romani*, 40(3), 210-225; Bianchi, G. (2012). Il Conflitto per l'Altare della Vittoria nel Contesto Tardo Antico Romano. *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 170(2), 345-362; López, C. (2016). El Altar de la Victoria: Significado y Controversia en la Roma Tardía. *Revista de Estudios Clásicos*, 28(1), 78-95; García, P. (2014). La Política Religiosa de Graciano y la Controversia por el Altar de la Victoria. *Historia Antigua*, 12(3), 210-228.

active intervention of the emperor. Zosimus, a pagan historian from the Sixth Century, and Prudentius, a Christian poet from the fourth Century, both assert that Emperor Theodosius, following his victory at the Frigid River in 394, visited Rome to persuade the city's upper class to abandon paganism. Prudentius suggests that the senate willingly and without coercion embraced Christianity, while Zosimus contends the opposite, claiming that the emperor's call went unheeded.

Modern scholars debate the details and purpose of this imperial visit, yet these narratives provide valuable insights into the issues involved and underscore the significance of the conversion of Rome's senatorial elite in the eyes of their contemporaries. The epigraphic and prosopographic evidence strongly supports the textual accounts, indicating that by the early Fifth Century, Christianity had become the predominant religion among Rome's senatorial aristocracy<sup>108</sup>.

#### 5.2.1.1. *The Elite of Aquileia*

Established as a Roman colony in 181 a. C. to thwart barbarian invasions, Aquileia's strategic location at the intersection of the Via Postumia and routes leading north and east to the Roman provinces of Illyria, Pannonia, and Noricum facilitated its rapid development as both a commercial and military hub<sup>109</sup>. By the fourth Century, it had ascended to the status of capital for the administrative regions of Venetia and Istria. Despite withstanding a siege by the Marcomanni and Quadi (Germanic tribes) in 167, the city succumbed to the Huns and was sacked in 452. The invasion of Italy by the Lombards in 568 and their subsequent conquest of the Venetian mainland marked the definitive decline of Aquileia's political and economic significance, relegating it to a part of the Lombard duchy of Friuli.

The city of Aquileia, located in the northeastern region of Italy, was regarded as one of the foremost cities in Italy. Aquileia flourished as a crucial hub for

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<sup>108</sup> Salzman, M. R. (2009). *The making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and religious change in the western Roman Empire*. Harvard University Press, pagg. 73-81

<sup>109</sup> Pearce, J., & Millett, M. (2001). The Romanization of Italy and the provinces. *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 14, 456-460; Mitchell, S. (2007). Aquileia from the First to the Third Century A.D.: Archaeological Evidence and Historical Analysis. *Classical Quarterly*, 57(2), 501-518; Fentress, E. (2016). Aquileia: A Roman City in Context. *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 29, 393-412.

commerce between the transalpine areas and the Mediterranean; goods from the northern regions passed through Aquileia on route to the Eastern empire, Rome, Africa, and Illyria. Aquileia, like its neighboring cities, drew a substantial number of immigrants, notably Jews and Greek-speaking Easterners, particularly Syrians. This demographic influx, evidenced by inscriptions bearing Greek, Syrian, and Jewish names, elucidates the religious diversity of the region. Besides Jews and Christians, various mystery cult followers were also present in the Third and Fourth Centuries. During the late Third Century and into the Fourth Century, the Christian community included many of these Eastern immigrants. Some were fairly affluent, as indicated by the late Third-Century Bishop Victorinus of Poetovium (modern-day Ptuj). Wealth conferred respectability, suggesting that some of these Christians were part of the local elite. Nevertheless, there are no records of wealthy Christian notables in Aquileia, and similar to Rome, no significant public places of worship or titular churches for the Christian community are documented until the time of Constantine. It was only following the Edict of Milan that the Christian community in Aquileia and its bishop began constructing large public places of worship. The increasing number of Christians and the emergence of basilicas contributed to Aquileia's reputation in ancient sources as the primary center for the westward expansion of Italian Christianity. By the second decade of the fourth Century, affluent Christian laypeople began acting as patrons, some presumably part of the municipal elite, though not documented as holding senatorial status.

The archaeological evidence of some basilicas allows us to understand how the elite, and specifically, the municipal aristocrats, acted as protectors of the basilicas built in the city. The earliest among the three monumental public Christian edifices that have been preserved in Aquileia is the episcopal, or Theodorian, complex. The initial layer of its mosaic flooring dates back to the years immediately following Constantine's conversion (313–319). The consistency and systematic arrangement of the mosaic flooring suggest that its design was centrally controlled, likely under the supervision of the clergy or possibly the bishop himself. The bishop, identified and referred to as '*felix*,' provides a *terminus post quem* for the mosaic, given that Theodore passed away in 319. Notably, Theodore did not finance the mosaic floor; an inscription in the southern room reveals that 'Theodore, with the assistance of God and his congregation,' facilitated the creation of this

mosaic. The floor of the basilica features the names and portraits of approximately fourteen donors, some of whom appear to have been quite affluent, based on the size of the mosaic sections they contributed. Several laypersons donated mosaic works of a scale comparable to the 880 Roman feet attributed to a donor named Januarius, likely also a layperson. The attire of the men and women depicted in the mosaics of the southern room further illustrates the wealth of these lay donors, who were probably Christianized members of the municipal elite<sup>110</sup>.

A second basilica in Aquileia, located near a funerary monument approximately 2 km south of the ancient urban center, provides additional insights into the Christianization of Aquileia's municipal elite during the latter half of the fourth Century and early Fifth Century. This site, known as the Basilica del Fondo Tullio<sup>111</sup>, preserves the names of around twelve donors. Among them are three individuals with distinctly Greek or Syriac names—Anatolius, Malchos, and Euticius—each contributing a relatively modest amount of flooring, approximately 33 Roman feet (around 2.9 square meters). This suggests that the Christian community of Aquileia included several Easterners, likely recent immigrants. However, the community also featured very affluent local Christian lay donors, such as the couple Primenius and Leontia, who financed about 300 Roman feet (around 27 square meters) of mosaic flooring here and an additional 200 Roman feet (approximately 18 square meters) for the nearby Christian basilica at Monastero in Aquileia. This indicates their probable membership in the municipal

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<sup>110</sup> Neil, B. (2013). The Religious Transformation of Aquileia in Late Antiquity. *Studies in Late Antiquity*, 2(3), 267-288; Ammerman, A. J., & Saggio, A. (2010). The Rise of Christian Aquileia: Evidence from the Bishop's Palace. *Antiquity*, 84(323), 1151-1163; Pellegrino, A., Visintini, D., & Santoro, F. (2016). Surveying, Modeling and Navigating the Theodorian Mosaic Floor of the Aquileia Basilica. *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports*, 9, 78-90; avalieri Manasse, G., Furlan, L., & de Bon, A. (2020). The Theodorian Mosaics of Aquileia: Technological and Artistic Analysis. *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 33, 123-145; Fontana, S. (2019). Mosaic Art in the Theodorian Complex of Aquileia: Context and Significance. *Antiquity*, 93(371), 950-964; Šmuc, A., & Lux, J. (2018). Making Roman Mosaics in Aquileia (I BC-IV AD): Technology and Workshop Practices. *Archaeometry*, 60(2), 185-206.

<sup>111</sup> Grande, N. (2001). Le aree cimiteriali paleocristiane di Aquileia. *Quaderni friulani di archeologia*, 11, 35-50; Giuseppe, C. (2014). Il contributo di Luisa Bertacchi all'archeologia cristiana di Aquileia. *Aquileia Nostra*; Bertacchi, L. (1985). I mosaici di Aquileia. *Mosaics n. 3. Conservation*, 1-29.

elite, despite the lack of evidence for senatorial status or high office, which would have conferred the rank of *clarissimus*. Other notable patrons include lay couples Splendonius and Hilara, and Nonnosus and Severiana, who each donated 200 Roman feet (approximately 18 square meters) of mosaic.

The third surviving Christian basilica in Aquileia, the Basilica del Monastero<sup>112</sup>, situated just beyond the ancient city walls, features mosaic flooring dated to two phases in the early and late Fifth Century. Among its thirty-nine donors were some extremely wealthy patrons. For instance, Victor and Theosebes, likely heads of households of Greek origin, donated 2000 Roman feet (around 180 square meters) of flooring, while another couple, Probus and Severa, contributed 1000 Roman feet (approximately 90 square meters). These significant contributions suggest that these donors were among the wealthiest members of the local municipal elite. The evidence indicates that these wealthy donors aimed to affirm their social status within the community through their generous contributions. The readiness of the elite in Aquileia and its surroundings to engage in such acts of patronage as early as 313 suggests an earlier and more widespread adoption of Christianity compared to Rome's senatorial class. The municipal elite of Aquileia lacked the autonomy and longstanding tradition of independence characteristic of Rome's senatorial elite. Instead, the notables of Aquileia depended on wealthier and more powerful individuals of senatorial rank for patronage and favors. Several of these influential senatorial aristocracies active in the region were Christians. For example, the *Anicii*, one of the most prominent Christian senatorial families in Rome, played a significant role in Aquileia, acting as patrons and owning property there. A member of this family, Anicia Ulfina, from the Fifth Century, was likely honored with burial in the city. Moreover, Parecorius Apollinaris, the governor of Venetia in the fourth Century, constructed a building identified as the Basilica of the Apostles in Aquileia. The *Petronii*, another powerful Christian senatorial family from Rome, were also active in Aquileia and its surroundings, serving as office holders and patrons. Similarly, the Christian family of the *Eusebii* were influential in the region; the discovery of a child's tomb with inscribed silver spoons and jewelry on what is believed to be their family property indicates their presence.

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<sup>112</sup> Grassi, G. F. (2009). Le dediche di Orientali nella basilica di Monastero di Aquileia. *Aquileia Nostra*, 80, 417-36.

This funerary monument exemplifies how urban Christian elites disseminated their faith in the area around Aquileia.

It was commonly believed that wealthy landowners influenced the religiosity of the rural populations on their estates. In rural areas, as in cities like Aquileia, the Christian senatorial class set behavioral examples and represented Christianity as a high-status choice. These factors likely contributed to the municipal elite of Aquileia being more receptive to Christianity. By the Fifth and Sixth Centuries, senators holding the rank of *clarissimus* were documented as patrons of Christianity in the Aquileia region.

#### 5.2.1.2. *The Elite of Milan*

Located near the borders, Milan occupied a strategic position at the intersection of major east-west and north-south routes linking the Balkans to Gaul and connecting Africa and Rome with the Alpine passes and the Rhineland. With Milan as his headquarters, the emperor could personally address threats from beyond the Rhine and maintain communication between the Eastern and Western parts of the empire. It was in this capital of the tetrarchy that the victorious emperor Constantine convened with his eastern co-emperor Licinius shortly after defeating Maxentius. Here, the victorious leaders formulated various laws, including a policy of tolerance toward Christians following the persecution, later issued by Licinius but famously referred to as the Edict of Milan. The imperial presence in Milan during the fourth Century helps to elucidate why the city and its aristocracy embraced Christianity so readily, early on, and in significant numbers. Christian emperors actively promoted and assisted fellow believers as members of the court and administrative personnel. For an ambitious provincial from Milan, attending church services in the emperor's presence was advantageous. By the latter half of the fourth Century, the Christian community in Milan had grown sufficiently to accommodate two rival factions. The imperial court exacerbated divisions within Milan's Christian community and significantly contributed to the city's prominence in the political and theological disputes of the time. These debates also facilitated the conversion of Milan's upper classes, as they intensified allegiance to influential Christian leaders, among whom Bishop Ambrose of the late fourth Century stands out as particularly effective. In Milan, a city marked by its prestigious and burgeoning Christian community, Ambrose, inspired by the bishops of Rome, was

enthusiastic about constructing impressive places of worship. He oversaw the erection of three substantial basilicas outside the city walls: Basilica Ambrosiana<sup>113</sup> (St. Ambrose) and Basilica Apostolorum<sup>114</sup> (St. Nazaro), both completed by 386, and Basilica Virginum<sup>115</sup> (St. Simpliciano), whose planning began shortly before his death in 397. These basilicas were strategically situated along major roads leading into Milan, a deliberate architectural choice that mirrored Rome's suburban martyr-basilicas and accommodated the growing influx of converts and pilgrims.

The expedited construction and use of more economical materials in these suburban basilicas suggest substantial funding from Ambrose's family. However, the embellishment of these basilicas with gifts and contributions from Milan's affluent citizens is evidenced by the elaborate sarcophagus of an unidentified high-ranking dignitary in Basilica Ambrosiana. This directive fostered a Christian framework that allowed Milan's elite to continue their customary patterns of urban patronage within an accepted Christian context. Even Milanese women, akin to their Roman counterparts, became patrons; for instance, Daedalia, celebrated on her tombstone as a consecrated virgin, was also praised for her charitable deeds toward the impoverished, earning her the title of "mother of the needy." Her prominent burial within Basilica Ambrosiana underscores how Milan's elite played a crucial role in elevating Nicene Christianity as a predominant source of social status for both women and men.

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<sup>113</sup> Foletti, I. (2018). *Oggetti, reliquie, migranti: la basilica ambrosiana e il culto dei suoi santi (386-972)*. Viella; Salzman, M. (2007). Christianity and paganism, III: Italy. In A. Casiday & F. W. Norris (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, pp. 224-228.

<sup>114</sup> Lewis, S. (1969). The Latin iconography of the single-naved cruciform Basilica Apostolorum in Milan. *The art bulletin*, 51(3), 205-219; Lewis, S. (1969). Function and Symbolic Form in the Basilica Apostolorum at Milan. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 28(2), 83-98; Maier, H. O. (1994). Private Space as the social context of Arianism in Ambrose's Milan. *The journal of theological studies*, 45(1), 72-93.

<sup>115</sup> Sparavigna, A. C. (2016). Saint Ambrose and His Four Basilicas Guarding the Faith of Mediolanum. *Available at SSRN 2786142*.

### 5.2.2. *Historia Augusta*

The *Historia Augusta* unquestionably holds a place as one of the most enigmatic literary pieces inherited from ancient times. With its plethora of mysteries and the author's evident intent to obscure or mislead, numerous fundamental inquiries, spanning literary, historical, and other realms, this work continues to ignite contentious debates within research circles. The *Historia Augusta*, unique in antiquity for its exceptional characteristics, has been described as a literary source of little or no reliability, as it is replete with false information. The numerous aberrant elements, false dedications, value judgments and pompous prefaces add a series of problems to an already complicated, discrepant, and enigmatic historical source, many of which remain unknown. In his now legendary work of 1889, H. Dessau was the first to alert us to the true nature of the piece. As a great connoisseur of imperial prosopography, the strange abundance of obsolete names caught the attention of the sober and honest German scholar. His suspicions, grounded in the oddities of the text, were brilliantly expounded in a theory that marked a genuine milestone in historiography on the subject. The composition date was pushed back by nearly a Century, and the ruse of multiple authorship was uncovered, concealing a single writer seeking protection<sup>116</sup>. Subsequently, there followed various theories about the author of the *Historia Augusta*, including those of the scholars Mommsen T. and Baynes N. H<sup>117</sup>.

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<sup>116</sup>For comprehensive studies see: White, P. (1967). "The Authorship of the *Historia Augusta*". *The Journal of Roman Studies* 57 (1), pp. 115-133; MARRIOTT, I. (1979). "The Authorship of the *Historia Augusta*: Two Computer Studies". *Journal of Roman Studies* 69, pp. 65-77; Adams, J.N. (1972), "On the Authorship of the *Historia Augusta*". *Classical Quarterly* 22, pp. 186-194. Sansone, D. (1990) "The computer and the *Historia Augusta*: A Note on Marriott". *Journal of Roman Studies* 80, pp. 174-177; Stover, J. & Kestemont, M. (2016), "The Authorship of the *Historia Augusta*: Two new Computer Studies". *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 59 (2), pp. 140-157; Johne, K.P. (1976). *Kaiserbiographie und Senatsaristokratie. Untersuchungen zur Datierung und sozialen Herkunft der Historia Augusta*. Berlin.

<sup>117</sup> Mommsen, T. (1890). *Die Scriptorum Historiae Augustae*. *Hermes* 25, pp. 228-292; Klebs, E. (1892). *Die Scriptorum Historiae Augustae*. *Rheinisches Museum* 47, pp. 1-52; Peter, H. (1892). *Die S. H. A. Sechs litterar-geschichtliche Untersuchungen*. Leipzig; De Sanctis, G. (1896) "Gli Scriptorum Historiae Augustae". *Rivista di Storia Antica* 1, pp. 90-119.

In the context of this research, the *Historia Augusta* is of interest to us because of the religious aspects it takes into consideration, related to the Roman world and its aristocracy. In fact, when he talks about the ancient Roman cults, compared to when he talks about Judaism and Christianity, he uses a different language, less irreverent and ironic, showing great respect<sup>118</sup>. Within the *Historia Augusta*, good emperors are associated with traditional cults, while the bad ones are associated with Eastern religions, perceived by much of the Roman populace as foreign and barbaric, even towards the end of the fourth Century. Heliogabalus and Commodus serve as significant examples of this trend. On the other hand, these cults were not absent within the prominent senatorial families defended by the author of the *Historia Augusta* throughout the text. The most admired emperors, however, are linked to "pure" Roman cult or practice a sober and pure religiosity, closely akin to the *mos maiorum*. Extravagant tastes and excesses are almost always attributed to the tradition of bad emperors; there is also a kind of canonization based on their culinary preferences and their inclination or aversion to drinking, which, if excessive, are associated with the tyrannical character of those whom the author deems bad emperors. The same applies to the sphere of sexuality.

#### 5.2.2.1. *Aurelian and the Solar cult*

The late fourth-Century Life of Aurelian from the *Historia Augusta* recounts that following Aurelian's triumph over Queen Zenobia of Palmyra, the emperor proceeded as though fulfilling his vows at the temple of Sol Elagabalus in Emesa<sup>119</sup>. The biographer aimed to elucidate Aurelian's intimate association with Sol as a direct consequence of a personal encounter, a narrative reminiscent of other imperial firsthand engagements with deities, such as Constantine's communion with his patron deity Apollo at a pagan sanctuary in Gaul or his subsequent vision of the Chi Rho before battle. The commitment to construct a temple as an *ex voto*

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<sup>118</sup> Gómez, M. P. S. (2018). *La religión del autor de la "Historia augusta"*. Universidad de Murcia, Centro de Estudios del Próximo Oriente y la Antigüedad Tardía, p.36.

<sup>119</sup> *Hist. Aug. Aurel.* 25.4-6: "Recepto igitur orientis statu Emesam victor Aurelianus ingressus est ac statim ad templum Heliogabali tetendit, quasi communi officio vota soluturus. 5 Verum illic eam formam numinis repperit, quam in bello sibi faventem vidit. 6 Quare et illic templa fundavit donariis ingentibus positis et Romae Soli templum posuit maiore honorificentia consecratum, ut suo dicemus loco."

ensues after Aurelian's conquest of Zenobia. However, it is noteworthy that the account wherein Aurelian pledges to restore the temple to Sol in Palmyra, demolished by his forces in quelling Zenobia's rebellion, is contained within a fabricated epistle attributed to Aurelian and included in the *Historia Augusta*, a notably unreliable source. The *Historia's* author contends, in what appears to be a subversion of religious ceremony, that Aurelian vowed to dispatch a *pontifex* from Rome to consecrate the refurbished temple to Sol in Palmyra. The correlation between the cult in Rome and the Palmyrene cult of Sol is a recurring theme in several sources. According to accounts by Zosimus and Eutropius, the temple constructed by Aurelian for Sol in Rome housed treasures originating from Palmyra, including representations of the Palmyrene deities Helios and Belos<sup>120</sup>. Allegedly, it even contained a portrait of Aurelian, either depicted in fresco or painted on a wooden board. Aurelian's adoption of Sol as a divine patron, particularly following his victories over Queen Zenobia in the East and Tetricus in Gaul, was not a new assertion in the Third Century. The Severan dynasty had previously minted coins depicting Sol as the protector of their military triumphs and the stability of the Empire. Similarly, Gallienus, Aurelian's predecessor, had issued coins portraying his investiture by Sol, aiming to align himself with military success. Undoubtedly, Aurelian's emphasis on Sol served to reinforce the military connotations of his victories in the East. Given the challenges he encountered upon assuming power in Rome, his reliance on the notion of divine selection to legitimize his rule proved advantageous in bolstering Aurelian's authority. These dynamics played a significant role in Aurelian's reconfiguration of the Solar cult and his construction of a grandiose sacred precinct dedicated to Sol Invictus in Rome, effectively showcasing the influence of his patron deity. Aurelian's adaptation of Solar worship, as it evolved within the confines of Rome, possessed a distinct ability to amalgamate various strata of society within the urban milieu of the Third Century<sup>121</sup>. The cult of Sol found adherents among soldiers and the military, both

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<sup>120</sup> Zos. 1.61.2; Eutr. 9.15; *Hist. Aug.* Aur. 28.4; 10.2.

<sup>121</sup> Jones, C. P. (2010). The Emperor Aurelian and the Cult of the Invincible Sun. *Historia*, 59(4), 401-425; Barnes, T. D. (1981). The Pontifex Maximus from Augustus to

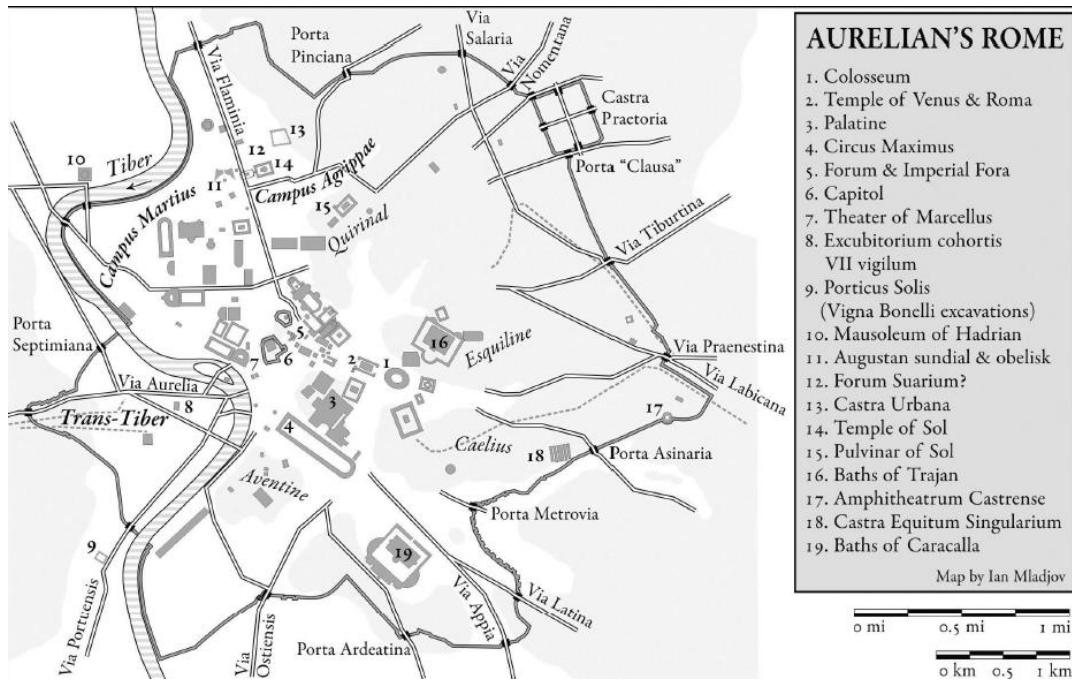
within the city itself and throughout the vast expanse of the empire. However, Aurelian undertook initiatives to broaden the scope of the cult, encompassing not only the military but also extending its appeal to include senatorial elites and the general populace. The success of his endeavors ensured the enduring popularity of the cult of Sol Invictus well beyond the relatively brief duration of Aurelian's five-year reign, a fact corroborated by the mid-fourth Century epigraph. Similar to Aurelian, Constantine arrived in Rome following a protracted and tumultuous civil conflict, subsequently embarking on the development of a reconfigured, albeit Christian, "topography of devotion" within the city (Fig.11).

Aurelian's construction of the temple to Sol Invictus did not involve repurposing any pre-existing Solar temples, although there were several smaller shrines or temples dedicated to different aspects of Sol within the city prior to his reign.

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Gratian. *The American Journal of Philology*, 102(3), 329-342; Alarcón, C. R. (2017). El culto al Sol Invictus durante el reinado de Aureliano. *Estudios Clásicos*, 152, 103-120; Hidalgo, J. M. (2005). Aureliano y el culto a Sol Invictus: Una aproximación desde la numismática. *Revista de estudios romanos*, 22, 209-226; Marin, M. (2019). The Sun God and the Emperor: Aurelian's Sol Invictus and the Renewal of the Roman State Cult. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 109, 51-75; Gasparro, A. (2013). Aureliano e il rinnovamento del culto solare a Roma. *Studi storici*, 54(1), 111-130; López, M. A. G. (2008). La imagen imperial de Aureliano en el contexto del culto a Sol Invictus. *Gerión*, 26, 345-364; Sánchez, L. G. (2015). El culto al Sol Invictus en la Roma imperial: reflexiones sobre la política religiosa de Aureliano. *Boletín de la Asociación Española de Orientalistas*, 51, 89-105.

Figure 11. Map of Rome at the time of Emperor Aurelian. From Salzman, M. R. (2020). *A new "topography of devotion". Urban Religion in Late Antiquity*, 76, p.152



A small *aedicula* dedicated to Sol Invictus near the Theater of Marcellus represents one of the earliest known places of Solar worship in Rome, dating back to 158 AD. Its diminutive size suggests it functioned as a private shrine. During the Third Century, the emperor Elagabalus purportedly erected or renovated a temple to Sol Elagabalus on the Palatine Hill, although this structure did not endure beyond his reign, despite the ongoing unofficial veneration of Sol Elagabalus in Rome. Another significant site for Solar worship in Rome, particularly relevant for understanding Aurelian's cult, is located in modern Trastevere, in the vicinity of Piazza Ippolito Nievo. An epigraphically dated portico, known as the *prima porticus Solis*, was restored with the authorization of the *kalatores*, assistants to Rome's principal state priests, prior to 102 a.C.<sup>122</sup>. Some scholars argue that this shrine to Sol in Trastevere should be associated with the patron deity of Palmyra, established by the Palmyrene community in Rome before Aurelian's time.

<sup>122</sup> (CIL 6.31034)

According to textual evidence, Aurelian's temple to Sol Invictus is situated in Region Seven of the city, known as the Campus Agrippae. This information is documented in the fourth-Century Regionary Catalogue, which places both the temple and the nearby *Castra (Urbana)* as having been dedicated by Aurelian in the *Campus Agrippae*. Additionally, textual sources indicate that within the porticoes of the Temple of Sol Invictus, wine was stored for distribution at a reduced price, a practice introduced by Aurelian<sup>123</sup>. The implementation of new rituals and the presence of existing artifacts served to promote Aurelian as a devout follower of Sol. This portrayal was further emphasized by the construction of a monumental temple in Rome, which Aurelian commissioned alongside the restoration of the barracks of the Urban Cohorts in the Campus Agrippae. Given Aurelian's evident dedication to Solar worship and his significant architectural projects in Rome, it is

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<sup>123</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Salzman, M. R. (2020). A new "topography of devotion". *Urban Religion in Late Antiquity*, 76, 157-158; Jones, C. P. (2005). The Temple of Aurelian and Its Significance in Roman Imperial Religious Policy. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 95, 197-226; Alcock, S. E. (2001). Aurelian's Temple of the Sun in Rome: Reinterpreting the Evidence. *American Journal of Archaeology*, 105(1), 71-102; Johnson, A. C. (2013). Sol Invictus: The Construction and Symbolism of Aurelian's Temple to the Sun. *Classical Philology*, 108(2), 178-202; Smith, R. R. R. (2010). Aurelian and the Temple of Sol Invictus in Rome: A Reappraisal. *Mediterranean Archaeology*, 23, 75-89; Green, J. R. (2008). The Temple of Sol Invictus in Rome: A Comparative Study of Imperial Religious Architecture. *Journal of Ancient Architecture*, 4, 23-42; Rossi, M. (2017). Il tempio di Aureliano a Roma: archeologia e politica religiosa. *Rivista di Studi Romani*, 23, 45-68; Bianchi, A. (2003). Il Tempio del Sole di Aureliano e la sua influenza sul culto solare a Roma. *Studi di Archeologia Romana*, 14, 101-124; Conti, L. (2015). Il Tempio di Aureliano e la sua importanza nel panorama religioso dell'Impero. *Archeologia Classica*, 66, 89-112; De Santis, A. (2009). Il Tempio di Aureliano: archeologia e politica nell'antica Roma. *Studi Romani*, 57(2), 201-224; Carosi, P. (2012). Aureliano e il Tempio del Sole: un'analisi iconografica. *Rivista di Studi Romani*, 19, 33-56; Leclercq, H. (2007). Le Temple d'Aurélien au Soleil: un symbole du pouvoir impérial. *Revue des Études Anciennes*, 109(2), 321-345; Martin, L. (2011). Le Temple du Soleil de l'empereur Aurélien: un monument de propagande impériale. *Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques*, 24, 87-110; Dupont, G. (2014). Le Temple d'Aurélien et son impact sur la religion impériale à Rome. *Revue Historique*, 686(3), 511-534; Renard, J. (2019). Le Temple du Soleil d'Aurélien: un témoignage de la politique religieuse impériale à Rome. *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 184(1), 77-98; Durand, P. (2008). Le Temple d'Aurélien à Rome et son contexte historique. *Études Classiques*, 76(2), 201-224.

understandable that subsequent pagan authors embellished his commitment to this cult, portraying him as a model traditional pagan emperor.

The biographer of Aurelian in the *Historia Augusta*, as mentioned previously, highlighted the emperor's personal religious experiences. These included not only Aurelian's direct encounter with the divine presence of Sol in Emesa, as discussed earlier, but also additional details inserted into his biography. For instance, the assertion that Aurelian's mother was a priestess of Sol and that she had consecrated his swaddling clothes in the temple of the Sun-god serves as indications of Aurelian's special relationship with this deity from birth, particularly for readers of the *Life* in the late fourth Century. Such narrative elements are reminiscent of the omens and signs often associated with rulers believed to be divinely ordained.

### 5.2.3. *Roma Triumphans* by Biondo Flavio

The seminal work *Roma Triumphans* by Biondo Flavio, completed in the late 1450s, stands as a pioneering chronological treatise offering a comprehensive examination of ancient Roman religious, civic, and political institutions<sup>124</sup>. While

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<sup>124</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Fubini, R. (1968). Biondo Flavio. In *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Vol. 10, pp. 536-559). Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana; Fubini, R. (2003). *Storiografia dell'umanesimo in Italia da Leonardo Bruni ad Annio da Viterbo* (pp. 77-83). Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura; Mazzocco, A. (1979). Some philological aspects of Biondo Flavio's *Roma triumphans*. *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 28, 1-26; Tomassini, M. (1985). Per una lettura della *Roma Triumphans* di Biondo Flavio. In M. Tomassini & C. Bonavigo, *Tra Romagna ed Emilia nell'Umanesimo: Biondo e Cornazzano* (pp. 9-80). Bologna: CLUEB; Momigliano, A. (1950). *Ancient history and antiquarian*. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, 13, 285-315. Anche in Id. (1955), *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (pp. 67-106: 73). Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura. In versione italiana in Id. (1984), *Sui fondamenti della storia antica* (pp. 3-45: 11). Torino: Einaudi; Momigliano, A. (1990). *The classical foundations of modern historiography*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press; Mazzocco, A. (1977). The antiquarianism of Francesco Petrarca. *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 7, 203-224: 203-204. Mazzocco, A. (1985). Biondo Flavio and the antiquarian tradition. In R. J. Schoeck (Ed.), *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Bononiensis* (pp. 124-136: 127-128). Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies.

this fundamental premise does not detract from the historical perspective inherent in the work, it is crucial to our analysis to highlight Biondo's deliberate choice to allocate the initial two volumes to the exploration of *religio*, preceding his discussion of other Roman state structures. This organizational decision underscores Biondo's particular focus on a thematic area previously emphasized by the erudite scholar, albeit in a secondary position within his discourse on Roman antiquities.

The humanist's section on Roman religious institutions, characterized by a descriptive-systematic methodology reminiscent of Varro's approach to the same subject, provides a lens through which to examine Biondo's stance on the interplay between Paganism and Christianity. His expository strategy, driven by a desire to avoid appearing unduly antagonistic towards pre-Roman beliefs and practices, showcases Biondo's adept utilization of Patristic sources. These include works such as the *Historia ecclesiastica*, which traced the Christian Church's journey from inception to its triumph over Paganism; the *Chronicon*, which portrayed the Roman Empire as a synthesis of preceding civilizations and their traditions; and the *Praeparatio evangelica*, renowned for its bold attempt to establish continuity between pagan thought and Christian doctrine.<sup>125</sup>

Biondo constructs a narrative of primordial history that posits diverse approaches to the sacred. In this account, an initial phase marked by a universal, innate perception of the divine was succeeded by a period in which the majority of humanity, barring a few exceptions such as the Hebrews, adopted profoundly misguided religious attitudes. These ranged from the deification of powerful yet immoral individuals to the attribution of sinful behaviors to deities, the preservation of their mythological exploits without fear of divine retribution, the anthropomorphization of the divine, and the formulation of a quadripartite theology distinguishing between a supreme deity, lesser gods, demons, and heroes with varied characteristics.

These observations, derived from an innovative synthesis of loci found in Trapezuntius's translation of Eusebius, further emphasize the Forlì humanist's assertion of the ubiquity of human theological inquiry. This confessional premise,

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<sup>125</sup> Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* II,7-8

initially evident in references to God as creator, appears to recede in subsequent discussions, which take the form of a historical-comparative review of ancient Egyptian and Phoenician cults and myths. This approach, while not claiming to be exhaustive, serves primarily to underscore the inescapable influence of pre-existing beliefs and customs on Roman religious thought.

Despite his critiques of certain aspects of Roman religious practices, Biondo's exposition reveals attempts to temper the perceived shortcomings of Roman Paganism. This is exemplified by his reference to the *prudentia* exercised by Romans in adopting potentially problematic religious practices such as divination. Of equal significance are his observations regarding the reinterpretation or moderation of specific rituals within the Roman context, such as those associated with the Phrygian cult of *Magna Mater Cybele*<sup>126</sup>.

Biondo's inclination towards critical analysis is further evidenced in a subsequent textual section, introduced by a Livian-inspired portrayal of King Numa as a prolific instigator of priesthoods, surpassing even Rome's founder, Romulus. This segment also cites Cicero and Varro as sources, with particular praise accorded to the latter for his erudition, as recognized by Jerome and Augustine, and for his insights into the originally aniconic nature of Roman religion. Beyond Biondo's appreciation for a primordial religious phase devoid of

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<sup>126</sup> *De Roma Triumphante*, l. I, p. 9: "Matris vero deorum sacra Phrygii quotannis crudelissimis certaminibus faciebant, sed Romani sacerdotes utriusque sexus virum et foeminam ex Phrygia consecrantes urbem solenni pompa tympanorum sonitu perlustrabant. Maiora sunt quae sequuntur et quorum pauca Romani vel modestissime duxerint imitanda". From Mastroso, I. G. (2012, July). Paganesimo e cristianesimo nella «Roma triumphans» di Biondo Flavio. In *Roma pagana e Roma cristiana nel Rinascimento* (p. 225). F. Cesati.

*De Roma Triumphante*, l. I, p. 10: "Gentilium externorum religione quantum ad Romanorum honestandam rem oportere visum est ostensa, ad nostrum redibimus propositum. Inter multa vero quae Romana superstitione nobis dicenda exhibet, nihil non respuendum ac omnino abominabile est, praeter unum quod viro Christiano in meliorem partem amplectendum convertendumque existimo, sacris scilicet ut appellarunt ac religioni Romanam gentem accuratissime intentam fuisse". Mastroso, I. G. (2012, July). Paganesimo e cristianesimo nella «Roma triumphans» di Biondo Flavio. In *Roma pagana e Roma cristiana nel Rinascimento* (p. 225). F. Cesati.

anthropomorphic elements, this section provides insight into his critical assessment of pagan polytheism, notably reflected in a concise final allusion to the *fabulae* of the gods. This reference is strategically placed within a transitional formula that heralds a new segment of the exposition dedicated to examining various ceremonial genres.

The author's predilection for diachronic analysis is further evidenced by their exploration of the evolutionary relationship between ancient pagan sanctuaries and their contemporary Christian counterparts. This methodological approach is particularly well-illustrated in the examination of the *Curia Vetus*, a site historically associated with augural rituals. The author posits that this ancient structure served as the foundation for the later construction of the Church of San Pietro in Vincoli<sup>127</sup>.

This historical connection is given additional relevance through the author's reference to a contemporary event: the cardinal investiture of Nicholas of Cusa, which took place at San Pietro in Vincoli during the period under study. This juxtaposition of ancient and contemporary religious significance within a single location serves to underscore the complex interplay between pagan and Christian traditions in Rome's sacred topography.

By highlighting this continuity of sacred space, the author demonstrates the layered nature of religious history in urban environments. This approach reveals how locations of spiritual importance have been adapted and reinterpreted over time, reflecting broader cultural and religious shifts. The specific mention of Cusa's investiture not only grounds the historical analysis in a relatable contemporary context but also emphasizes the ongoing ceremonial importance of these repurposed sacred sites.

This methodology offers insight into the author's broader analytical framework, which seeks to trace the evolution of religious practices and their architectural manifestations across different historical epochs. It presents a nuanced view of how sacred spaces have been reimagined and repurposed, while

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<sup>127</sup> *De Roma Triumphante*, l. I, p. 24

maintaining a thread of spiritual significance throughout Centuries of cultural and religious transformation<sup>128</sup>.

### 5.3. ROMAN BRITAIN

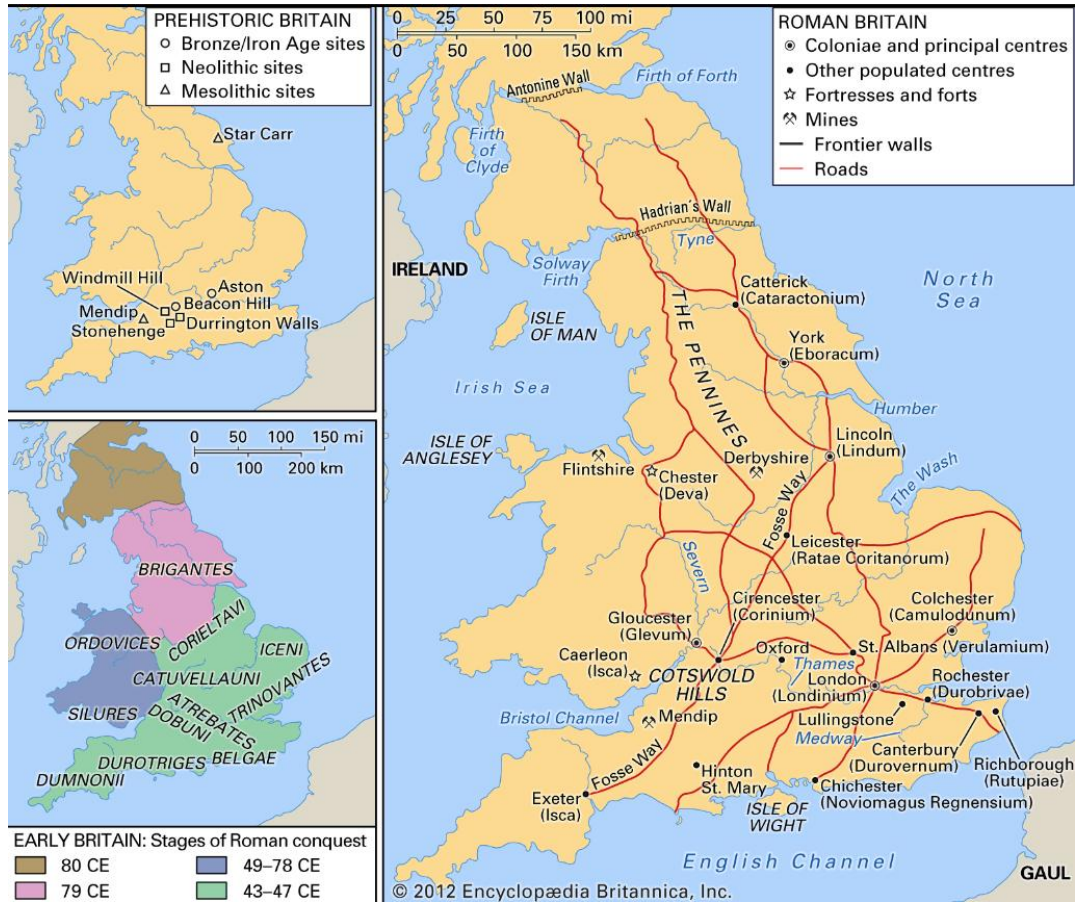
Roman Britain refers to the region of Great Britain that fell under Roman control from the conquest led by Claudius in 43 AD until the withdrawal of Roman authority by Honorius in 410 AD (Fig. 12)<sup>129</sup>.

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<sup>128</sup> Mastrorosa, I. G. (2012, July). Paganesimo e cristianesimo nella «Roma triumphans» di Biondo Flavio. In *Roma pagana e Roma cristiana nel Rinascimento* (pp. 217-230). F. Cesati.

<sup>129</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Birley, A. R. (2005). *The Roman Government of Britain*. Oxford University Press; Mattingly, D. (2007). *An imperial possession: Britain in the Roman Empire, 54 BC-AD 409*. Penguin UK; Haynes, I. (2005). Britain and Rome. In P. Salway (Ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Roman Britain* (pp. 49-92). Oxford University Press; Todd, M. (1981). *Roman Britain 55 BC-AD 400: The Province Beyond Ocean*. Fontana Press; Osgood, J. (2010). *Claudius Caesar: Image and power in the early Roman empire*. Cambridge University Press; Hind, J. G. F. (2007). A. Plautius' Campaign in Britain: An Alternative Reading of the Narrative in Cassius Dio (60.19. 5–21.2). *Britannia*, 38, 93-106; Barrett, A. A. (1991). Claudius' British victory arch in Rome. *Britannia*, 22, 1-19; Gambash, G. (2012). To rule a ferocious province: Roman policy and the aftermath of the Boudican revolt. *Britannia*, 43, 1-15; Hoffmann, B. (2013). *The roman invasion of Britain: Archaeology versus history*. Pen and Sword; Manley, J. (2002). *AD 43: The Roman Invasion of Britain: a Reassessment*. Tempus; Momigliano, A. (1961). *Claudius: The emperor and his achievement*. Cambridge University Press; Sealey, P. R. (2004). *The Boudican revolt against Rome*. Shire Publications; Webster, G. (2003). *The Roman Invasion of Britain*. Routledge.

Figure 12. Map of Roman Britain. From *Britannica*, T. Editors of *Encyclopaedia* (2024, May 13). *Roman Britain*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Roman-Britain>.



The Roman conquest of northern Gaul (58–50 BC) established a definitive connection between Britain and the Mediterranean world. Britain was already closely linked with Gaul, and as Roman civilization spread through Gallia Belgica, it naturally extended to Britain. This period saw British coins<sup>130</sup> begin to feature

<sup>130</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Abdy, R. (2002). *Romano-British coin hoards*. Shire Publications; Bland, R. (2013). *Hoarding in Britain: An overview*. *British Numismatic Journal*, 83, 214-238; Brickstock, R. J. (2004). *The production, analysis and standardisation of Romano-British coin reports*. English Heritage; Casey, P. J. (1984). *Roman coinage in*

Latin inscriptions<sup>131</sup>, and following Julius Caesar's expeditions in 55 and 54 BC, the Romans started viewing the southern tribes of Britain as vassals. However, these tribes did not consider themselves as such, and direct Roman control was postponed. Although the emperor Augustus had plans for the conquest of Britain, both he and his successor, Tiberius, prioritized consolidating the existing empire and integrating the extensive territories recently acquired by Pompey, Caesar, and Augustus. The emperor Caligula initiated preparations for the conquest of Britain, which were subsequently abandoned, until the invasion was finally executed by Claudius in 43 a. C. This decision was driven by two main factors: Claudius sought the political prestige of a significant military conquest, and Cunobelinus, a pro-Roman ruler (known in literature as Cymbeline), had recently been succeeded by his two sons, Caratacus and Togodumnus, who were hostile to Rome. These sons had ousted Verica, a Roman client king, and were held responsible for raids on Gaul originating from across the English Channel. Aulus Plautius, commanding a formidable force of approximately 40,000 soldiers, landed in Kent and advanced towards the Thames, crossing at the future site of Londinium (London). Claudius himself, the only 1st-Century emperor to traverse the ocean, joined the campaign, and the army proceeded through Essex to capture the native capital, Camulodunum (modern-day Colchester). Utilizing London and Colchester as

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Britain (third ed.). Shire Publications; Creighton, J. (2000). *Coins and power in Late Iron Age Britain*. Cambridge University Press; Hobbs, R. (2006). *Late Roman precious metal deposits c. AD 200-700: Changes over time and space*. *British Archaeological Reports*; Reece, R. (2002). *The coinage of Roman Britain*. Tempus; Williams, J. (2007). *New light on Latin in pre-conquest Britain*. *Britannia*, 38, 1-11.

<sup>131</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Collingwood, R. G., & Wright, R. P. (1965-1995). *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain* (Vols. 1-3). Oxford University Press; Cooley, A. E. (2012). *The Cambridge manual of Latin epigraphy*. Cambridge University Press; Frere, S. S., & Tomlin, R. S. O. (Eds.). (1992-1994). *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain: Volume II, Instrumentum Domesticum* (Vols. 1-8). Alan Sutton Publishing; Mullen, A. (2007). *Linguistic evidence for 'Romanization': Continuity and change in Romano-British onomastics: A study of the epigraphic record with particular reference to Bath*. *Britannia*, 38, 35-61; Tomlin, R. S. O. (2018). *Britannia Romana: Roman inscriptions and Roman Britain*. Oxbow Books; Tomlin, R. S. O., Wright, R. P., & Hassall, M. W. C. (2009). *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain: Volume III, Inscriptions on Stone*. Oxbow Books; Velaza, J. (2015). *The Tardiness of Latin Epigraphy in Roman Britain: A Note on Methodological Caution*. *Britannia*, 46, 1-9.

strategic bases, the Roman legions and their auxiliary forces continued their conquest. On the left flank, the 2nd Legion, under the command of Vespasian (later emperor), subdued the southern regions; in the center, the 14th and 20th Legions pacified the Midlands; on the right flank, the 9th Legion advanced through the eastern territories of the island. The lowlands of Britain, with their partially Romanized populations and manageable terrain, offered little resistance. Within three to four years, the region located south of the Humber estuary and east of the River Severn was either directly incorporated into the Roman Empire or governed as protectorates by local client princes. Further north, even the Brigantes of the Pennine region fell within the realm of client states. The Welsh tribes, particularly the Silures, resisted more fiercely, leading to over three decades of sporadic conflict (47–79 AD). Legionary fortresses were established in Gloucester, Wroxeter (at least until 66 AD), and Lincoln. The Roman method of conquest involved the construction and upkeep of small, strategically positioned forts, each manned by 500 to 1,000 legionaries and auxiliaries. Progress was impeded in 60–61 AD due to a rebellion in the nominally subdued lowlands led by Queen Boudicca of the Iceni tribe. Albans (Verulamium), and London, and decimated the 9th Legion. Provincial Governor Suetonius Paulinus, who had been campaigning in Anglesey, returned to suppress the uprising, though for a time, the government hesitated to advance its garrisons. Indeed, other demands of the empire led to the withdrawal of the 14th Legion in 69 AD. However, the decade from 70 to 80 AD. was decisive. A succession of three generals, commanding an army bolstered to full strength by the addition of the 2nd Legion (Legio II Adiutrix), achieved the final subjugation of Wales and the third, and arguably the most capable of these generals, Gnaeus Julius Agricola, embarked on the conquest of the farther north in 79 AD. He constructed forts in Cumberland and Durham, initiated a network of roads, secured the north, and pushed into Scotland. There, he established a temporary frontier between the rivers Clyde and Forth, guarded by a series of posts, the most identifiable of which was at Bar Hill in Dunbartonshire. He advanced into Caledonia and secured a victory against the Picts at Mons Graupius, the exact location of which remains unknown but was not south of the approaches to Banffshire. Agricola even contemplated invading Ireland, considering it an easy task, and prepared by conquering southwestern Scotland, establishing forts at Loudoun Hill, Ayrshire; Dalwinton, Dumfriesshire; and Glenlochar and Gatehouse-of-Fleet,

Kirkcudbrightshire. His permanent occupation of Scotland encompassed Strathmore, the large valley in central Scotland extending from southwest to northeast through the counties of Perthshire, Angus, and Kincardineshire. Before 90 AD, the Roman garrison in Britain was reduced due to the transfer of the 2nd Legion to Pannonia, located south and west of the Danube. Around this time, Strathmore was evacuated, and by the early 2nd Century, all of Scotland was abandoned, likely linked to Trajan's conquest of Dacia in central Europe. Early in Hadrian's reign, a rebellion broke out among the Britons, and the 9th Legion disappeared from records. In 122 AD, Hadrian visited Britain, bringing the sixth Legion to replace the 9th, and implemented his frontier policy. He constructed Hadrian's Wall, a continuous barrier stretching 73 miles (118 km) from the Tyne estuary to the Solway Firth, specifically from Wallsend to Bowness (Fig. 13-14).

Figure 13. Vallum Hadriani (Hadrian's Wall), c. 122 AD. From [https://www.worldhistory.org/Roman\\_Britain/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Roman_Britain/) (Accessed 16/07/2024)

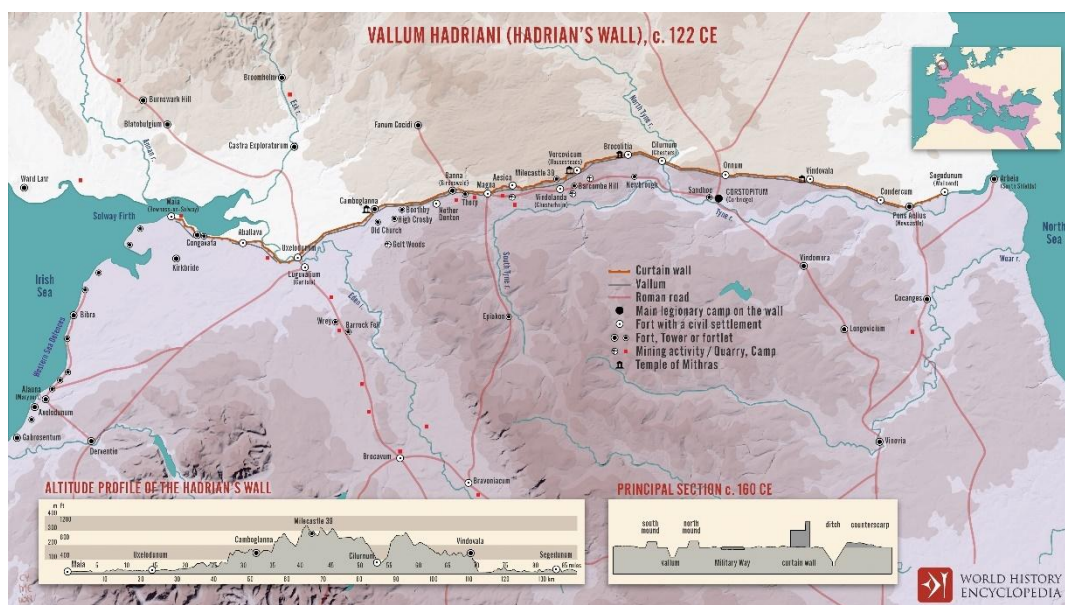


Figure 14. Hadrian's Wall Gate. From [https://www.worldhistory.org/Roman\\_Britain/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Roman_Britain/) (Accessed 16/07/2024)



This wall included western outposts, detached forts, milecastles, and towers protecting the Cumberland coast beyond its western terminus<sup>132</sup>. His role as the wall's builder is confirmed by both literary sources and inscriptions.

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<sup>132</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Breeze, D. J. (2006). *J. Collingwood Bruce's Handbook to the Roman Wall* (1fourth ed.). Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne; Hingley, R. (2012). *Hadrian's Wall: a life*. Oxford University Press; Hodgson, N. (2017). *Hadrian's Wall: Archaeology and history at the limit of Rome's empire*. The Crowood Press; Collins, R. (2012). *Hadrian's Wall and the End of Empire: The Roman Frontier in the fourth and fifth Centuries*. Routledge; Symonds, M. (2020). *Hadrian's Wall: creating division*. Bloomsbury Publishing; De la Bédoyère, G. (2010). *Hadrian's Wall: history and guide*. Amberley Publishing Limited; Hingley, R., Witcher, R., & Nesbitt, C. (2012). *Life of an ancient monument: Hadrian's Wall in history*. *Antiquity*, 86(333), 760-771; Crow, J. G. (2004). *Housesteads: A fort and garrison on Hadrian's Wall* (2nd ed.). Tempus; Hill, P. R., & Dobson, B. (1992). *The design of Hadrian's Wall and its implications*. *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 20, 27-52.

The purpose of Hadrian's Wall was clear: it was intended to serve as a definitive boundary of the Roman Empire, similar to the Great Wall of China. The defensive structure consisted of multiple layers: a stone wall—10 feet (3 meters) thick in the east and 6–8 feet (1.8–2.4 meters) thick elsewhere, originally standing 15 feet (4.6 meters) high to the rampart walk. This was accompanied by a deep ditch on the north side, regularly spaced milecastles and towers (two per mile), and 16 forts connected by a road behind the wall. Remnants of the wall, especially between Chollerford, Northumberland, and Gilsland, Cumberland, remain visible as it ascends hills and follows precipices. In the western regions, the wall was initially constructed of turf but was gradually replaced with stone, except for a two-mile stretch at Birdoswald near Gilsland. South of the wall lay the vallum, a broad ditch flanked by mounds, 100 feet (30 meters) apart from crest to crest, serving as a rear barrier marking the military zone. When Scotland was reoccupied, causing temporary dismantling of milecastles, the vallum was breached by causeways at 15-yard (14-meter) intervals.

Initially, forts associated with Hadrian's Wall were situated behind it, along the Stanegate Road, at locations such as Corbridge, Chesterholm (Vindolanda), Haltwhistle Bum, Throp, Nether Denton, Boothby Castle Hill, Old Church Brampton, and Carlisle. The final configuration of Hadrian's Wall evolved through several modifications. Under Lucius Septimius Severus, many components of the tower system were abandoned, and outpost forts, previously limited to the west at Bewcastle, Netherby, and Birrens, were extended to the east at Risingham (Habitancum) and High Rochester, both situated on Dere Street.

In 139 AD, Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius, influenced by his general Lollius Urbicus, decided to extend the frontier to the narrower isthmus between the Forth and Clyde rivers, which is 36 miles (58 km) across and had previously been fortified by Agricola. In 142 AD Antoninus constructed a turf wall, known as the Antonine Wall, which was fronted by a large ditch and included 16 forts connected by a rearward road. Portions of this structure still exist today, particularly in the central sector. In some areas, such as Croy Hill (near Kilsyth) and Bonnybridge (near Falkirk), the complete system—wall, ditch, and road—can still be discerned, and many fort sites, some identified through aerial photography, are visible to trained observers.

Several forts along the Antonine Wall have been excavated, revealing wooden barracks and stone headquarters, granaries, commandant's houses, and baths<sup>133</sup>. These forts range in size from just over one acre to nearly seven acres, with varying defensive structures. The walls at Mumrills, Stirlingshire, were made of clay. Besides the 16 forts on the wall, there were outposts at Camelon, Ardoch, Strageath, Carpow, and Bertha along the natural route from Stirling and Perth to Strathmore. Additional forts at Cramond and Inveresk guarded the Firth of Forth flank, while the Clyde was protected by a fort at Bishopton near Paisley and other smaller posts. Two roads provided access to the new frontier from the south: one road, known in medieval times as Dere Street, ran northwest from Corbridge on Tyne (Corstopitum) through several forts to the eastern end of the wall. The other road started from Carlisle, leading to Birrens near Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire, and then via Tassiesholm and Crawford in Lanarkshire to Inveresk in Midlothian, with branches to Carzield in Nithsdale and Carstairs in Clydesdale, reaching the wall's western end. A fort at Lyne near Peebles suggests an intermediate link between these routes.

The construction of the Antonine Wall did not lead to the complete abandonment of Hadrian's Wall. Initially, Hadrian's Wall was maintained with garrisons in forts only, but eventually, both walls were fully manned, with the area

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<sup>133</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Hassall, M. (1983). The building of the Antonine Wall. *Britannia*, 14, 262-264; Tipping, R., & Tisdall, E. (2006, November). The landscape context of the Antonine Wall: a review of the literature. In *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (Vol. 135, pp. 443-469); Breeze, D. J. (2015). The Antonine Wall: A handbook to Scotland's Roman frontier. Birlinn; Hanson, W. S., & Maxwell, G. S. (1986). Rome's north west frontier: The Antonine Wall (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press; Hodgson, N. (2017). Hadrian's Wall: Archaeology and history at the limit of Rome's empire. Robert Hale; Keppie, L. (2012). The legacy of Rome: Scotland's Roman remains (third ed.). Birlinn; Macdonald, G. (1934). The Roman Wall in Scotland (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press; Maldonado, A. (2015). The early medieval Antonine Wall. *Britannia*, 46, 225-245; Robertson, A. S. (2015). The Antonine Wall: A handbook to the Roman Wall between Forth and Clyde and a guide to its surviving remains (sixth ed., revised by L. Keppie). Glasgow Archaeological Society; Shotter, D. (1996). The Roman frontier in Britain: Hadrian's Wall, the Antonine Wall and Roman policy in the north. Preston: Carnegie Publishing; Symonds, M. F. A. (2018). Protecting the Roman Empire: Fortlets, frontiers, and the quest for post-conquest security. Cambridge University Press; Woolliscroft, D. J., & Hoffman, B. (2006). Rome's first frontier: The Flavian occupation of Northern Scotland. *Tempus*.

between them treated as a military zone. The Antonine Wall did not bring lasting peace; within 20 years of its construction (155–158 AD), disorder erupted between the Cheviot and Derbyshire hills, which was only suppressed with difficulty (Fig. 15).

Figure 15. A map indicating the location and extent of the Antonine Wall (140s AD) and Hadrian's Wall (122 AD). From [https://www.worldhistory.org/Roman\\_Britain/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Roman_Britain/) (Accessed 16/07/2024).



Around 180–185 AD, the Antonine Wall was breached according to Dio Cassius, and subsequent civil wars in Europe (193–197 AD) for the imperial succession allowed the Caledonians to ravage the north as garrisons were withdrawn to fight on the continent. The territory lost was regained up to Hadrian's Wall in 197 AD. In 209 AD, Emperor Lucius Septimius Severus and his son Caracalla led a punitive expedition into Caledonia. Severus died in York in 211 AD, after which Hadrian's Wall was established as the primary frontier. His successors, Caracalla (sole emperor 212–217 AD) and Severus Alexander (emperor 222–235 AD), upheld its status as the northern boundary of Roman Britain, as evidenced by numerous inscriptions referring to construction or repairs aimed at enhancing the frontier defenses. No further advances were made, and for nearly 200 years, Hadrian's Wall marked the extent of Roman dominion.

From the Third Century onwards, to enhance administrative efficiency, the island was bifurcated: Britannia Superior was governed from London, while Britannia Inferior was overseen from York (Eboracum). Subsequently, Emperor Diocletian further subdivided the province into four distinct regions. Under Diocletian's tetrarchy, Britain was placed under the surveillance of the western emperor.

Britain continued to face persistent turmoil. Throughout the Third Century AD, the island suffered incessant attacks from the Picts of Scotland, the Scots from Ireland, and the Saxons from Germany. A rebellion spearheaded by Carausius, followed by Allectus, briefly allowed Britain to become an independent kingdom until 296 AD when Constantius, the Roman emperor of the west (293–306 AD), reclaimed control. Constantius had previously served as a military tribune combating Celtic tribes. In recognition of his victory, he was honored with the title 'The Restorer of the Eternal Light' by the people of London. Despite the introduction of Christianity, by the late fourth Century AD, Rome struggled to retain control over Britain. Following Alaric's sack of Rome in 410 AD, the western half of the empire began to fragment, losing territories such as Spain, Britain, and much of Gaul. The eastern half, centered in Constantinople, emerged as the new economic and cultural hub. The loss of the wealthy grain-producing provinces critically undermined Rome. Historian Peter Heather, in "The Fall of the Roman Empire," posits that Britain was particularly susceptible to rebellion or secession because both civilians and military personnel felt neglected, with defensive

priorities lying elsewhere. Emperor Valentinian I (364-375 CE), who had subdued Saxon insurgents in 367 CE, gradually began withdrawing troops. In 410 CE, Emperor Honorius, among the last western emperors, fully evacuated the island, instructing British cities to defend themselves. Ultimately, Roman officials were expelled, and local governance took over.

Although Britain ceased to be a Roman province, the influence of the empire on the island's people and culture endured. Sporadic contact with Rome persisted, with missionaries aiding Christians in combating heresy. In the Fifth Century CE, as Saxon attacks intensified and raiders from Ireland and Scotland harried the English coast, an appeal for assistance was made to the Roman general Aetius, who did not respond. As Europe entered the 'Dark Ages,' Britain fragmented into smaller kingdoms. The Vikings began their incursions in the late 8th Century, wreaking havoc for decades. Ultimately, Alfred the Great emerged to repel the Viking invasions and assert his claim as the king of England, leading to Britain's recovery.

#### 5.4. RELIGION IN ROMAN BRITAIN

Official worship in the civilian world was manifested through calendared festivals held by Roman officials and troops, as well as through the provincial cult of the emperor. While relics from the worship conducted by Roman government officials are scarce, abundant evidence from the troops and their officers remains. This includes the extensive series of annual parade-ground dedications from Maryport, Cumberland, to Iuppiter Optimus Maximus and other exclusively Roman deities. Additionally, dedications to military standards by legionary or auxiliary officers and to imperial discipline, a practice shared by Roman Britain and Roman Africa, have been preserved. Local deities also received attention, such as Mars Cocidius in Cumberland and Apollo Maponus along Hadrian's Wall. Brigantia, the patron goddess of northern England, appears to be an official creation from the early Third Century, with her statue now housed in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.

The provincial cult's official center under Claudius was located at Colchester. At Colchester, the worship of Claudius, a living emperor, as *divus* (divine) exceeded traditional norms. The large vaulted foundations of the temple, still

extant below Colchester Castle, highlight the substantial burden this cult placed on a relatively small number of tribal communities—about a dozen compared to 64 in Gaul. Another early dedication was made for the well-being of the *domus divina*, or imperial household, by a guild in Chichester established under the authority of Tiberius Claudius Cogidumnus, *rex et legatus Augusti* (king and representative of Augustus), whom Tacitus also mentions as a loyal ally and client king. Religious corporations known as *seviri Augustales* were formed in York and Lincoln, tasked with maintaining the local imperial cult and handling the numerous dedications to the *numina Augustorum* (imperial spirits) by officials, military officers, and private citizens. Imported cults in Roman Britain were represented by various deities introduced by auxiliary units. Examples include Mars Thincsus, worshipped by the Frisii at Housesteads, Northumberland; Matres Ollolotae, revered by the Vettones at Binchester, County Durham; Vagdavercustis and Harimella, brought by the Tungri to Birrens, Dumfriesshire; and Dea Hammia, venerated by Syrian archers at Carvoran, Northumberland. Eastern religions were well-represented, notably through numerous dedications to Iuppiter Dolichenus and the shrines of Mithras. Mithraism, a religion favored not only by soldiers—as evidenced by shrines along Hadrian’s Wall at Housesteads, Rudchester, and Carrawburgh—but also by traders, as indicated by the elaborate shrine at Walbrook, London. Mithras was regarded as a god of courage, honesty, and truth. Despite its widespread presence, Mithraic communities were relatively small and had a limited number of adherents. Individual importations of deities were not uncommon. For example, Demetrius of Tarsus made a dedication to Oceanus and Tethys at York, imitating Alexander the Great. Similarly, there were dedications to Serapis by a legionary legate at York and to Apollo Grannus by a procurator at Inveresk, Midlothian. Dedications in Greek, such as that by Demetrius, were rare and mainly associated with doctors or exotic figures like the priestess of Tyrian Hercules at Corbridge, Northumberland.

Numerous and notable native cults existed in Roman Britain, often combining loyalty to Rome with worship. The cult of Sulis Minerva at Bath (in Somerset) is a striking example, where Sulis, the native goddess of the springs, was identified with Minerva through *interpretatio Romana*. This process gave native deities classical equivalents with well-known human forms and attributes,

exemplified by the statues of Minerva and the classical design of the temple at Bath, whose architectural order and front pediment still survive.

This syncretism occasionally led to unusual results, such as Mars being seen as a healing deity at Caerwent (in Monmouthshire) where he was worshipped as Mars Lenus sive Ocelus. Similarly, Maponus on Hadrian's Wall was equated with Apollo, while Belatucadrus and Cocidius in Cumberland were associated with Mars. Nodens, the hunter-god at Lydney (in Gloucestershire), was equated with Silvanus, as was Vinotonus, a local deity of the high Pennines near Bowes (in Yorkshire). Many shrines lack names due to the absence of surviving inscribed dedications, yet their widespread presence and survival into the latest period of Roman Britain, particularly in the southwest, are notable<sup>134</sup>.

#### 5.4.1. Paganism and Christianity in Roman Britain

Julian became the sole Augustus upon the death of Constantius at the end of 361 and promptly declared his apostasy. In early February 362, he announced religious freedom across the empire. He disseminated directives aimed at revitalizing pagan practices: for instance, he mandated the restoration of traditional honors to pagan deities and the refurbishment of temples with statues and altars; temples that had been dismantled (often by Christians) were to be rebuilt using reclaimed stone (Julian, to his Uncle Julian). Following Julian's death, subsequent emperors were Christian, and this was evident in their appointments. Although complete information is not always available, whenever the religion of the prefects of Gaul from 361 to 391 is known, they were Christians. One potential exception is the period from approximately December 379 to sometime in 381, when Sibirius, whose son was known to be a pagan, held the position.

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<sup>134</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Aldhouse-Green, M. (2018). *Sacred Britannia: The Gods and Rituals of Roman Britain*. Thames & Hudson; Henig, M. (1984). *Religion in Roman Britain*. Batsford; King, A. (2015). *Dii Familiares: The Role of Divine Protectors in Roman Military Settlements*. *Britannia*, 46, 1-34; Giorcelli Bersani, S. (2019). *Culti e religiosità nelle province occidentali dell'Impero romano: il caso della Britannia*. *Studi Storici*, 60(2), 367-396.

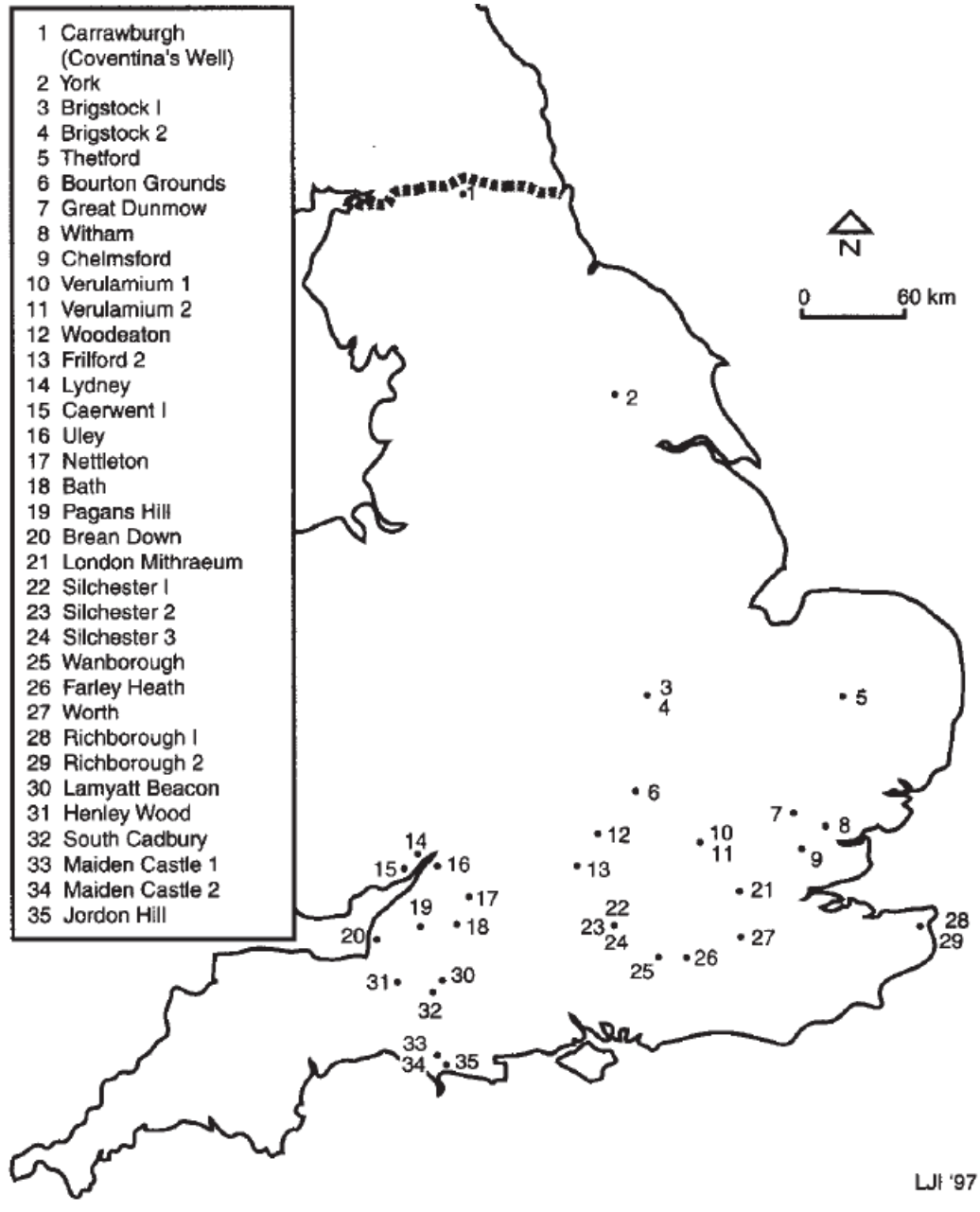
Since Julian's successors from Jovian to Theodosius I (up until 391) generally adopted a policy of religious tolerance, the paganism encouraged by Julian was only slightly curtailed by subsequent laws. Nevertheless, in his oration to Theodosius around 386 (*Or. 30*), Libanius laments that Christians were illegally destroying temples, often with the bishops' complicity. He suggests that such actions had at least the tacit approval of Christian prefects, if not their direct involvement. He also notes that rural temples were the most frequent targets. It appears that, starting around 360, several temples experienced a revival through refurbishment or were reinstated as centers for pagan worship after a period of Christian use. Additionally, there was some investment in new temple constructions. While some temples remained in use until the end of the Century and beyond, others that had withstood the challenges posed by Constans and Constantius lasted only another two or three decades before succumbing to the pressures of Christianity. With few exceptions, most of the renewed pagan activity occurred at Romano-Celtic or indigenous shrines, primarily in rural areas<sup>135</sup>.

Although the temples that survived up to the fourth Century are not few (see Fig. 16), we will focus on the possible presence of pagan temples or rituals in the later period, so that we can ascertain how far they survived.

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<sup>135</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Higham, N.J. (1997). *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England*; Gribben, C. (2021). *The rise and fall of Christian Ireland*. Oxford University Press; Henig, M., & Gilmour, L.A. (2007). *Pagans and Christians : from Antiquity to the Middle Ages : papers in honour of Martin Henig, presented on the occasion of his fifth birthday*; Mayr-Harting, H. (1972). *The coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*; Davies, W. (1982). *Charles Thomas: Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500*. London: Batsford, 1981. 408 pp., 8 pls., 60 figs. £14.95. *Antiquity*, 56(217), 146–148; Thomas, C. (1981). *Christianity in Roman Britain to A.D. 500*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Watts, D. (2014). *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain*. London and New York. Routledge.

Figure 16. Map of temples surviving to AD 391. From Whatts, D., Religion in Late Roman Britain, p.41



The conversion of pagan sites to Christianity progressed neither swiftly nor uniformly<sup>136</sup>. Many locations likely maintained their pagan characteristics significantly longer than others, even within the same vicinity. For instance, in the Fifth Century, while the Henley Wood temple and temenos were desecrated with west-east burials, the nearby Structure II at Cadbury Congresbury, about 140 meters away, continued to uphold pagan traditions. Such a scenario could have also occurred during the Roman period. Some pagan sites under threat were evidently protected by their devotees. The deliberate dismantling and deposition of sculptures, dedicatory stones, and altars into Coventina's Well at Carrawburgh suggests pagan actions rather than Christian, especially considering the decree of January 399. Similarly, the deposition of the Thetford Treasure probably took place around this time, likely prompted by the anti-pagan laws of Theodosius rather than a Saxon threat, reflecting efforts to safeguard the cult's treasures.

Such examples are rare, but there is substantial evidence for the continuation of pagan cults and religious activities at shrines, often conducted illegally and covertly. The reinforcing legislation of Honorius and Arcadius in 395 (*C. Th.* 16.10.13) suggests non-compliance with Theodosius's decrees banning these cults. This is corroborated by archaeological findings, both in rural areas where Christianity was not always firmly established and in towns. Due to the collapse of the money economy, dating the cessation of pagan activities is sometimes impossible. As Rahtz notes, paganism may have persisted "for decades or even Centuries"<sup>137</sup>. Evidence from rural Roman Britain indicates ongoing pagan practices well into the late fourth and early Fifth Centuries. In the north, offerings

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<sup>136</sup> For comprehensive studies on Religious Art and Architecture see: Bell, T. (2005). *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England*; Croxford, B. (2003). *Iconoclasm in Roman Britain?* *Britannia*, 34, 81-95; Johns, C. (2008). *Roman Art, Religion and Society: New Studies for the Roman Art Seminar*, Oxford 2005. Edited by M. Henig. *British Archaeological Reports International Series 1577*. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2006. Pp. ix + 213, illus. *Britannia*, 39, 399-400; Perring, D. (2003). 'Gnosticism' in fourth-century Britain: The Frampton mosaics reconsidered. *Britannia*, 34, 97-127; Toynbee, J. M. C. (1986). *The Roman Art Treasures from the Temple of Mithras*. London.

<sup>137</sup> Rahtz, P. (1991). 'Pagan and Christian by the Severn Sea', in L. Abrams and J. Carley (eds) *The Archaeology and History of Glastonbury Abbey*, Woodbridge: Boydell, pp. 1-37.

of coins and other votive items were still made to the goddess at Coventina's Well, although the altars and stones were no longer visible. In the southwest, Christianity had made significant progress but did not entirely eradicate pagan cults by the end of the fourth Century. Structure II at Cadbury Congresbury, believed to be a pagan shrine continuing into the post-Roman period, likely existed at this time. Temple complexes at Maiden Castle, Lydney, Nettleton, and possibly Henley Wood and Pagans Hill, remained in use until they fell into decay in a period lacking numismatic evidence.

A notable number of coins dated 388–95 found at Jordan Hill suggest the temple there maintained its original function well beyond the Theodosian decrees, eventually becoming a site for squatters. Conversely, the Romano-Celtic temple at South Cadbury, whose existence is accepted by the present writer, was abandoned by the end of the fourth Century. Further east, the temple at Farley Heath was destroyed by fire in the First half of the Fifth Century. In East Anglia, the Witham site reverted to its pagan character, with evidence of cultic activity extending into the early Fifth Century.

In the central region, several Romano-Celtic temples remained active until the early Fifth Century before being abandoned or meeting violent ends. The building at Bourton Grounds, constructed in the mid-Third Century, peaked during the reign of Constantius and was used until the early Fifth Century, when it may have been intentionally destroyed. The temple at Woodeaton, which was built and rebuilt over approximately 350 years, likely survived until it was destroyed by fire. Similarly, the temple at Frilford, after considerable activity in the latter half of the fourth Century and a significant increase in coin deposits from 360–85, continued until its abandonment in the first half of the Fifth Century<sup>138</sup>.

To gain a deeper understanding of the insights provided by material evidence, it is essential to examine artifacts that are dated to a later period, as they are the focus of our research. Between 361 and 391, at least thirty-five distinct temple sites or locations of pagan cultic activity have been identified. Of these, nineteen were likely officially out of use by 391, including nine urban, two military,

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<sup>138</sup> Watts, D. (1998). *Religion in Late Roman Britain: Forces of Change* (1st ed.). Routledge, pagg. 52-55.

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and eight rural sites (Tab. 1). Among the remaining sites, while up to five offer little or no evidence regarding their dedication, the connection to native gods is a notable characteristic of the others. When examining the twenty sites where pagan activity persisted or likely persisted after 391 and into the Fifth Century—at least for a period following Theodosius's legislation—this trend is maintained. Seven sites appear to be associated with healing and/or hunting, two with a war god (though Mars could also be linked to fertility), two with Jupiter-like gods potentially related to the weather, one with a fertility-type goddess, two (including one urban) with a salvation cult, and another urban site possibly with a god of trade and merchants.

Table 1. Pagan temples surviving and pagan activity after AD 391. Adapted from Watts, D. (1998). *Religion in Late Roman Britain: Forces of Change*. Routledge, pag. 58.

Site	Type of Site	Deity or Type of Deity Worshipped
Bath	Urban?	Sulis-Minerva (Healing)
Bourton Grounds	Rural	(Epona ? River god?)
Carrowburgh (Coventina's Well)	Rural/Military	Coventina (Healing)
Farley Heath	Rural	Sucellis? (Jupiter type)
Frilford 2	Rural	Mars type (Military/Fertility)
Great Dunmow	Rural	Native Deity?
Henley Wood	Rural	Native goddess (Fertility ?)
Jordon Hill	Rural	?
Lydney	Rural	Nodens (Healing)
Maiden Castle 1	Rural	(Hunting/Healing/Fertility)
Maiden Castle 2	Rural	Composite native deity
Nettleton	Rural	Apollo/Cunomaglus (Hunting/Healing)
Pagans Hill	Rural	Apollo C' maglus type? (Hunting/Healing)
South Cadbury	Rural	War god?
Thetford	Rural	Faunus (Salvation type)
Verulamium 1	Urban	Mercury (God of Merchants)
Verulamium 2	Urban	Cybele (Salvation type)
Witham	Rural	Jupiter/ Weather god type
Woodeaton	Rural	Mars/Jupiter/Cupid type (War/Fertility/Healing)
York	Urban	Roman deity?

The scarcity of mystery cults such as those dedicated to Bacchus, Orpheus, Mithras, Isis, and Magna Mater in rural Britain suggests that religious practices in these areas remained largely unchanged from their pre-Roman state. This phenomenon can be attributed to the evolutionary trajectory of early British religious beliefs. Primordial deities associated with weather and chthonic forces, reminiscent of those found in ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Hittite, and Persian civilizations, were characteristic of hunter-gatherer societies. As communities transitioned to agricultural and pastoral lifestyles, these deities were gradually superseded by fertility gods. Subsequently, the emergence of territorial conflicts led to the prominence of war deities<sup>139</sup>.

The progression of religious development in pre-Roman Britain continued with the attribution of spiritual significance to local fauna, flora, and natural features such as springs, trees, caverns, and shafts. As survival became less dependent on environmental factors, there was a shift towards seeking spiritual assistance for life extension. The advent of healing cults represents a later stage in this religious evolution. However, the indigenous population did not develop salvation cults, which remained absent from their belief system.

The Celtic conceptualization of the afterlife was notably ambiguous, intertwined with the notion of soul transmigration, a belief potentially cultivated for military purposes, or a nebulous post-mortem realm. The presence of equine burials alongside human remains in the late Roman-era cemetery at Dunstable likely symbolizes Epona's role as a protector of the deceased, rather than indicating a belief in salvation.

Salvation cults promising an afterlife in Britain were predominantly of Graeco-Roman or Eastern origin, typically concentrated in urban centers, villas, and military establishments. Unlike Christianity, which also offered salvation and enjoyed imperial support, these cults failed to penetrate rural areas effectively. Despite this, the rural spread of Christianity lagged behind its urban counterpart,

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<sup>139</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Hutchinson, V.J. (1986) *Bacchus in Roman Britain: The Evidence for his Cult* (2 vols), Oxford: BAR; Webster, G. (1986) *The British Celts and their Gods under Rome*, London: Batsford.

and vestiges of paganism, including salvation-oriented cults, persisted even in towns.

The persistence of pagan practices in post-Roman Britain exhibits a complex pattern of continuity and transformation. Archaeological evidence suggests that not all sites where paganism endured maintained active temples into the fifth Century after the Roman withdrawal. With the notable exception of Bath, the majority of locations with continued pagan activity were situated in rural settings.

Among the thirteen identified sites of ongoing pagan worship, historical data indicates that all but three, namely Coventina's Well, Pagans Hill, and Lydney, had strong connections to Iron Age cultic practices. Even for these three sites, the possibility of pre-Roman origins cannot be entirely discounted. This pattern underscores the deep-rooted nature of the pagan traditions that survived both the Theodosian edicts and the cessation of Roman governance.

The longevity of these practices in rural environments points to a significant cultural conservatism among Romano-British populations outside urban centers. This observation aligns with the scholarly perspective, notably articulated by Rahtz and Watts (1979), which posits that the surviving cults owed their resilience to their indigenous character rather than Roman influence<sup>140</sup>.

Several factors contributed to the prolonged existence of native pagan cults well into the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Centuries, potentially extending even further. The ineffective organization and evangelization efforts of the Christian church, as noted by Frend (1992), coupled with the dual challenges of Saxon incursions and Roman withdrawal, created conditions conducive to the preservation of pre-Christian religious practices<sup>141</sup>.

This analysis highlights the nuanced religious landscape of post-Roman Britain, emphasizing the importance of local traditions and historical continuity in shaping the spiritual practices of the period. It suggests that the transition from paganism to Christianity was a gradual and complex process, influenced by a

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<sup>140</sup> Rahtz, P. and Watts, L. (1979) 'The end of Roman temples in the west of Britain', in P.J. Casey (ed.) *The End of Roman Britain*, Oxford: BAR, pp. 183–210.

<sup>141</sup> Frend, W.H.C. (1992). 'Pagans, Christians, and the "barbarian conspiracy" of A.D. 367 in Roman Britain', *Britannia* 23:121–31.

variety of social, political, and cultural factors. The urban centers and artifacts like the Thetford Treasure present a distinct pattern of religious continuity and transformation in late Roman Britain, potentially reflecting influences akin to Julian's pagan revival. Archaeological evidence from various sites offers insights into this complex religious landscape.

Discoveries at Verulamium/Dunstable and Thetford suggest the persistence, resurgence, or introduction of salvation-oriented cults during the latter half of the fourth Century. This trend indicates a dynamic religious environment in urban settings, possibly influenced by broader imperial policies.

Even in long-established Roman centers such as Verulamium and Bath, archaeological findings demonstrate the endurance of pagan practices. Julian's decree to reinstate traditional pagan worship appears to have encompassed both native deities, exemplified by Sulis-Minerva, and those of Roman or Eastern origin. This policy likely contributed to the revitalization of diverse pagan traditions in urban contexts.

The case of York presents an intriguing scenario. Despite the mid-Century abandonment of its temple, evidence suggests the continuation of clandestine pagan rituals. This phenomenon underscores the resilience of pagan practices, even in the face of official discontinuation of religious sites.

These observations highlight the complexity of religious transitions in urban Roman Britain. They suggest a landscape where traditional pagan practices coexisted with, and in some cases resurged alongside, newer religious movements. This nuanced picture challenges simplistic narratives of religious change and emphasizes the need for a more granular understanding of spiritual practices in late Roman urban centers.

The religious landscape of late Roman Verulamium presents a complex scenario, particularly evident in the temple near the theatre. Archaeological evidence suggests a period of activity and renovation at this site post-379 AD, despite the theatre's closure before the Century's end. This renewal phase likely persisted until the implementation of Theodosius' anti-pagan legislation in 391 AD

Some researchers have proposed its potential conversion into a Christian church, while others suggest it may have devolved into a waste disposal site<sup>142</sup>. However, the numismatic evidence, particularly the pattern of coin deposition similar to that observed in the triangular temple, casts doubt on both these hypotheses.

A more plausible interpretation is that the temple experienced a period of revitalization prior to the Theodosian edicts. The continued practice of coin deposition post-391 AD, possibly associated with a localized, Celticized version of Mercury, is particularly noteworthy. This persistence of pagan rituals is especially significant given the likely presence of a substantial Christian community in Verulamium during this period.

This evidence from Verulamium contributes to our understanding of the resilience of traditional religious practices in the face of increasing Christianization and imperial anti-pagan policies. It underscores the complex nature of religious transformation in late Roman Britain, where longstanding pagan traditions coexisted and sometimes thrived alongside emerging Christian communities, even in urban centers with significant Roman influence.

Towards the conclusion of Roman occupation in Britain, Christianity had likely established dominance in the most Romanized civilian areas, although this represented only a small fraction of the total population. The rural landscape, however, presented a more complex religious picture. Despite the expansion of Christianity, pagan practices demonstrated remarkable resilience against imperial edicts aimed at their suppression.

The archaeological record primarily reveals sites with long-standing religious traditions, but it is reasonable to infer the existence of numerous other sacred locations lacking structural remains or permanent constructions.

An intriguing postscript to this analysis concerns the potential longevity of Romano-British temples. Historical accounts, such as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*<sup>143</sup>, indicate that when Augustine arrived in England at the close of the Sixth Century, he was instructed to repurpose existing temples rather than destroy them

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<sup>142</sup> Niblett, R. (1993). 'Verulamium since the Wheelers', in S.J.Greep (ed.), pp. 78–92.

<sup>143</sup> Bede, *H. E.* 1.30.

outright. While traditionally interpreted as referring to Anglo-Saxon religious structures, recent scholarship on Anglo-Saxon paganism has highlighted the lack of archaeological evidence for purpose-built temples from this period, with the possible exception of Yeavinger.

This absence of Anglo-Saxon temple structures, coupled with the likelihood that early Germanic settlers in Britain utilized natural features as shrines (similar to pre-Roman British practices), raises an alternative interpretation<sup>144</sup>. It is plausible that the "temples" mentioned in Bede's account were, in fact, surviving structures from the Roman era, representing cults with pre-Roman origins that had outlived the period of Roman governance.

This perspective underscores the remarkable continuity of certain religious practices in Britain, spanning from pre-Roman times through the Roman occupation and into the early medieval period. It highlights the complex interplay between indigenous traditions, Roman influence, and emerging religious movements in shaping the spiritual landscape of post-Roman Britain<sup>145</sup>.

## 5.5. THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

The urban landscape of Roman Hispania (Fig. 17-18) was characterized by a multitude of city-states, each with its distinct territorial jurisdiction. This urban-centric structure remained prevalent throughout late antiquity, mirroring the patterns established during the height of imperial rule. While scholars often associate Hispania with other western provinces like Gaul or Britannia, its extensive urban development bore closer resemblance to that of Italy or North Africa. As Rome's initial overseas conquest, Hispania experienced a more profound and enduring Roman influence compared to other regions of the Latin West.

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<sup>144</sup> Hutton, R. (1991) *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*, London: BCA/Blackwell, pag. 270.

<sup>145</sup> Watts, D. (1998). *Religion in Late Roman Britain: Forces of Change* (1st ed.). Routledge, pagg. 63-64.

Figure 17. Spain, conventus boundaries and provinces before ca. 293. From Kulikowski, M. (2011). *Late Roman Spain and its cities*. JHU Press, pag. Xx.

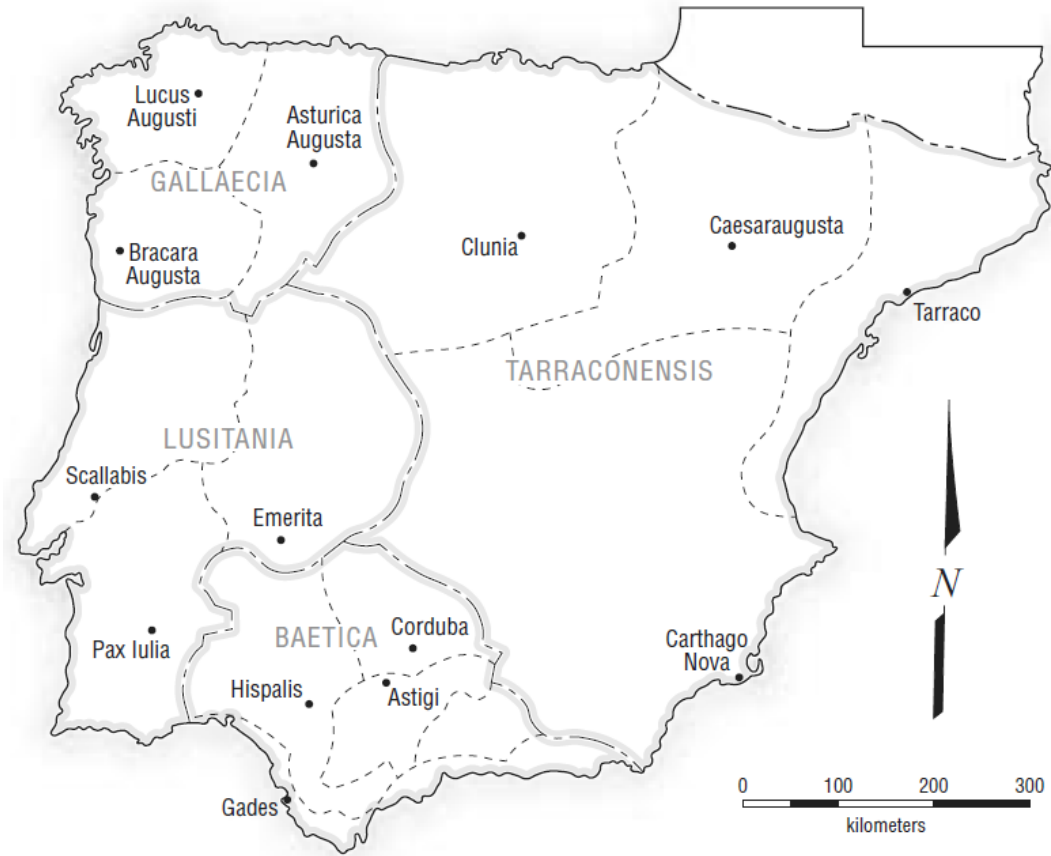
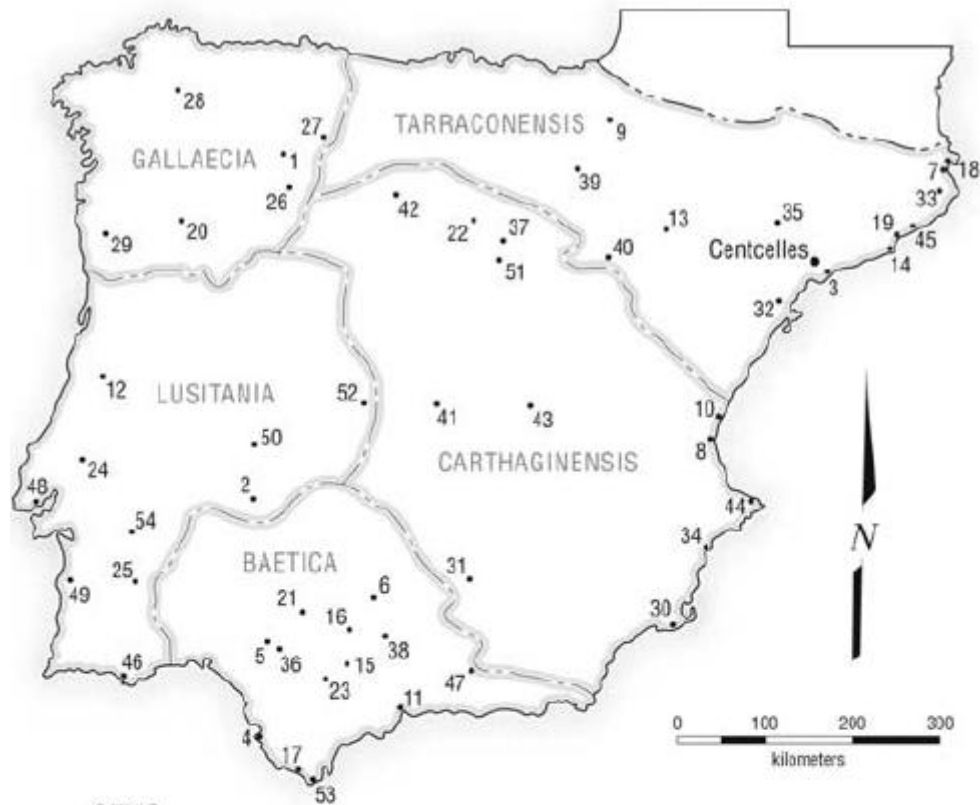


Figure 18. Spain, the Diocletianic provinces excluding Tigitania and the Balearics, and important cities. From Kulikowski, M. (2011). *Late Roman Spain and its cities*. JHU Press, pag. xxi.



### SITES

- |                     |                         |                   |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Asturica Augusta  | 19 Baetulo              | 37 Uxama          |
| 2 Emerita           | 20 Aquae Flaviae        | 38 Igabrum        |
| 3 Tarraco           | 21 Munigua              | 39 Calagurris     |
| 4 Gades             | 22 Clunia               | 40 Bilibis        |
| 5 Italica           | 23 Irti                 | 41 Toletum        |
| 6 Corduba           | 24 Scallabis            | 42 Pallantia      |
| 7 Emporion/Emporiae | 25 Pax Iulia            | 43 Segobriga      |
| 8 Valentia          | 26 Rosinos de Vidriales | 44 Dianium        |
| 9 Pompaelo          | 27 Legio                | 45 Iluro          |
| 10 Saguntum         | 28 Lucus Augusti        | 46 Ossonoba       |
| 11 Malaca           | 29 Bracara Augusta      | 47 Illiberis      |
| 12 Conimbriga       | 30 Carthago Nova        | 48 Olisippo       |
| 13 Caesaraugusta    | 31 Castulo              | 49 Mirobriga      |
| 14 Barcino          | 32 Dertosa              | 50 Norba          |
| 15 Urso             | 33 Gerunda              | 51 Termes         |
| 16 Astigi           | 34 Lucentum             | 52 Caesarobriga   |
| 17 Baelo            | 35 Ilerda               | 53 Iulia Traducta |
| 18 Rhode            | 36 Hispalis             | 54 Evora          |

The urban centers and their associated political geography were fundamental to this Roman impact. Emperor Augustus strategically organized the Spanish provinces around urban territories. Unlike in Gaul, where civitates often represented rebranded tribal lands, Spanish administrative units were predominantly small, urban-focused entities. Within seven decades of Augustus's passing, most of these urban centers had attained the privileged status of municipia under Roman law. These cities served as the primary catalysts for Hispania's Romanization process.

Consequently, the urban geography of Hispania demonstrated remarkable resilience, persisting even after the dissolution of the empire that had initially established it. This enduring urban framework underscores the deep-rooted nature of Roman influence in the Iberian Peninsula.

The Roman subjugation of the Iberian Peninsula was a protracted process spanning over two Centuries, during which Rome itself underwent a fundamental transformation from a republic to an empire. Initially, Rome's involvement in Hispania was precipitated by its conflicts with Carthage, and for a considerable period, Roman authorities viewed the region primarily through a military lens, a perspective that persisted until the Augustan era.

The Iberian theater of the Second Punic War commenced in 218 BC when Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio disembarked with his forces at Emporion, a Hellenic settlement in present-day Catalonia. The peninsular phase of this conflict concluded in 206 BC, with the younger Publius Cornelius Scipio (later honored as Africanus following his triumph over Hannibal at Zama) successfully expelling Carthaginian forces from Hispania.

Scipio's victorious campaigns penetrated deep into the Iberian hinterland. In the Guadalquivir valley, near modern-day Seville, he established Italica as a settlement for his convalescing veterans. Concurrently, Tarraco (present-day Tarragona), situated approximately 160 kilometers south of Emporion, evolved from a Roman military base established in 217 BC into one of the most significant urban centers of Roman Hispania.

This extended period of conquest and settlement laid the foundation for the profound Romanization of the Iberian Peninsula, initiating a process that would dramatically reshape the region's cultural, political, and urban landscape<sup>146</sup>.

The Roman conquest of the Iberian Peninsula was accompanied by a significant influx of both military and civilian elements. The prolonged military campaigns not only brought legions but also attracted a diverse array of non-combatants, including camp followers and logistics contractors. These operations facilitated numerous interactions with indigenous populations, who had aligned themselves with either Rome or Carthage during the Punic Wars. The resulting commitments to both emerging Roman settlements and various Iberian groups made a Roman withdrawal from the peninsula increasingly unfeasible, even if such a course had been desired.

The competitive nature of Roman imperialism, however, made such a withdrawal unlikely<sup>147</sup>. Roman political figures sought military triumphs abroad to enhance their domestic standing, and the fragmented tribal landscape of Iberia provided ample opportunities for ambitious generals. Concurrently, ongoing social tensions in Rome motivated some less privileged citizens to seek opportunities abroad, either within the legions or in the auxiliary industries that accompanied them. The presence of these Roman civilians, in turn, necessitated continued military engagement, ostensibly for their protection.

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<sup>146</sup> Kulikowski, M. (2011). *Late Roman Spain and its cities*. JHU Press, pag. 2; For a comprehensive study see: Cary, M. (1949). *The geographic background of Greek & Roman history*. Clarendon Press; Fernández Castro, M. C. (1995). *Iberia in prehistory*. Blackwell; Harrison, R. J. (1988). *Spain at the dawn of history: Iberians, Phoenicians and Greeks*. Thames and Hudson; Richardson, J. S. (1996). *The Romans in Spain*. Blackwell; Way, A. G. (1962). *The geography of Spain and Portugal*. Methuen.

<sup>147</sup> Brunt, P. A. (1965). Italian aims at the time of the Social War. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 55(1-2), 90-109; Brunt, P. A. (1978). *Laus imperii*. In P. D. A. Garnsey & C. R. Whittaker (Eds.), *Imperialism in the ancient world* (pp. 159-191). Cambridge University Press; Brunt, P. A. (1990). *Roman imperial themes*. Clarendon Press; Harris, W. V. (1979). *War and imperialism in Republican Rome, 327-70 BC*. Clarendon Press; Harris, W. V. (1984). *The imperialism of mid-republican Rome*. American Academy in Rome; Mattingly, D. J. (Ed.). (1997). *Dialogues in Roman imperialism: Power, discourse, and discrepant experience in the Roman Empire*. *Journal of Roman Archaeology*; Richardson, J. S. (1986). *Hispaniae: Spain and the development of Roman imperialism, 218-82 BC*. Cambridge University Press.

This interplay of interests perpetuated Rome's commitment to the conquest of Iberia, which continued long after Scipio's decisive victory over Carthage in 206 BC. The subsequent phases of Republican occupation in Iberia were characterized by opportunistic military engagements, resulting in the gradual expansion of Roman-controlled territories.

The early Roman administration of Iberia was minimal, with the peninsula primarily viewed as a resource for the benefit of Romans in Italy. Governance was akin to that of occupied territory, with little effort to impose Roman cultural norms. Local power structures were permitted to persist, provided they remained subservient to Rome. In 197 BC, the Roman Senate laid the groundwork for the future territorial organization of the peninsula by dispatching two praetors, each assigned to a distinct provincia. This action led to the establishment of Hispania Citerior and Hispania Ulterior, delineated based on their distance from Rome and centered on Tarragona and Córdoba, respectively. Tarragona, in particular, was fortified extensively, a feature that would define its urban landscape well into the medieval period<sup>148</sup>.

The Roman presence in Iberia underwent significant evolution from the initial conquest to the Augustan era. Despite substantial territorial gains and the implementation of a basic taxation system around 179 BC, the administrative structure of the Spanish provinces remained largely undeveloped until Augustus's reign. While Rome's engagement with Iberia profoundly influenced developments in the capital, and Roman demand for tribute stimulated peninsular agricultural expansion, the integration of Iberia into the Roman sphere was often marked by conflict.

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<sup>148</sup> Kulikowski, M. (2011). *Late Roman Spain and its cities*. JHU Press, pagg. 3-4; Carreté, J. M., Keay, S., & Millett, M. (1995). A Roman provincial capital and its hinterland: The survey of the territory of Tarragona, Spain, 1985-1990. *Journal of Roman Archaeology*; Hauschild, T. (1983). *Arquitectura romana de Tarragona*. Ajuntament de Tarragona; Hauschild, T. (1993a). *Arquitectura oficial romana*. In X. Dupré i Raventós (Ed.), *La ciutat en el món romà: XIV Congrés Internacional d'Arqueologia Clàssica*, Tarragona, 5-11/9/1993 (pp. 189-195). *Comité Organitzador del XIV C.I.A.C*; León, P. (Ed.). (1993a). *Colonia Patricia Corduba: una reflexió arqueològica*. Universidad de Córdoba.

The late Republican civil wars, which spilled onto Iberian soil, demonstrated the region's incorporation into wider Roman political struggles, often with dire consequences for local populations who aligned with the losing faction. The Roman perspective on Iberian inhabitants is exemplified by Pompey's triumph of 71 BC, following the Sertorian revolt. Despite the involvement of Iberian allies, Pompey celebrated his victory as a conquest over foreign peoples, underscoring their alien status in Roman eyes.

The period following Sertorius's defeat saw Iberian history subsumed within the broader narrative of Roman civil conflicts. Paradoxically, these internecine struggles served to normalize Iberia's position within the Roman world, as the peninsula experienced the same political upheavals as other provinces. By Augustus's victory at Actium, Iberia's integration into the Roman sphere was undeniable, with only the northern regions, particularly the Astures and Cantabri, remaining resistant to Roman authority.

Augustus prioritized the pacification of these northern areas, personally leading campaigns in 26 and 25 BC. Although he prematurely declared victory over the Cantabri in 25 BC, allowing for the symbolic closing of the Temple of Janus in Rome, decisive pacification was only achieved in 19 BC under Agrippa. This final campaign, involving the massacre of Cantabrian warriors and the strategic resettlement of survivors, effectively extended the Pax Augusta to Iberia, marking the end of hostilities between indigenous Iberians and Roman forces.

This period of transition under Augustus laid the foundation for a more comprehensive integration of Iberia into the Roman administrative and cultural framework, setting the stage for the peninsula's significant role in the subsequent Centuries of Roman imperial history.

Augustus's approach to the Iberian Peninsula acknowledged the significant regional disparities that persisted after two Centuries of Roman presence<sup>149</sup>. In

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<sup>149</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Alföldy, G. (1996). Spain. In A. K. Bowman, E. Champlin, & A. Lintott (Eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History* (2nd ed., Vol. 10, pp. 449-463). Cambridge University Press, Bendala Galán, M. (1990). *El plan urbanístico de Augusto*

areas where Roman influence was already established or where indigenous urban cultures were well-developed, local populations had begun to adopt Roman customs. Caesar's triumph over Pompey further reinforced this trend through the establishment of prominent *coloniae* of Roman citizens in strategic locations across Hispania. These settlements were carved out from the *ager publicus* that comprised the provinces, serving either as punitive measures for supporting the losing faction in civil conflicts or as rewards for loyalty to the victorious side.

The establishment of these colonies introduced not only Roman citizens and land division practices but also Roman legal and administrative systems into regions that had previously encountered Romans primarily as military personnel, merchants, or tax collectors, rather than as permanent landowners. In areas such as the lower Ebro valley, the Mediterranean coastline, and the Guadalquivir valley, the populace had grown accustomed to Roman presence and was receptive to Roman cultural practices. Strabo even notes that in the Guadalquivir region, the local language had been supplanted by Latin<sup>150</sup>.

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en Hispania: Precedentes y pautas macroterritoriales. In W. Trillmich & P. Zanker (Eds.), *Stadtbild und Ideologie: Die Monumentalisierung hispanischer Städte zwischen Republik und Kaiserzeit* (pp. 25-42). Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften; Bendala Galán, M. (1998). *La ciudad entre los iberos, espacio de poder*. In C. Aranegui Gascó (Ed.), *Los iberos, príncipes de Occidente* (pp. 25-34). Fundación La Caixa; Fear, A. T. (1996). *Rome and Baetica: Urbanization in Southern Spain c. 50 BC-AD 150*. Oxford University Press; Haley, E. W. (1997). Review of *Rome and Baetica: Urbanization in Southern Spain c. 50 BC-AD 150* by A. T. Fear. *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 97.3.25.

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Strabo

3.2.15.

From

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0239&doc=Strab.+3.2.15> (Accessed 23-07-2024). "The Turdetani not only enjoy a salubrious climate, but their manners are polished and urbane, as also are those of the people of Keltica, by reason of their vicinity [to the Turdetani], or, according to Polybius, on account of their being of the same stock, but not to so great a degree, for they live for the most part scattered in villages. The Turdetani, on the other hand, especially those who dwell about the Guadalquiver, have so entirely adopted the Roman mode of life, as even to have forgotten their own language. They have for the most part become Latins, and received Roman colonists; so that a short time only is wanted before they will be all Romans. The very names of many of the towns at present, such as Pax Augusta amongst the Keltici, Augusta-Eme-

However, beyond these Romanized zones lay vast areas where Roman influence was minimal, limited to military campaigns or tax collection. This included much of the western and southwestern regions, as well as the Meseta and the mountainous areas flanking the coastal and riverine centers of Roman settlement. In these areas, despite a Century or more of nominal subjugation to Rome, Roman cultural imprint remained superficial. The recently subdued northwestern regions operated under a distinct, largely tribal societal structure.

Augustus's administrative reorganization of Hispania was designed to accommodate this diversity while simultaneously creating a framework to gradually reduce these disparities. This approach aimed to facilitate the long-term integration of the entire peninsula into the Roman imperial system, acknowledging the varied levels of Romanization across different regions while promoting a more uniform administrative structure.

Beyond the areas of significant Roman influence, there existed regions in Hispania where Roman presence was primarily associated with military campaigns or tax collection. This scenario was prevalent in much of the west and southwest, as well as in the Meseta and the mountainous regions bordering the coastal and riverine centers of Roman settlement. Despite a Century or more of nominal Roman control, these areas exhibited minimal Roman cultural imprint. The recently subjugated northwestern regions, in particular, still adhered to a largely tribal societal structure.

Augustus's administrative restructuring of Hispania was designed to accommodate this diversity while simultaneously creating a framework to gradually diminish these regional disparities. The existing provinciae of Citerior and Ulterior were reconfigured. Citerior, administered from Tarragona, was expanded to include the strategically significant area around the Guadalquivir's headwaters in the Sierra Morena, as well as parts of Gallaecia in the northwest. This vast new province became known as Hispania Citerior or Tarraconensis. Conversely, the former Hispania Ulterior was divided into two provinces: Baetica

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rita amongst the Turduli, Cæsar-Augusta amongst the Keltiberians and certain other colonies, are proof of the change of manners I have spoken of. Those of the Iberians who adopt these new modes of life are styled *togati*. Amongst their number are the Keltiberians, who formerly were regarded as the most uncivilized of them all. So much for these”.

and Lusitania. The boundary between these new provinces roughly followed the Guadiana (Anas) river, demarcating the cultural divide between the urbanized Guadalquivir valley and the more tribal regions of present-day Extremadura and the Portuguese Alentejo.

This administrative reorganization not only reflected regional differences but also served Augustus's political objectives. Baetica, now demilitarized, could be entrusted to senatorial governance, supporting Augustus's claim of republican restoration. By 13 BC, Baetica was administered by a senatorial proconsul, while Lusitania and Citerior remained under imperial control through propraetorian and proconsular legates, respectively.

The Augustan era also saw the formalization of *conventus* as administrative subdivisions within the provinces. These *conventus*, which had originally developed around communities of Roman citizens for juridical purposes, were regularized as official administrative districts. By the Flavian period, fourteen Spanish *conventus* were established as fixed subdivisions, each centered on a city where provincial governors or their representatives could address the legal needs of Roman citizens<sup>151</sup>.

This administrative framework laid the groundwork for the gradual integration and Romanization of the diverse regions of Hispania, balancing immediate political considerations with long-term provincial management strategies.

The administrative framework established by Augustus for Hispania, despite the creation of smaller provinces and *conventus*, still encompassed a vast territory. Augustus appears to have deliberately chosen to implement Roman control and facilitate imperial census-taking through a network of urban centers with assigned dependent territories, known as *civitates*. These *civitates* formed the fundamental units of Roman administration throughout the empire.

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<sup>151</sup> Burton, G. P. (1975). Proconsuls, assizes and the administration of justice under the empire. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 65, 92-106; Galsterer, H. (2000). Local and provincial institutions and government. In A. K. Bowman, P. Garnsey, & D. Rathbone (Eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History* (2nd ed., Vol. 11, pp. 344-360). Cambridge University Press; Lintott, A. (1993). *Imperium Romanum: Politics and administration*. Routledge.

While the Iberian Peninsula already possessed numerous towns of both indigenous and Roman origin, Augustus actively promoted urban development where it was lacking. These urban centers varied greatly in their origins and legal status under Roman law. *Coloniae*, numbering around thirty across the peninsula, were intentionally established by Roman authorities and populated with Roman or Latin citizens. Both *coloniae* and *municipia* enjoyed the privilege of autonomous governance over their territories. *Municipia* were often pre-existing urban centers, either settled by Roman or Latin citizens or derived from indigenous sites, which had been granted privileged status by Rome.

Beyond these privileged settlements, the majority of peninsular cities were classified as stipendiary, or tribute-paying, with their inhabitants considered *peregrini* (foreigners) under Roman law. Despite their lower status, these stipendiary *civitates* served as effective administrative units, providing focal points for Roman state interaction.

The Augustan era witnessed an unprecedented surge in urban development, including the establishment of new *coloniae*, *municipia*, and peregrine cities. Some were created *ex nihilo*, such as Augusta Emerita (modern Mérida) founded in 25 BC for veterans of the Cantabrian wars, or Barcelona, established on a new site in 9 or 8 BC. In the northwest, a series of stipendiary cities like *Lucus Augusti*, *Bracara Augusta*, and *Asturica Augusta* were founded to serve as urban centers for the recently subjugated mountain tribes. Concurrently, many existing towns were elevated to colonial or municipal status.

This Augustan system of provinces, *conventus*, and *civitates* facilitated the Romanization of Hispania, transforming its inhabitants from subjects of Rome into Roman provincials and active participants in the empire<sup>152</sup>. This transformation was not a deliberate policy goal but rather a consequence of practical administrative needs. Augustus, like his predecessors, primarily viewed the

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<sup>152</sup> Kulikowski, M. (2011). *Late Roman Spain and its cities*. JHU Press, pagg. 7-8; Albertini, E. (1923). *Les divisions administratives de l'Espagne romaine*. E. de Boccard; Estefania, D. (1958). *Notas para la delimitación de los conventos jurídicos en España*. *Zephyrus*, 9, 51-57; Hübner, E., Alföldy, G., & Mayer, M. (Eds.). (1869-present). *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum II: Inscriptiones Hispaniae Latinae* (2nd ed.). Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften.

provinces as sources of revenue for the Roman state and Italy. The co-optation of local elites proved an efficient method of administration, requiring minimal Italian manpower and yielding rapid results in Hispania.

Subsequently, in the period of Diocletian, administrative reforms established the provincial boundaries that would shape Spain's late Roman period and persist beyond the fall of imperial governance in the region. These changes in Hispania were part of a broader, empire-wide restructuring initiated by Diocletian to address the endemic instability that characterized Third-Century imperial administration.

The half-Century following the end of the Severan dynasty in 235 A.D. witnessed a rapid succession of emperors and imperial claimants. While recent scholarship has tempered the traditional narrative of an all-encompassing Third-Century crisis affecting politics, institutions, economics, and society simultaneously, certain challenges are undeniable. The period's severe inflationary spiral undoubtedly contributed to the precarious position of individual emperors and strained their relationships with both military forces and civilian subjects. However, the crisis of the Third Century was primarily political in nature.

The frequent turnover of emperors had a profound impact on the empire's governing elite, but its effects were somewhat limited in scope. Periods of relative stability interspersed episodes of upheaval, and the consequences of turmoil at the highest echelons of imperial power were felt unevenly across the empire. The fundamental issue was a cycle of foreign invasion, usurpation, and civil war that proved unbreakable for five decades. The repercussions of this instability were most acutely felt along the frontiers and in the frontier provinces.

A significant factor contributing to imperial instability in the Third Century was the emergence of the Sassanian dynasty in Persia, established by Shah Ardashir in Ctesiphon in 226 A.D. The assassination of Alexander Severus in 235 A.D. was directly linked to his failed Persian campaign. The inability of subsequent emperors to achieve decisive victories against the Persians or to simultaneously defend the eastern frontier, the Danube, and the Rhine encouraged military mutinies and internal usurpations.

However, the western provinces, including Hispania, experienced less severe and more temporally limited effects compared to their eastern counterparts. The civil wars that raged from 235 to 253 A.D. did not directly impact the western

provinces until 259 A.D., with the rebellion of Marcus Cassianus Latinius Postumus against Gallienus. This relative insulation of the western regions from the most severe consequences of the Third-Century crisis would have significant implications for their subsequent development and administration under Diocletian's reforms.

Subsequently, in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries, the increasing christianization of the physical and social world is undoubtedly its most notable characteristic, as church power filled the void left by the decline of older urban authorities. However, the old municipal institutions did not vanish completely. Some are still attested in surviving sources, and much of the peninsula saw political life devolve to the level of the *civitas* due to the absence of more effective power. The period continued the confused pattern of local developments seen in the late Fifth Century. Only with the rise of the Gothic king Leovigild does Spanish history regain a sense of unity. Most of our evidence for the earlier Sixth Century comes from the activities of Gothic kings, recorded in sources from the late Sixth or Seventh Century when a Gothic kingdom encompassed nearly the entire peninsula. This fact skews our perception, making Gothic kings seem more influential in earlier periods than they actually were.

In the Spanish provinces, the Sixth Century began similarly to how the Fifth Century ended. Although the Gothic kings claimed hegemony over the peninsula, there is scant evidence that these claims were widely accepted. Even in *Tarraconensis*, Gothic control was fragile, as evidenced by the campaigns against the "tyrants" *Burdunelus* and *Petrus*. The church council of *Agde*, held in 506 under King *Alaric's* patronage, also reflects this weakness. The council convened on September 10, 506, presided over by *Caesarius* of *Arles*. As a council of *Nicene* bishops within the Gothic kingdom, it aimed to confirm the authority of earlier councils and establish uniform discipline for the kingdom's church. Although it included twenty-four bishops, eight priests, and two deacons representing most of the Gothic kingdom's churches, no Spaniards were present. Provisions were made for a subsequent council the following year, inviting Spanish *confratres*, but their absence from *Agde* is significant. This absence indicates that while royal claims to *Tarraconensis* and possibly the entirety of Spain were broadly acknowledged, in

practical terms, Spain, including Tarraconensis, remained outside the effective control of the Gothic kingdom<sup>153</sup>.

### 5.5.1. Christianity in Late Antiquity

While religious tradition attributes the origins of Spanish Christianity to apostolic times, the earliest verifiable evidence is textual and dates to the Third Century<sup>154</sup>. A correspondence from Cyprian, dated 254 AD, provides testimony to the existence of multiple episcopal sees in Spain<sup>155</sup>. This letter, composed by Cyprian and thirty-six other bishops in synod, addresses a schism that had emerged among Spanish bishops.

The schism was precipitated by the Decian persecution, which elicited similar controversies within Christian communities across the empire. The central issue revolved around the appropriate ecclesiastical response to those who had compromised their faith under duress. In the Spanish context, this debate focused on the treatment of two bishops, Martialis and Basilides, associated with the sees of Mérida, León, and Astorga, although their precise affiliations remain uncertain.

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<sup>153</sup> Kulikowski, M. (2011). *Late Roman Spain and its cities*. JHU Press, pagg. 256-257; Collins, R. (2008). *Visigothic Spain 409-711*. John Wiley & Sons.; Heather, P. (1996). *The Goths*. Blackwell Publishing; Mathisen, R. W., & Sivan, H. (Eds.). (1996). *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*. Ashgate Publishing; Thompson, E. A. (1969). *The Goths in Spain*. Clarendon Press; Ferreiro, A. (2011). *The Visigoths in Gaul and Iberia: A Supplemental Bibliography, 2007-2009* (Vol. 45). Brill; Sivan, H. (1998). The appropriation of Roman law in barbarian hands: "Roman-barbarian" marriage in Visigothic Gaul and Spain. *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300, 800*, 189-204; Tune, W. (2024). *The Shadow of Empire: Gothic Aemulatio Imperii in Sixth Century Spain*;

<sup>154</sup> Teja, R. (2000). El cristianismo primitivo en la Hispania romana: Los orígenes. In M. Sotomayor & J. Fernández Ubiña (Eds.), *Historia del cristianismo en España: Desde los orígenes hasta los visigodos* (pp. 51-64). Madrid: Trotta; Jorge, A. M. (2002). *L'épiscopat de Lusitanie pendant l'Antiquité tardive (IIIe - VIIe siècles)*. Lisboa: Instituto Português de Arqueologia; Teja, R. (ed.), *La Hispania del siglo IV. Administración, economía, sociedad, cristianización*, Edipuglia, Bari, 2004; Sotomayor M. (1981). *Manuel, Cristianismo primitivo y paganismo en Hispania*, Universidad de la Rioja; Purroy Omenat, T., & Sopeña Genzor, G. *La implantación del cristianismo en Hispania: un estado de la cuestión*.

<sup>155</sup> Cyp., *Ep.67*.

These bishops, having compromised with imperial authorities during the persecution, were subsequently deposed by their congregations. New bishops, Sabinus and Felix, were elected in their stead. The deposed bishops, after appealing to the Roman bishop Stephen, attempted to reclaim their episcopal authority. In response, the newly elected bishops sought arbitration from an African synod led by Cyprian.

A Christian layman from Zaragoza, also named Felix, corroborated the apostasy accusations against Martialis and Basilides in a letter to the synod. Cyprian and his colleagues, addressing the congregations of the cities in question, upheld strict canonical teachings. They concurred that bishops who had lapsed into apostasy should be relegated to lay status. However, the ultimate fate of the Spanish clergymen mentioned in Cyprian's letter remains unknown.

This episode provides valuable insights into the early development of Spanish Christianity, its organizational structure, and its engagement with broader ecclesiastical debates of the Third Century.

The letter from Cyprian, while offering a glimpse into early Spanish Christianity, raises more questions than it answers. It demonstrates that certain Spanish Christian congregations maintained connections with both Rome and Carthage, but provides no information about their size or relative importance. The epistle does not offer insights into the overall Christian population in Spain or its proportion to the general populace. While speculation on these matters is common, there is a lack of concrete evidence to support such conjectures.

Nevertheless, archaeological evidence from the subsequent half-Century suggests the presence of substantial Christian communities in many Spanish cities, potentially corroborating the link between Spanish and African Christianity implied by Cyprian's letter. This connection is further reinforced by the Spanish enthusiasm for martyr cults, a development in which Cyprian's own martyrdom played an inspirational role.

It is important to note that while there is evidence of thriving martyr cults, the historical authenticity of many early Spanish martyrs remains questionable. Many accounts of these martyrs are considered inauthentic, making it difficult to distinguish between actual historical figures and those whose existence is primarily supported by cultic traditions.

For instance, Felix, purportedly the bishop of Gerona and a martyr of the Diocletianic persecution, has a widely established cult. However, the earliest reference to his existence comes from Prudentius' *Peristephanon*, which is also the first substantial evidence of Christian worship in Gerona. Similarly, other prominent Spanish martyrs like Vincentius of Valencia and Eulalia of Mérida have strong cultic followings but minimal historical evidence of their actual lives.

An exception to this pattern is Fructuosus of Tarragona, a victim of the Valerianic persecution. The account of his martyrdom, along with his deacons Augurius and Eulogius, is considered authentic due to its simplicity, limited miraculous elements, and plausible depiction of judicial processes. Another authentic account is that of Marcellus, a centurion executed in Tangiers in 298 for dereliction of duty after renouncing his military role on religious grounds<sup>156</sup>.

While these authentic accounts provide valuable insights into Third-Century Christianity within the broader imperial context, they offer limited information about the development of Christian communities in Spain. The lack of contextual information about the communities to which Fructuosus and Marcellus belonged limits our understanding of the broader landscape of early Spanish Christianity.

The evidence concerning the role of Spanish Christianity in the fourth Century presents a complex picture. While there are records of Christians' efforts to adapt to their surroundings, the same evidence suggests the persistence of a largely classical and non-Christian environment in urban areas. The canons of Elvira provide significant insights into this situation.

These canons, while addressing issues such as sexual mores and Christian observance, primarily focused on navigating relationships with the non-Christian majority. This concern was not novel; Cyprian had addressed similar issues in his 254 AD letter, criticizing Bishop Martialis for his associations with non-Christian groups<sup>157</sup>.

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<sup>156</sup> Kulikowski, M. (2011). *Late Roman Spain and its cities*. JHU Press, pag.218

<sup>157</sup> Cyp., *Ep.* 67.6: "Wherefore, since as you have written, dearly beloved brethren, and as Felix and Sabinus our colleagues affirm, and as another Felix of Caesar Augusta, a

The bishops who convened at Elvira in the early fourth Century represented various regions of southern Spain, bringing with them the challenges faced in their respective communities. The choice of Elvira as the council's location may have been strategic, given the limited evidence of pre-Christian devotion in the city and its potential as a stronghold of Christian presence.

The council's canons collectively indicate the existence of a substantial Christian community that nonetheless felt vulnerable to the persistent influences of the non-Christian past. They reflect the bishops' attempts to establish guidelines for Christian conduct within a predominantly non-Christian society, addressing issues ranging from personal behavior to communal practices.

These canons also provide insights into the social and religious landscape of fourth-Century Spain. They suggest a Christian community striving to define its identity and practices while coexisting with, and sometimes accommodating, the prevailing classical culture. The need to moderate certain Christian observances, such as fasting during harvest time, demonstrates the practical challenges of integrating Christian practices into the broader societal context.

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maintainer of the faith and a defender of the truth, signifies in his letter, Basilides and Martialis have been contaminated by the abominable certificate of idolatry; and Basilides, moreover, besides the stain of the certificate, when he was prostrate in sickness, blasphemed against God, and confessed that he blasphemed; and because of the wound to his own conscience, voluntarily laying down his episcopate, turned himself to repentance, entreating God, and considering himself sufficiently happy if it might be permitted him to communicate even as a layman: Martialis also, besides the long frequenting of the disgraceful and filthy banquets of the Gentiles in their college, and placing his sons in the same college, after the manner of foreign nations, among profane sepulchres, and burying them together with strangers, has also affirmed, by acts which are publicly taken before a ducenarian procurator, that he had yielded himself to idolatry, and had denied Christ; and as there are many other and grave crimes in which Basilides and Martialis are held to be implicated; such persons attempt to claim for themselves the episcopate in vain; since it is evident that men of that kind may neither rule over the Church of Christ, nor ought to offer sacrifices to God, especially since Cornelius also, our colleague, a peaceable and righteous priest, and moreover honoured by the condescension of the Lord with martyrdom, has long ago decreed with us, and with all the bishops appointed throughout the whole world, that men of, this sort might indeed be admitted to repentance, but were prohibited from the ordination of the clergy, and from the priestly honour”.

This evidence paints a picture of a Christian community in Spain that was growing in influence but still navigating its place within a largely non-Christian environment. The canons of Elvira thus serve as a valuable source for understanding the complexities of religious and social dynamics in fourth-Century Hispania<sup>158</sup>.

The integration of fourth-Century Christianity into a partially Christianized environment is further evidenced by the sermons of Bishop Pacianus of Barcelona. His admonitions reveal the persistence of non-Christian practices among self-identified Christians within his congregation. Pacianus not only reiterates the prohibitions established at the Council of Elvira against post-baptismal sacrifices, likely associated with imperial cult, but also references a intriguing pagan festival in Barcelona.

This festival, possibly known as the *cervolia*, is described by Pacianus in vague terms as abominable and licentious<sup>159</sup>. He mentions authoring a tract called the *Cervulus*, critiquing the festival. Interestingly, Pacianus laments that his efforts to suppress the festival inadvertently increased participation. He expresses concern that such practices could spread within his congregation, using the metaphor of yeast leavening a whole loaf.

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<sup>158</sup> Hosang, F. B. (2010). Chapter One. The Council Of Elvira. In *Establishing Boundaries* (pp. 23-76). Brill; Dale, A. W. W. (1882). *The synod of Elvira and Christian life in the fourth century: a historical essay*. Macmillan; Hefele, C. J. (1876). *A History of the Councils of the Church: From the Original Documents*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Leiva, J. G. (2018). *El Concilio de Elvira*. Editorial Almuzara; Vilella, J., & Barreda, P. E. (2006). ¿ Cánones del concilio de Elvira o cánones pseudoiliberitanos?. *Augustinianum*, 46(2), 285-373; Sotomayor Muro, M. (2007). Los cánones 1 y 59 del concilio de Elvira. A propósito de un artículo de J. Vilella Masana; Castillo Maldonado, P. (2005). Sobre la representación de Tucci en el concilio de Elvira: reconstrucción hipotética de la diócesis en los años iniciales del siglo IV. *Hispania antiqua*, (29), 175-191; Villena, T. B. (2008). Los cánones del Concilio de Elvira: una réplica. *Augustinianum*, 48(2), 369-434; Grigg, R. (1976). Aniconic worship and the apologetic tradition: a note on canon 36 of the Council of Elvira. *Church History*, 45(4), 428-433:

<sup>159</sup> Pac., *De paen.* 1.2.

Pacianus' writings, composed primarily during Theodosius' reign, suggest that as late as the 380s or 390s, bishops in urban centers like Barcelona still grappled with the challenge of steering their congregations away from traditional practices<sup>160</sup>. This persistence of pre-Christian rituals in a major Mediterranean port city underscores the complex religious landscape of the period.

This literary evidence cautions against accepting uncritically the notion of an early and intense Christianization of Spanish society. While Christianity may have spread early and widely within peninsular towns, it coexisted with a persistent non-Christian world deeply rooted in Roman urban institutions.

Archaeological findings provide the most compelling evidence for this slow Christianization of urban landscapes. Excavations across numerous Spanish cities consistently reveal that for nearly two Centuries after the appearance of identifiably Christian artifacts, Christian cult activities remained largely confined to the cemetery areas surrounding cities. This pattern is remarkably consistent across the peninsula, offering a striking contrast to the traditional narrative of rapid Christianization. This archaeological evidence, combined with the literary sources, paints a picture of a gradual and complex process of Christianization in late antique Spain. It suggests a prolonged period of coexistence between Christian and non-Christian practices and institutions within urban settings, challenging simplistic views of religious transformation in this period.

By the late Fifth Century, the urban landscape of most Spanish cities had undergone a significant transformation compared to the Third and early Fourth Centuries. Rather than being structured around public buildings, urban public spaces were now centered around sacred sites. None of the cities for which we have substantial late antique data resemble the archetypal high imperial Roman city. In only one or two instances did the *fora* continue to function as vibrant public spaces into the Sixth Century, though this fact is notable in itself<sup>161</sup>.

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<sup>160</sup> Pac., *De paen.* 5.2.

<sup>161</sup> Kulikowski, M. (2001) "The Interdependence of Town and Country in Late Antique Spain," in *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity*. Ed. T. S. Burns and J. W. Eadie. East Lansing. pp. 147–61.

### 5.5.2. Paganism and Pagan Survivals in Spain from the Fourth to the Sixth Centuries

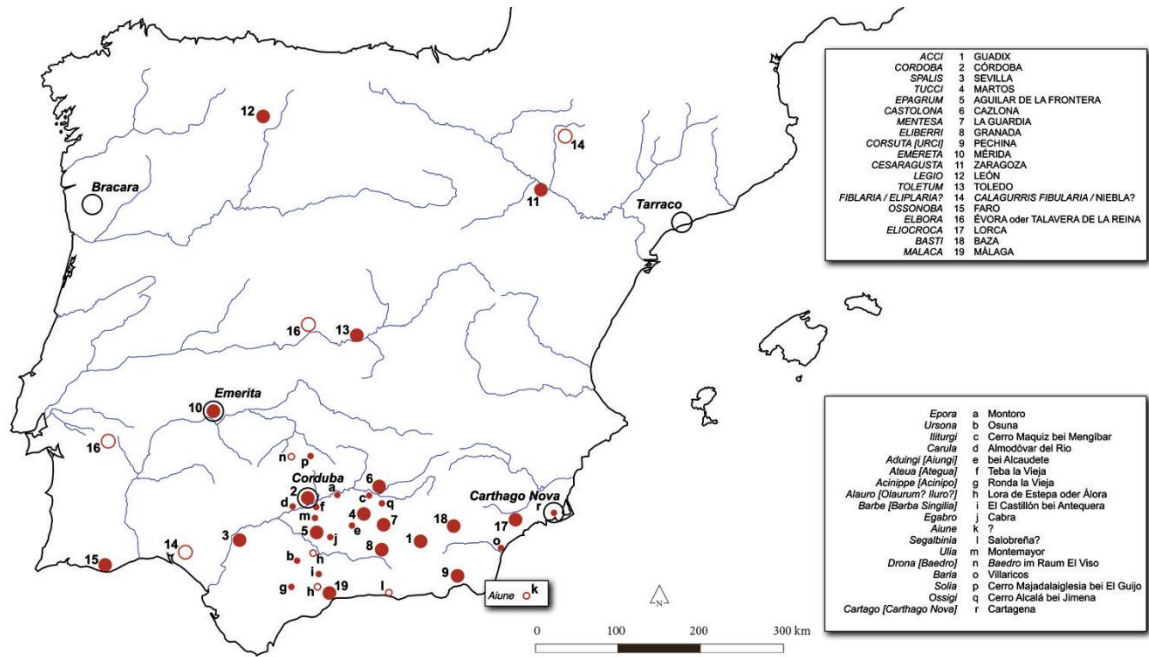
The town of Elvira (Illiberis) where the bishops of Spain met was situated in the province of Baetica near the site of the present city of Granada. Practically all students of early Church history are agreed that the council was held before the Edict of Toleration (313) and during the time when Constantius Chlorus was Caesar of the West (293-306). While some historians assert that the bishops met at Elvira (Fig. 19) before the persecution of Diocletian in Spain (303-305), internal evidence seems to indicate that the bishops assembled only after the persecution had ended, that is, about the year 306<sup>162</sup>. Thus the council discussed the punishment to be meted out to informers (*delatores*), to Christians who had sacrificed to the gods, and also the question whether a person who had been killed in the act of destroying a pagan idol was entitled to the honors of martyrdom. Such problems were more likely to arise after a persecution than during a time when the Church

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<sup>162</sup> Key bibliography for the Religions of the Iberian Peninsula includes: Simón, F. M. (2014). The religions of the Iberian Peninsula. In *The handbook of religions in ancient Europe* (pp. 156-172). Routledge; Alfayé Villa, S. 2009. *Santuarios y rituales en la Hispania Céltica* (BAR International Series 1963); Almagro-Gorbea, M. & A. J. Lorrio Alvarado 2011. *Teutates: el héroe fundador y el culto heroico al antepasado en Hispania y en la Keltiké*. Madrid. Oxford; Blázquez Martínez, J. M. 1983. *Primitivas religiones ibéricas. Tomo II: Religiones Prerromanas*. Madrid; Burillo Mozota, F. (ed.) 2010. *VI Simposio sobre Celtíberos. Ritos y Mitos. Daroca (Zaragoza), 27-29 de noviembre de 2008*. Zaragoza; Marco Simón, F. 1998. *Die Religion im keltischen Hispanien*. Budapest; Moneo, T. 2003. *Religio Iberica. Santuarios, ritos y divinidades (siglos VII-I ac)*. Madrid; Olivares Pedreño, J. C. 2002. *Los dioses de la Hispania Céltica*. Madrid; Olmos Romera, R. (ed.) 1996. *Al otro lado del espejo. Aproximación a la imagen ibérica*. Madrid; Sopena Genzor, G. 1995. *Ética y ritual: Aproximación al estudio de la religiosidad de los pueblos celtibéricos*. Zaragoza; Cirot G., Mc Kenna, S., *Paganism and pagan survivals in Spain up to the fall of the Visigothic Kingdom*. The Catholic University of America Studies in Mediaeval History, New Series, Volume I ; Charles H. Lynch, *Saint Braulio, bishop of Saragossa (631-651), his life and writings..* In: *Bulletin Hispanique*, tome 42, n°3, 1940. pp. 241-247; Mackenna, S. (1938). *Paganism and pagan survivals in Spain up to the Fall of the Visigothic Kingdom*, Washington D.C.

was at peace. Nineteen bishops participated in the council, the most notable being Osius, who would later play a significant role in ecclesiastical history.<sup>163</sup>

Figure 19. Bishops and priests represented at the Council of Elvira. From <https://books.openedition.org/cvz/23617#anchor-footnotes> (Accessed 25-07-2024)



Representatives from all five provinces of the Iberian Peninsula, as divided by Diocletian, attended the council, thus justifying its designation as a "national" council<sup>164</sup>. There was one bishop from Galicia, one from Tarraconensis, three from Lusitania, five from Carthaginensis, and the remaining bishops from Baetica. Additionally, twenty-four priests were present, with four from Carthaginensis and twenty from Baetica. Out of the eighty-one canons enacted at Elvira, more than

<sup>163</sup> Arce, J. (2018). De la ciudad pagana a la ciudad cristiana. In S. Panzram & L. Callegarin (éds.), *Entre civitas y madina* (1-). Casa de Velázquez; Čairović, I. (2017). Possible Influence of Hosius of Cordoba on Decisions Made at the First Ecumenical Council (325): Analogy of Canons from the Councils of Elvira, Arles and Nicaea; Gwynn, D. M. (2013). Osius of Cordoba. *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*.

<sup>164</sup> Schulten, A. (1913). Hispania. In A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, W. Kroll, K. Witte, K. Mittelhaus, & K. Ziegler (Eds.), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Vol. 8, cols. 2036-2038). J. B. Metzler'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung.

twenty addressed issues related to paganism. The Council of Elvira also addressed three issues specifically affecting the wealthy members of the Church. During Roman times, it was common for those organizing heathen games and processions borrowed ornaments and attire from acquaintances for use as stage properties or decorations. The council ruled that any Christian who allowed their clothes and ornaments to be used in pagan celebrations or games would be excommunicated from the Church for three years<sup>165</sup>. Additionally, wealthy Christians faced another dilemma due to a pagan custom where pagans would offer part of their produce to their gods, considering it a necessary expense. Pagan tenants would expect these expenses to be credited in their rent settlement. The council prohibited Christian landowners from agreeing to this arrangement, as it would imply approval of idolatrous practices. Non-compliance with this directive resulted in a five-year exclusion from the Church.

Furthermore, the council recommended that wealthy Christians remove pagan idols from their homes. However, if this action risked provoking violence from pagan slaves, the idols could remain, provided the owner did not engage in any activities that suggested approval of idolatry. To avoid antagonizing pagans by destroying idols, the council wisely decreed that those killed while destroying pagan images would not receive the honors typically accorded to martyrs<sup>166</sup>.

Two canons from the Council of Elvira pertain to the behavior of Christians at cemeteries. The bishops prohibited women from spending the night in vigil at cemeteries, citing that under the guise of prayer, they secretly committed crimes<sup>167</sup>. Additionally, the council forbade the use of lighted candles during the day at the tombs of the deceased, reasoning that "the spirits of the saints are not to be

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<sup>165</sup> Canon 57: "Matronae vel earum mariti vestimenta sua ad ornandam saeculariter pompam non dent; et si fecerint, triennio abstineantur."

<sup>166</sup> Canon 60: "Si quis idola fregerit et ibidem fuerit occisus, quatenus in evangelio scriptum non est, neque invenietur sub apostolis umquam factum, placuit in numerum eum non recipi martyrum."

<sup>167</sup> Canon 35: "Placuit prohiberi ne foeminae in coemeterio pervigilent, eo quod saepe sub obtentu orationis latenter scelera committunt."

disturbed<sup>168</sup>." As Hefele suggests, this likely refers to the pagan belief that the soul remained within the tomb and the practice of lighting candles at the resting places of the dead, practices which may have persisted among new Christian converts. This canon seems to have been prompted by local superstitions.

Recent archaeological discoveries provide tangible evidence of abuses similar to those that concerned the bishops of Elvira. Excavations in a fourth or Fifth-Century Christian cemetery at Tarragona reveal several signs of continued pagan practices<sup>169</sup>. The presence of six semicircular tables with central depressions, some covered in red stucco (a color associated with death in pagan tradition), suggests the continuation of funeral banquets. Near one tomb, fragments of glass, coins, ashes, and bones were found, indicating a banquet. Tubes leading into tombs were discovered in two instances, and a vial containing milk remnants was found in one grave. A coin resting on a corpse's head suggests the practice of placing money with the deceased to pay Charon for passage across the river Acheron. One sealed tomb contained no body, indicating it was a cenotaph, reflecting the pagan belief that a spirit needed a tomb if the body was missing.

As Père Delehaye notes, various burial practices of pagan origin persisted into Christian times, deeply rooted in local customs<sup>170</sup>. Many of these practices were originally based on the belief that the soul continued to inhabit the tomb, although over time, they often lost their superstitious connotations and were maintained merely out of tradition.

The legislation at Elvira regarding paganism and related issues reveals the bishops' understanding of the challenges faced by their congregation in a predominantly pagan world. They sought to ensure that Christians could live peacefully with their neighbors and engage in regular secular activities without

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<sup>168</sup> Canon 34: "Cereos per diem placuit in coemeterio non incendi, inquietandi enim sanctorum spiritus non sunt. Qui haec non observaverint, arceantur ab ecclesiae communione."

<sup>169</sup> Schneider, A. (1935). *Das neuentdeckte Coemeterium zu Tarragona*. In *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kulturgeschichte Spaniens: Spanische Forschungen der Görresgesellschaft* (Vol. 5, pp. 74-88).

<sup>170</sup> Delehaye, H. (1933). *Les origines du culte des martyrs* (2nd ed.). Société des Bollandistes, pag. 29.

provoking hostility. The council discouraged violent and imprudent zeal against pagan objects. For instance, Christians could allow their slaves to keep pagan images at home if removing them might lead to violence. While acknowledging the risks to faith for Christians holding public office, the bishops outlined specific conditions under which such roles could be accepted.

However, the bishops made no concessions to pagan practices or sacrifices. Christians who worshipped the gods or directly endorsed pagan practices faced the harshest spiritual penalties: perpetual excommunication from the Church. These strict measures were deemed necessary to prevent apostasy, as paganism was still the official religion, deeply intertwined with civil and social life.

The ability of so many Spanish bishops to convene after Diocletian's persecution indicates a firmly established ecclesiastical hierarchy in the Romanized southern and eastern regions of the Peninsula. The canons addressing pagan priests, magistrates, and wealthy Christians suggest that Christianity had already made significant inroads into the upper echelons of Spanish society. While the exact number of Christians at the time is indeterminate, Spain likely had one of the largest Christian communities in the western empire<sup>171</sup>. The early fourth Century's pivotal events would mark the gradual decline of paganism and the rise of Christianity across most of the Peninsula.

### 5.5.3. Temples in Late Roman Hispania

The extent to which the phenomenon of temple abandonment can be comprehensively examined in the context of Late Roman Hispania's provinces remains a subject of scholarly inquiry. In Roman urban settings, temples served as symbolic guardians of the city and its populace, mirroring Libanius' assertion of their role as the 'soul of the fields' in rural areas<sup>172</sup>. These structures embodied the physical presence of divine protectors, intrinsically linking the fate, defense, health, and security of the urban center and its inhabitants to their existence and the veneration of the deities they housed.

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<sup>171</sup> Harnack, A. (1908). *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (2nd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 255-262). J. C. Hinrichs.

<sup>172</sup> *Lib. Or.* 30.4 and 9.

The civic significance of temples extended beyond their religious functions, encompassing roles as venues for political assemblies, forums for discourse, commercial hubs, and repositories for public treasures. This multifaceted importance was reflected in the prevalence of sacrificial rituals outside temple precincts and the celebration of festivals.

An examination of fourth-Century legislation promulgated by Christian emperors reveals a primary focus on prohibiting cultic practices and sacrifices within temple grounds, rather than mandating the destruction of the structures themselves. Indeed, imperial edicts explicitly ordering temple demolition did not emerge until 435 AD. A law enacted in 399 AD, addressed to the proconsul of Africa, specifically emphasized the preservation of temple buildings. Subsequently, a 407 AD decree sanctioned the repurposing of urban and rural temples for public use, while simultaneously ordering the destruction of altars and temples serving unspecified alternative purposes, as well as those integrated into private residences.

The 435 AD law, which first explicitly mandated urban temple destruction, proposed purification through the placement of a cross on temple grounds, suggesting the possibility of Christianization without necessitating structural alterations. Similarly, a 399 AD edict directed at the vicarius Hispaniarum Macrobius prohibited sacrifices while advocating for the conservation of temple ornaments, possibly referring to statuary.

It is crucial to recognize that many of these laws were enacted in response to inquiries from provincial governors seeking clarification.

Viewing the decline of temples solely through the lens of fourth and early Fifth-Century anti-pagan legislation might lead to the conclusion that widespread destruction resulted from the zealotry of fervent Christians, foreign administrators, or monks intent on eradicating all vestiges of paganism. However, a more nuanced understanding of the historical context and the complexities of religious transition in Late Roman Hispania is necessary for a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon.

The fate of temples in Roman Hispania's urban centers during the late antique period remains a subject of scholarly inquiry, with limited contemporary textual evidence providing direct insights. An examination of the Fifth-Century *Chronica*

authored by Hydatius, a Christian bishop, reveals a notable absence of references to pagan temples or practices. This omission could be interpreted in multiple ways: it may reflect a lack of interest in the topic among the author and his intended audience, or it could suggest a deliberate avoidance of the subject. The latter interpretation gains credence when considering Hydatius' base in *Gallaecia*, a region renowned for the persistence of pagan customs. The bishop may have chosen to eschew discussion of lingering paganism to maintain a favorable portrayal of his diocese and his own ecclesiastical authority.

Similarly, the seventh-Century compilation known as the *Vitas patrum emeritensium*, which focuses on Sixth-Century Mérida, is conspicuously silent on matters of paganism and the status of civic temples, whether active, abandoned, or repurposed. This absence of explicit mentions in key historical texts presents challenges for scholars attempting to reconstruct the trajectory of temple use and abandonment in urban contexts across Roman Spain during this period of religious transition<sup>173</sup>.

These textual silences necessitate a multifaceted approach to understanding the fate of urban temples in Hispania, incorporating archaeological evidence, comparative studies from other regions, and careful analysis of the sociopolitical context to develop a more comprehensive picture of religious change in late antique Iberian cities. The urban landscape of Roman Hispania was characterized by the presence of numerous temples dedicated to various deities and deified emperors in *coloniae* and *municipia*. Most urban centers boasted at least one such structure, with some cities like Cordoba, Emerita, Hispalis, Italica, Caesaraugustum, Barcino, Tarraco, Carteia, Carthago Nova, and Asturica Augusta featuring multiple temples.

Intriguingly, despite the prevalence of these sacred structures, archaeological investigations have yet to uncover compelling evidence of direct temple-to-church conversions or the reuse of temple spaces for Christian worship during the period spanning the fourth to 7th Centuries in these locations. This absence of evidence is

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<sup>173</sup> Arce, J. (2011). *Fana, templa, delubra destrui praecipimus: the End of the Temples in Roman Spain. Late Antique Archaeology*, 7(1), pag. 202.

particularly noteworthy given the significant religious transformations occurring during this timeframe.

A potential exception to this pattern may be found in the Upper Town of Tarraco, where a temple overlooking the Flavian-era forum and council complex has been the subject of scholarly debate<sup>174</sup>. However, alternative interpretations of the archaeological data suggest that by the mid-Fifth Century, a portion of the upper forum had been repurposed as a refuse area<sup>175</sup>. Consequently, definitive proof of the temple's conversion to a church during this period remains elusive.

As noted by Luke Lavan, textual sources indicate the establishment of a church at this site by the early 8th Century. Archaeological findings from this later church include late antique ecclesiastical architectural elements (sometimes referred to as 'Visigothic') and opus sectile. Nevertheless, this site represents the sole potential instance of temple-to-church conversion currently known in Hispania. It is worth considering that by the time of its purported conversion, the structure may have lost its pagan connotations in the perception of the local populace.

This scarcity of evidence for direct temple conversions in Hispania presents a compelling area for further research and raises questions about the processes of religious transformation and urban development in late antique Iberian cities.

Archaeological and historical research indicates that the development of Christian architecture within the urban centers of Hispania primarily occurred after the fourth and Fifth Centuries. Prior to this period, Christian structures were predominantly located in peripheral and extramural areas, mirroring the pattern observed in Rome during the Constantinian era<sup>176</sup>.

Excavations at various temple sites across Hispania have revealed a consistent pattern of partial dismantlement, material reuse, and repurposing. For instance, a recent comprehensive analysis by Alba suggests that the two main

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<sup>174</sup> Keay S. (1996) "Tarraco in Late Antiquity", in *Towns in Transition*, edd. N. Christie and S. T. Loseby (Aldershot 1996).

<sup>175</sup> Arce J. (2005). *Bárbaros y romanos en Hispania, 400–507 A.D.* (Madrid 2005).

<sup>176</sup> Christie N. (2006) *From Constantine to Charlemagne. An Archaeology of Italy, AD. 300–800* (Aldershot); Kulikowski M. (2005). "Cities and government in late antique Spain", in *Hispania in Late Antiquity*, edd. K. Bowes and M. Kulikowski (Leiden).

temples in Emerita, the capital of Lusitania, were destroyed and considered dispensable by the mid-Fifth Century<sup>177</sup>. The Temple of Concordia on Calle Holguín experienced damage to its marble components and was partially repurposed for residential use during the Visigothic period. Similarly, the 'Augusteum' portico, which housed the so-called 'Temple of Diana', underwent marble spoliation and was subsequently occupied by Visigothic-era structures.

While the chronology at Carteia's temple remains unclear, the grand Traianeum at Italica appears to have had a relatively short lifespan as a temple. During the Late Roman period, its portico was repurposed for densely packed housing, with building materials from the temple being reused by new inhabitants.

Interestingly, some urban centers demonstrate varying timelines of temple preservation. For example, evidence suggests that the forum and Temple of Augustus in Barcino were maintained until the Sixth Century. Conversely, at Baelo Claudia, domestic structures encroached upon the precinct of the Isis temple, likely during the latter half of the fourth Century, and remained occupied for approximately two Centuries<sup>178</sup>. Notably, Baelo experienced a near-complete abandonment of its main buildings as early as the Third Century, with these structures being repurposed for residential, workshop, or storage use from the fourth Century onward.

In Corduba, the temple on Calle Claudio Marcelo was converted into housing during the fourth and Fifth Centuries, further exemplifying the trend of temple repurposing across Hispania<sup>179</sup>.

This pattern of temple reuse, dismantlement, and repurposing across various urban centers in Hispania provides valuable insights into the changing urban landscape and the shifting roles of religious structures during the late antique

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<sup>177</sup> Alba, M. (2004) "Evolución y final de los espacios romanos emeritenses a la luz de los datos arqueológicos (pautas de transformación de las ciudades tardoantigua y altomedieval)", in *Augusta Emerita. Territorios, Espacios, Imágenes y Gentes en Lusitania Romana*, ed. T. Nogales (Monografías Emeritenses 8) (Mérida 2004).

<sup>178</sup> Sillières, P. (1997) *Baelo Claudia, una ciudad romana de la Bética* (Collection de la Casa de Velázquez 61) (Madrid 1997), pagg. 57, 178.

<sup>179</sup> Salvador, J. L. (1992) "El templo romano de la calle Claudio Marcelo en Córdoba", in *Templos romanos de Hispania* (Cuadernos de Arquitectura Romana 1) (Murcia 1992).

period. It underscores the complex processes of urban transformation and adaptation in the face of changing social, economic, and religious dynamics.

An analysis of the fate of temples in Late Roman Hispania reveals several key patterns and insights. Firstly, the conversion of temples into churches appears to have been a rare and late occurrence, with the sole potential example at Tarraco not definitively attested until the early eighth Century. This stands in contrast to the narrative often presented in literary sources<sup>180</sup>.

Notably, there is a lack of evidence for the deliberate destruction of pagan temples in Hispania. Many temples had already fallen into disuse by the fourth Century, with their spaces frequently repurposed for residential or utilitarian functions. While the complete dismantling of temples would have been a resource-intensive endeavor, there is evidence of selective material reuse from some temples beginning in the latter half of the Fifth Century.

It is important to note that numerous temples remained largely intact, potentially valued for their architectural significance rather than their religious function. The primary objective of the Spanish Church, as evidenced by the canons of the Council of Elbira, was the prohibition of sacrifices at these sites. The repeated issuance of this ban suggests that its implementation was not immediately successful. Consequently, temples continued to be prominent features in the urban landscapes of many Hispanic cities during Late Antiquity, even after losing their original religious purpose. The extent to which Christian architects and planners incorporated columns and ornaments from pagan temples into new ecclesiastical structures remains an area requiring further investigation.

In conclusion, the current evidence presents a nuanced picture of both continuity and change in the transition from pagan to Christian landscapes in Hispania. This complex process calls for more detailed and systematic research to fully elucidate the nature of this religious and architectural transformation in the Iberian Peninsula during Late Antiquity.

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<sup>180</sup> Arce, J. (2011). *Fana, templa, delubra destrui praecipimus: the End of the Temples in Roman Spain*. *Late Antique Archaeology*, 7(1), pagg. 205-206.

#### 5.5.4. Pagan Survivals in Galicia in the Sixth Century

The Roman authorities established the territory of ancient Gallaecia (or Callaecia) by unifying and standardizing populations that exhibited noticeably similar, though not identical, cultures and social frameworks. These communities are referred to by specialists as the *cultura castreña* of the Northwest from an archaeological standpoint. The terms "Gallaecia" and "Galicia" are frequently employed synonymously in historical discourse. The phonological progression from the Roman-era designation to its contemporary form is readily comprehensible in both Galician and Castilian languages. Archaeological investigations of artifacts excavated from settlement sites provide evidence for the geographical extent of this cultural complex. The material culture associated with these populations spans across the entirety of contemporary Galicia, extending into the Bierzo region, the mountainous areas of León, the undulating terrain of Sanabria-Carballeda and Aliste in Zamora, the Portuguese territory of Trás-os-Montes, and the Navia valley in western Asturias, which was historically part of the *conuentus Lucensis*.

Concurrently, the archaeological record reveals significant internal variations, suggesting the presence of distinct ethnic groups within this broader cultural milieu. The Gallaeci, specifically, occupied the northwestern territories of the Iberian Peninsula, north of the Duero River. They shared a frontier zone with the Lusitanians, characterized by well-documented linguistic and material culture differentiations. This transitional area would subsequently be incorporated into Gallaecia Bracarensis, encompassing the lower Miño basin, while Gallaecia Lucensis was situated to the north.

It is noteworthy that the Romans amalgamated a diverse array of peoples under the collective designation of Gallaeci. This nomenclature, however, offers limited insight into the complex ethnic composition of these populations. The term primarily refers to a minority group of Celtic origin who arrived relatively late in the region's history, overlooking the majority of cultural and ethnic elements present. This oversimplification is exemplified by the initial inclusion of these

populations within Lusitania during the early administrative organization following Roman conquest<sup>181</sup>.

The Sueves, as the inaugural Germanic people to establish a lasting presence in the Iberian Peninsula, warrant comprehensive scholarly examination. Our knowledge of pagan practices persisting in the Galician Suevic kingdom during the latter half of the Sixth Century is relatively substantial, primarily due to the vigorous efforts of St. Martin of Braga to eradicate such beliefs. However, the religious landscape prior to this period remains largely obscure.

Contemporary scholarship posits that the Sueves were adherents of pagan beliefs upon their entry into the Iberian Peninsula, thus introducing a novel form of Germanic paganism to the region.

It is noteworthy that the extant literature from the initial four Centuries following the Suevic arrival is devoid of references to their religious practices. Moreover, the chronicle of Hydatius, widely regarded as the principal historical source for Fifth-Century Iberian affairs, is similarly silent on the matter of Suevic religious observances. This lacuna in the historical record presents significant challenges for researchers attempting to reconstruct the religious milieu of the early Suevic settlement period.

In the initial phase of their Iberian settlement, the Sueves appear to have maintained a relatively non-antagonistic stance towards the Church. This is evidenced by the Galician ecclesiastical hierarchy's ability to implement active measures against Priscillianism. Furthermore, Catholic clergy engaged in evangelization efforts among the barbarian populations, as demonstrated by Rechiar's adherence to Catholicism upon his ascension to the throne in 448. However, the extent to which this royal conversion influenced the general Suevic populace remains uncertain, as Hydatius's chronicle provides no indication of widespread Catholic conversion among the Galician Sueves.

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<sup>181</sup> Díaz, P. C., & Menéndez-Bueyes, L. R. (2015). 3 Gallaecia in Late Antiquity The Suevic Kingdom and the Rise of Local Powers. In *Culture and Society in Medieval Galicia* (pp. 146-175). Brill; Díaz, P. C. (2000). City and territory in Hispania in Late Antiquity. In *Towns and their territories between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (pp. 3-35). Brill; Portass, R. (2010). Re-evaluating the Iberian north-west in late antiquity. *Debating Urbanism Within and Beyond the Walls, AD, 300-700*.

Rechiar's religious transformation did not significantly alter the Suevic propensity for predatory behavior towards the indigenous Iberian populations. Incidents such as the massacre of Romans celebrating Easter in Astorga and the three-month imprisonment of Bishop Hydatius illustrate the persistence of such aggressive tendencies. A particularly consequential raid into Tarraconensis provoked a retaliatory campaign by the Visigoths, commissioned by the newly-acclaimed Emperor Avitus. The resultant battle at Astorga inflicted such severe losses on the Sueves that Hydatius prematurely declared the end of their kingdom.

However, the Suevic polity experienced a resurgence under Reismund's leadership. In 464, Reismund forged an alliance with the Visigoths, solidified by his marriage to a Visigothic woman. This period also saw the arrival of Ajax, an apostate Catholic, who, with Reismund's support, disseminated Arian doctrines among the Sueves. The termination of Hydatius's chronicle in 468 precludes a definitive assessment of Arianism's spread within the Suevic population. Nevertheless, Hydatius records significant hardships endured by the Galician Catholic Church as a consequence of these invasions and religious shifts.

According to the historical account provided by Gregory of Tours<sup>182</sup>, the year 550 marked the commencement of a series of noteworthy occurrences that precipitated a significant religious transformation within the Suevic realm. These events culminated in the conversion of the Suevic monarch and his immediate entourage to Catholicism. Moreover, this period witnessed a resurgence of Catholic religious fervor among the broader Suevic populace. This religious shift represents a pivotal moment in the socio-cultural evolution of the Suevic kingdom, with far-reaching implications for its subsequent historical trajectory.

According to historical accounts, a pivotal sequence of events unfolded in the year 550 within the Suevic kingdom. The narrative centers on Chararich, the Suevic ruler, whose son had fallen gravely ill, with his survival deemed improbable.

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<sup>182</sup> *De virtutibus Martini*, I, 11.

Confronted with this dire situation, Chararich inquired about the religious affiliation of Martin of Tours, a renowned thaumaturge in Gaul<sup>183</sup>.

Upon learning of St. Martin's adherence to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which posits the equality of the Son with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Chararich resolved to dispatch emissaries to St. Martin's tomb. Their mission was to seek divine intervention for his son's recovery, with Chararich pledging to embrace Catholicism should his son be healed through St. Martin's intercession.

The envoys were dispatched to Tours bearing precious offerings of gold and silver, the weight of which equaled that of the ailing prince. These gifts were presented at St. Martin's tomb, accompanied by fervent supplications for the prince's restoration to health. However, upon their return to Galicia, the emissaries were disconcerted to discover that the prince's condition remained unimproved, despite having witnessed numerous miraculous occurrences at the saint's shrine.

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<sup>183</sup> Key bibliography for Gregory of Tours includes: McKinley, A. S. (2006). The first two centuries of Saint Martin of Tours. *Early Medieval Europe*, 14(2), 173-200; Severus, S. (1995). The Life of Saint Martin of Tours. *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, 1-29; Barnes, T. D. (1996). The military career of Martin of Tours. *Analecta Bollandiana*, 114(1-2), 25-32; Reames, S. L. (1981). Saint Martin of Tours in the "Legenda aurea" and Before. *Viator*, 12, 131; Pernoud, R. (2006). Martin of Tours: Soldier, Bishop, and Saint. Ignatius Press; Corbett, J. (1987). Changing Perceptions in Late Antiquity: Martin of Tours. *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 3(2), 236-251; Farmer, S. (1991). *Communities of Saint Martin: legend and ritual in medieval Tours* (p. 378). Cornell University Press; Rand, E. K. (1929). A Survey of the Manuscripts of Tours (Vol. 1). Mediaeval academy of America; Dalbey, M. A. (1984). The Good Shepherd and the Soldier of God: Old English Homilies on St. Martin of Tours. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 422-434; Heinzelmann, M. (2001). *Gregory of Tours: history and society in the sixth century*. Cambridge University Press; Sato, S. (2000). The Merovingian accounting documents of Tours: form and function. *Early Medieval Europe*, 9(2), 143-161; Maynard, J. (1906). Saint Martin of Tours. *The Sewanee Review*, 14(2), 219-235; Wood, I. (2002). The individuality of Gregory of Tours. In *The world of Gregory of Tours* (pp. 29-46). Brill; Murray, A. C. (Ed.). (2015). *A companion to Gregory of Tours* (Vol. 63). Brill; Rotman, T. (2021). Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity in Sixth-Century Gaul: Rethinking Gregory of Tours; Flierman, R. (2021). Gregory of Tours and the Merovingian letter. *Journal of Medieval History*, 47(2), 119-144; Ferreiro, A. (1995). Braga and Tours: some observations on Gregory's De virtutibus sancti Martini (1.11). *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 3(2), 195-210.

This unexpected outcome prompted Chararich to engage in introspection, leading him to conclude that the lack of divine intervention was attributable to his own insincerity regarding his commitment to renounce Arianism. This realization marked a crucial juncture in the religious trajectory of the Suevic ruling elite. He now renounced this heresy, as an earnest of his good-will causing a church to be built in honor of St. Martin. Upon the embassy's return to Galicia, a remarkable series of events occurred. The king's son, having fully recovered from his illness, eagerly greeted the legates upon their arrival. This unforeseen recovery triggered a major religious shift within the royal household, leading the king and his close associates to formally abandon their previous beliefs in favor of Catholicism.

Martin's pastoral endeavors in Galicia prominently featured his campaign against pagan practices. During the opening address of the Second Council of Braga in 572, Martin highlighted the prevailing unity of faith in the region.

The council's first canon mandated that bishops, during their annual diocesan visitations, congregate the populace to admonish against idolatry and other grave transgressions such as homicide, adultery, and perjury. Furthermore, Martin's Greek translation of the *Capitula* incorporated several canons pertaining to idolatry and superstition.

*De correctione rusticorum*<sup>184</sup>, likely emerged as a direct response to the Second Council of Braga's directive on addressing idolatry. The sermon's structure aligns

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<sup>184</sup> Key bibliography for this work includes: Bracarensis, M. (1950). *De correctione rusticorum. Martini episcopi Bracarensis, Opera omnia, ed. CW Barlow, London, 159-203*; Kurfess, A. M. (1955). *Textkritische Bemerkungen zu Sancti Martini Bracarensis sermo de correctione rusticorum. Aevum, 29(2), 181*; Madoz, J. (1945). *Una nueva recensión del "De correctione rusticorum", de Martín de Braga:(Ms. Sant Cugat, n. 22). Estudios Eclesiásticos. Revista de investigación e información teológica y canónica, 19(74), 335-354*; da Silva, L. R., & Xavier, N. A. (2013). *Aspectos da ortodoxia no reino suevo: considerações sobre o De Correctione Rusticorum. BRATHAIR-REVISTA DE ESTUDOS CELTAS E GERMÂNICOS, 13(2)*; Fiorot, J. B. (2016). *Galiza, uma terra pagã: religiosidades e religião no discurso do De correctione rusticorum (séculos V e VI)*; Naldini, M. (1991). *Contro le superstizioni: catechesi al popolo De correctione rusticorum. Nardini*; Mendes, J. M. S., & Leal, T. B. (2019). *Considerações sobre residualidades pagãs no De Correctione Rusticorum de*

closely with the council's prescribed format, further suggesting its post-council composition, probably around 574. While its widespread use among Galician bishops remains uncertain, the sermon's influence extended beyond regional boundaries. St. Eligius (590-660), who combated paganism in northern France, incorporated verbatim quotes from Martin's work. Similarly, Abbot Pirminius, in his "*Scarapsus*" (c. 710-724), reproduced Martin's descriptions of pagan practices.

#### 5.5.4.1. *Pagan Practices*

St Martin of Braga, in his work *De Correctione Rusticorum*, after having linked up idolatry with the worship of the demons, and thereby made the people aware of its gravity he proceeds to censure the various superstitious beliefs and practices. In his critique of idolatrous practices, Martin initially addresses the nomenclature of weekdays, which derive from pagan deities such as Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn. This custom is presented as a manifestation of lingering pagan influence in daily life.

Martin's approach to these deities is noteworthy for its euhemeristic interpretation. He conceptualizes these gods not as mythological constructs, but as historical figures who once existed among the Greek populace<sup>185</sup>. This perspective serves to demythologize and humanize these divine figures.

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Martinho De Braga. *Revista de História Bilros: História (s), Sociedade (s) e Cultura (s)*, 7(15); Sagaspe, F. (2020). Martín de Braga: acercamiento y presentación de un padre de la Iglesia por su obra "De correctione rusticorum"; Maraval, P. (1993). Martino di Braga, Contro le Superstizioni. Catechesi al popolo. De correctione rusticorum, a cura di Mario Naldini, Firenze, Naldini Editore, 1991,(= Biblioteca Patristica, 19). *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuses*, 73(3), 335-335.

<sup>185</sup> *De correctione rusticorum*, 7: "Tunc diabolus vel ministri ipsius, daemones, qui de caelo deiecti sunt, videntes ignaros homines dimisso Deo creatore suo, per creaturas errare, coeperunt se illis in diversas formas ostendere et loqui cum eis et expetere ab eis, ut in excelsis montibus et in silvis frondosis sacrificia sibi offerrent et ipsos colerent pro deo, imponentes sibi vocabula sceleratorum hominum, qui in omnibus criminibus et sceleribus suam egerant vitam, ut alius Iovem se esse diceret, qui fuerat magus et in tantis adulteriis incestus ut sororem suam haberet uxorem, quae dicta est Iuno, Minervam et Venerem filias suas corruperit, neptes quoque et omnem parentelam suam turpiter incestaverit. Alius

In his discourse, Martin employs a moralizing tone, emphasizing what he perceives as the reprehensible and licentious conduct of these deified individuals during their purported earthly existence. This rhetorical strategy aims to undermine the reverence accorded to these figures by highlighting their alleged moral failings.

By framing pagan gods as flawed historical personages rather than transcendent beings, Martin's argument seeks to diminish their spiritual authority and, by extension, the legitimacy of practices associated with their worship. This approach reflects a common strategy employed by early Christian apologists in their efforts to discredit pagan belief systems and promote Christian doctrine.

According to Martin, some Galicians continued the pagan tradition of honoring Jupiter by refraining from work on Thursday, a day dedicated to this god. Caesarius of Arles also criticized this practice and recommended that people refrain from all business and agricultural work on Sunday, dedicating the day to the worship of God. Martin prohibited servile work on Sundays but allowed activities necessary for physical refreshment, food preparation, and essential travel. Demonstrating his leniency, he permitted short journeys on Sundays for worthy purposes, such as visiting a shrine or a friend, consoling a sick neighbor, or supporting a good cause.

Regarding Mercury, venerated on Wednesday, Martin noted that some people practiced casting stones into a heap as an offering to Mercury: "To him, as the god of gain, the avaricious when passing the crossroads cast stones together and offer heaps of stones in token of sacrifice." Images of Mercury, the Grecian Hermes, were often placed at crossroads to ward off harmful influences believed

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autem daemon Martem se nominavit, qui fuit litigiorum et discordiae commissor. Alius deinde daemon Mercurium se appellare voluit, qui fuit omnis furti et fraudis dolosus inventor; cui homines cupidi quasi deo lucri, in quadriviis transeuntes, iactatis lapidibus acervos petrarum pro sacrificio reddunt. Alius quoque daemon Saturni sibi nomen adscripsit, qui, in omni crudelitate vivens, etiam nascentes suos filios devorabat. Alius etiam daemon Venerem se esse confinxit, quae fuit mulier meretrix. Non solum cum innumerabilibus adulteris, sed etiam cum patre suo Iove et cum fratre suo Marte meretricata est”.

From <https://germanicmythology.com/works/De%20Correctione%20Rusticorum.html> (Accessed 29-07-2024).

to originate from these locations. This practice, or a variant of it, might have persisted in Galicia, where the *Lares viales* were particularly popular in pagan times.

In addition to the deities already mentioned, Martin references the Lamias, various nymphs, and the Dianas who preside over maritime, freshwater, and woodland realms. The worship of Diana appears to have been extensively practiced. The account of St. Symphorianus, who was martyred in Autun during the rule of Emperor Aurelian, notes the continued pagan devotion to the Dianas associated with forests. Furthermore, Gregory of Tours recounts the experience of a Lombard monk named Vulfoaic, who, during his ascetic existence in the woods, encountered individuals who had constructed a significant statue dedicated to Diana<sup>186</sup>. Additionally, the inhabitants of Galicia not only allocated specific days of the week for honoring deities such as Mars and Mercury but also maintained superstitious traditions at the turn of the year, particularly on the kalends of January. In certain parts of Galicia, a distinct tradition took place at the start of the year, where rural residents set aside a day to recognize mice and moths. Although this practice is not extensively documented in classical literature, it resembles the Roman *Paganalia* festival, which was also celebrated at the beginning of the year and dedicated to *Tellus* and *Ceres*, with prayers to protect crops from rodents. Historical accounts, such as those by Strabo<sup>187</sup>, note that field mice had previously

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<sup>186</sup> *Hist. Franc.*, VIII, I5.

<sup>187</sup> Strabo, *Geography*. III, 4, 18: "Another practice, not restricted to the Iberians alone, is for two to mount on one horse, so that in the event of a conflict, one may be there to fight on foot. Neither are they the only sufferers in being tormented with vast swarms of mice, from which pestilential diseases have frequently ensued. This occurred to the Romans in Cantabria, so that they caused it to be proclaimed, that whoever would catch the mice should receive rewards according to the number taken, and [even with this] they were scarcely preserved, as they were suffering besides from want of corn and other necessaries, it being difficult to get supplies of corn from Aquitaine on account of the rugged nature of the country. It is a proof of the ferocity of the Cantabrians, that a number of them having been taken prisoners and fixed to the cross, they chanted songs of triumph. Instances such as these are proofs of the ferocity of their manners. There are others which, although not showing them to be polished, are certainly not brutish. For example, amongst the Cantabrians, the men give dowries to their wives, and the daughters are left heirs, but they

inflicted considerable crop damage and caused disease outbreaks in Cantabria. Scholars like Caspari suggest that Martin might have misunderstood the true purpose of this superstitious ritual. Instead of venerating mice and moths, the people were likely trying to mitigate their harmful effects. Regardless of their intentions, it is clear that some form of magical practice was employed to shield crops from the destructive nature of mice and moths. Martin also criticizes the people for "keeping the Vulcanalia," a festival that was celebrated in Roman times on the twenty-third of August. The notion of lucky and unlucky days appears to have been prevalent in Galicia, as Martin denounces women who wait until the day of Venus (Friday) to get married and those who avoid traveling on specific days. One of the canons of the *Capitula*<sup>188</sup> by Martin, condemns those who engage in astrology to determine the most auspicious days for building a house, planting crops, and getting married.

From the *De correctione rusticorum*, it is clear that the practice of augury and divination was widespread among the people. Martin mentions individuals who attempt to predict the future by observing the flight of birds and interpreting sneezes. Divining future events based on the flight of birds was a popular method of divination among the ancient Romans and Germans<sup>189</sup>. An obscure superstitious

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procure wives for their brothers. These things indicate a degree of power in the woman, although they are no proof of advanced civilization. It is also a custom with the Iberians to furnish themselves with a poison, which kills without pain, and which they procure from a herb resembling parsley. This they hold in readiness in case of misfortune, and to devote themselves for those whose cause they have joined, thus dying for their sake". From <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0239%3ABook%3D3%3Achapter%3D4%3Asection%3D18> (Accessed 31-07-2024).

<sup>189</sup> Key bibliography for Divination in Ancient World includes: Driediger-Murphy, L., & Eidinow, E. (2019). *Ancient divination and experience* (p. 320). Oxford University Press; Johnston, S. I., & Reynolds, J. J. (2009). Ancient greek divination. *Aestimatio: Sources and Studies in the History of Science*, 6, 139-144; Beerden, K. (2013). *Worlds full of signs: ancient Greek divination in context* (Vol. 176). Brill; Jeffers, A. (2007). Magic and divination in ancient Israel. *Religion Compass*, 1(6), 628-642; Jeffers, A. (2007). Interpreting Magic and Divination in the Ancient Near East. *Religion compass*, 1(6), 684-694; Maul, S. M. (2007). Divination

ritual, referred to as "foot observation<sup>190</sup>", is documented in historical religious texts. St. Eligius mentions the practice of placing foot-shaped images at

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Culture and the Handling of the Future. *The Babylonian World*, 361, 372; Engels, D., & Nice, A. (2021). Divination in Antiquity. *Prognostication in the medieval world: A handbook*, 1, 15-53; Jeffers, A. (2015). Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World ed. by Amar Annus. *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 10(1), 113-115; Veldhuis, N. (2006). Divination: theory and use. In *If a Man Builds a Joyful House: Assyriological Studies in Honor of Erle Verdun Leichty* (pp. 487-497). Brill; Veldhuis, N. (2006). Divination: theory and use. In *If a Man Builds a Joyful House: Assyriological Studies in Honor of Erle Verdun Leichty* (pp. 487-497). Brill; Rüpke, J. (2013). New perspectives on ancient divination. *Divination in the Ancient World: Religious Options and the Individual*. Stuttgart: Steiner, 9-19; Abusch, T., Guinan, A. K., Heeßel, N. P., Rochberg, F., & Wiggermann, F. A. (1999). Ancient Magic and Divination. *Mesopotamian Magic. Textual, Historical and Interpretative Perspectives*, Groningen; Jeffers, A. (2023). *Magic and divination in ancient Palestine and Syria* (Vol. 8). Brill; Engels, D., & Nice, A. (2021). Divination in Antiquity. *Prognostication in the medieval world: A handbook*, 1, 15-53; Addey, C. (2022). Introduction: divination and knowledge in ancient Greek and Roman cultures. *Crystal Addey, Divination and Knowledge in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. Abingdon–New York, 3; Davidson, H. E. (2021). The Germanic World. In *Divination and oracles* (pp. 115-141). Routledge. Loewe, M., & Blacker, C. (Eds.). (2021). *Divination and oracles*. Routledge.

<sup>190</sup> *De correctione rusticorum*, XVI: "Ecce qualis cautio et confessio vestra apud deum tenetur! Et quomodo aliqui ex vobis, qui abrenuntiaverunt diabolo et angelis eius et culturis eius et operibus eius malis, modo iterum ad culturas diaboli revertuntur? Nam ad petras et ad arbores et ad fontes et per trivia cereolos incendere, quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli? Divinationes et auguria et dies idolorum observare, quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli? Vulcanalia et Kalendas observare, mensas ornare, et lauros ponere, et pedem observare, et fundere in foco super truncum frugem et vinum, et panem in fontem mittere, quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli? Mulieres in tela sua Minervam nominare et Veneris diem in nuptias observare et quo die in via exeatur adtendere, quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli? Incantare herbas ad maleficia et invocare nomina daemonum incantando, quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli? Et alia multa quae longum est dicere. Ecce ista omnia post abrenuntiationem diaboli, post baptismum facitis et, ad culturam daemonum et ad mala idolorum opera redeuntes, fidem vestram transistis et pactum quod fecistis cum deo disruptistis. Dimisistis signum crucis, quod in baptismum accepistis, et alia diaboli signa per avicellos et sternutos et per alia multa adtenditis. Quare mihi aut cuilibet recto Christiano non nocet augurium? Quia, ubi signum crucis praecesserit, nihil est signum diaboli. Quare vobis nocet? Quia signum crucis contempnit, et illud timetis quod vobis ipsi in signum configitis. Similiter dimisistis incantationem sanctam, id est symbolum quod in baptismum accepistis, quod est Credo in deum patrem omnipotentem, et orationem dominicam, id est Pater noster qui es

intersections, which he subsequently ordered to be incinerated<sup>191</sup>. The Council of Auxerre (590 AD) also prohibited the use of foot-shaped effigies. Scholars such as

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in caelis, et tenetis diabolicas incantationes et carmina. Quicumque ergo, contempto signo crucis Christi, alia signa aspicit, signum crucis, quod in baptismum accepit, perdidit. Similiter et qui alias incantationes tenet a magis et maleficis adinventas, incantationem sancti symboli et orationis dominicae, quae in fide Christi accepit, amisit et fidem Christi inculcavit, quia non potest et deus simul et diabolus coli". From <https://germanicmythology.com/works/De%20Correctione%20Rusticorum.html> (Accessed 31-07-2024).

<sup>191</sup> *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*, n. 29: "De ligneis pedibus et manibus pagano ritu." Wikipedia reports : The *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum* (Small index of superstitions and paganism) is a Latin collection of capitularies identifying and condemning superstitious and pagan beliefs found in the north of Gaul and among the Saxons during the time of their subjugation and conversion by Charlemagne. From the original manuscript only the cover remains, which lists thirty chapters. The manuscript is held in the Vatican Library in a collection (Codex Palatinus Latinus 577) which probably originates from Fulda and thence traveled to Mainz, arriving there in 1479. From Mainz it went to the Bibliotheca Palatina in Heidelberg, and arrived in Rome at the latest in 1623. Preceding the *Indiculus* is the so-called Old Saxon Baptismal Vow. The text is edited in the *Karломanni Principis Capitulare*, published by the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. Codex Palatinus Latinus 577 itself appears to have been copied ca. 800 in either Fulda or Mainz. Alain Dierkens argues, on the basis of word choice (the correspondence between the phrase *superstitionem et paganiarum* and the diction used by Boniface in his 742 letter to Pope Zachary) and a comparison between the content of the *Indiculus* and the conclusions of the Concilium Germanicum (744), that the *Indiculus* was indeed appended to or pertained to the decisions made at the Concilium Germanicum and the two consequent Frankish synods at Estinnes and Soissons. In other words, they were not the product of a late-seventh century scribe at Fulda, nor were the prohibitions aimed specifically or exclusively at the Saxons. The index provides valuable insight into the religious culture of the pagan Saxons (from the Christian point of view) and into the daily practices of Christian missionaries working in that area. Since it is more or less contemporary with the activities of Saint Boniface in modern-day Germany, he has been called a "guiding influence" on its compilation. According to Alain Dierkens, the *Indiculus*, which he thinks derives from the "entourage" of Boniface, evidences the ongoing practice of pre-Christian practices, including divination, the use of amulets, magic, and witchcraft, and suggests that the church allowed or transformed certain practices which it had been unable to extirpate. From

Caspari draw parallels between this practice and a ritual described in Burchard of Worms' *Decretals* (c. 1020 AD), where certain women were said to collect soil from Christian footprints, believing they could influence the health or lifespan of the individuals who left them. This practice aligns with the widespread magical belief that harming objects associated with an individual could cause them harm.

Additionally, the custom of adorning home entrances with laurel branches, a practice prevalent in ancient Roman society, is criticized in these texts. Romans believed that laurel branches offered protection to the household and its occupants, particularly at the entrance, which was considered vulnerable to malevolent forces. Furthermore, some Galician women engaged in the practice of invoking Minerva, the patroness of weaving, during their textile work. This custom is condemned in religious sermons and capitularies, which instead advocate for invoking God's name, acknowledging Him as the source of weaving knowledge. These examples illustrate the persistence of pagan practices and beliefs in early Christian societies, and the efforts of religious authorities to suppress them. In Sixth-Century Galicia, certain trees were the focus of a particular cult, with Martin specifically mentioning the practice of lighting candles in connection with them. These sacred trees were believed to be inhabited by benign spirits and held a special place in the hearts of the people. For instance, in the life of St. Martin of Tours, it is recounted that the

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indiculus\\_superstitionum\\_et\\_paganiarum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indiculus_superstitionum_et_paganiarum) (Accessed 31-07-2024).

Key bibliography for *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum* includes: Zíbrt, Č. (1894). *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum* (Vol. 3). Nákladem České akademie císaře Františka Josefa pro vědy, slovesnost a umění; Saupe, H. A. (1891). *Der Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum: ein Verzeichnis heidnischer und abergläubischer Gebräuche und Meinungen aus der Zeit Karls des Grossen, aus zumeist gleichzeitigen Schriften erläutert* (Vol. 551). Städtisches Realgymnasium; Gallée, J. H. (1894). *Indiculus Superstitionum et Paganiarum*. In *Old-Saxon texts* (pp. 249-255). Brill; Kolner, F. G. P. (2018). *The Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum: a controversy reviewed* (Master's thesis); Zíbrt, Č. (1995). *Seznam pověr a zvyklostí pohanských z VIII. věku:[jeho význam pro všeobecnou kulturní historii i pro studium kulturních přežitků v nynějším lidovém podání se zvláštním zřetelem k české lidovědě]= Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*. Academia; TANIGUCHI, Y. (1980). *L'Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum. Hiroshima (The) University Studies. Literature Department Hiroshima*, (40), 218-238.

pagans of a certain area allowed the saint to destroy one of their temples but refused to let him harm their sacred trees. In Gaul, branches of trees were often placed in the water where animals drank, as it was believed this would enhance their fertility. Similarly, the Germans used tree twigs for divination purposes<sup>192</sup>.

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<sup>192</sup> McKenna, S. (1938). *Paganism and Pagan Survivals in Spain up to the Fall of the Visigothic Kingdom* (Vol. 1). Catholic University of America, Chapter 4.



# **VI – PAGANISM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE EAST**

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## VI -PAGANISM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE EAST

The spread of Christianity exhibited differences between urban and rural areas in both Eastern and Western regions. However, the Eastern progression was uniquely influenced by factors absent in the West. Extended periods of peace with Persia, coupled with the successful defense against Hunnic and other invasions, afforded Christianity the opportunity to establish itself in previously strong pagan territories. Conversely, the esteemed status of Hellenic culture, acknowledged even by prominent Church figures like Gregory of Nyssa, enabled pagan intellectuals in cities such as Athens and Aphrodisias to maintain their beliefs, albeit under increasing pressure.

In the eastern Mediterranean provinces, non-Greek religious practices, exemplified by the worship of deities like the moon-god Sin in Carrhae (Harran) and Baal in Heliopolis (Baalbek), demonstrated similar resilience. Egypt, maintaining its distinctive character in Late Antiquity as it had in Herodotus' time, presented a complex religious landscape. While Hellenized elites populated cities like Alexandria, Antinoopolis, and Panopolis, indigenous cults persisted in smaller towns, such as Pnuit in Upper Egypt. In this context, Christianity found a fervent advocate in Shenute, the abbot of the White Monastery at Atripe (Athribis). His confrontations with both landowners and peasants illustrate the endurance of paganism across various social strata<sup>193</sup>.

The spread of Christianity across the late antique world presents a complex framework of religious, cultural, and social transformations that defy simplistic generalizations. While the overall trajectory of Christianization followed a general pattern of expansion from urban centers to rural areas, the process was far from uniform across the vast expanse of the Roman Empire. Indeed, the regional differences in the adoption and adaptation of Christianity were so pronounced that they necessitate a more nuanced, geographically specific approach to fully comprehend the intricacies of this historical phenomenon. The varying pace, extent, and character of Christian advancement in different regions were shaped

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<sup>193</sup> Jones, C. P. (2014). *Between pagan and Christian*. Harvard University Press, p. 126.

by a multitude of factors, including pre-existing religious traditions, entrenched cultural practices, socio-economic conditions, and the degree of Hellenization or Romanization in each area. These regional disparities not only affected the rate at which Christianity spread but also influenced the forms of Christian practice and belief that emerged, resulting in a rich diversity of local expressions of the faith.

The heterogeneity of the Christianization process challenges any monolithic narrative of religious transformation, instead presenting a nuanced picture of diverse regional experiences, each shaped by its unique historical, cultural, and geographical context. In some areas, Christianity rapidly displaced traditional cults, while in others, it coexisted with or syncretized with local religious practices for extended periods. The strategies employed by Christian missionaries and leaders often had to be adapted to suit the specific circumstances of each region, leading to varying degrees of success and different modes of integration with existing social structures. Moreover, the role of language played a crucial part in this diversification. While Greek served as a *lingua franca* in many parts of the Eastern Empire, facilitating the spread of Christian ideas, other regions maintained strong linguistic traditions that influenced the development of local Christian communities, contributing to the emergence of distinct theological traditions and liturgical practices<sup>194</sup>.

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<sup>194</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Adams, J. N. (2003). *Bilingualism and the Latin Language*. Cambridge University Press; Brock, S. P. (1994). "Greek and Syriac in Late Antique Syria." In A. K. Bowman & G. Woolf (eds.), *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, 149-160. Cambridge University Press; Clackson, J. (2015). *Language and society in the Greek and Roman worlds*. Cambridge University Press; Cotton, H. (Ed.). (2009). *From Hellenism to Islam: cultural and linguistic change in the Roman Near East*. Cambridge University Press; Millar, F. (2006). *A Greek Roman Empire: power and belief under Theodosius II (408-450)* (Vol. 64). Univ of California Press; Horrocks, G. (2011). Greek: a history of the language and its speakers. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 104(1), 208-212; Mullen, A., & James, P. (Eds.). (2012). *Multilingualism in the Graeco-Roman worlds*. Cambridge University Press; Papaconstantinou, A. (ed.) (2010). *The Multilingual Experience in Egypt, from the Ptolemies to the Abbassids*. Ashgate; Rochette, B. (1997). *Le latin dans le monde grec. Recherches sur la diffusion de la langue et des lettres latines dans les provinces hellénophones de l'Empire romain*. Latomus, Bruxelles, Belgium; Taylor, D. (2017). Bilingualism and diglossia in late antique Syria and Mesopotamia. In *Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity: Greek* (pp. 183-220). Routledge;

The political and administrative structures of different regions also significantly impacted the spread of Christianity. Areas with strong centralized governance often saw a more coordinated approach to Christianization, while more fragmented regions experienced a more piecemeal process. Furthermore, the economic conditions and social hierarchies in various areas influenced the reception of Christianity among different social strata, affecting the religion's appeal and the methods of its propagation. The interaction between Christianity and indigenous beliefs varied significantly, resulting in a spectrum of responses ranging from outright rejection to enthusiastic adoption, with many shades of syncretism in between.

Given these substantial regional variations, a comprehensive understanding of the advance of Christianity in late antiquity necessitates a more granular approach. By examining the process in distinct geographical areas, we can better appreciate the complexities and nuances of this historical phenomenon, avoiding overgeneralization and recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities that Christianity faced in different contexts. This approach allows us to explore how local factors interacted with broader imperial trends, shaping the distinctive character of Christian communities across the empire.

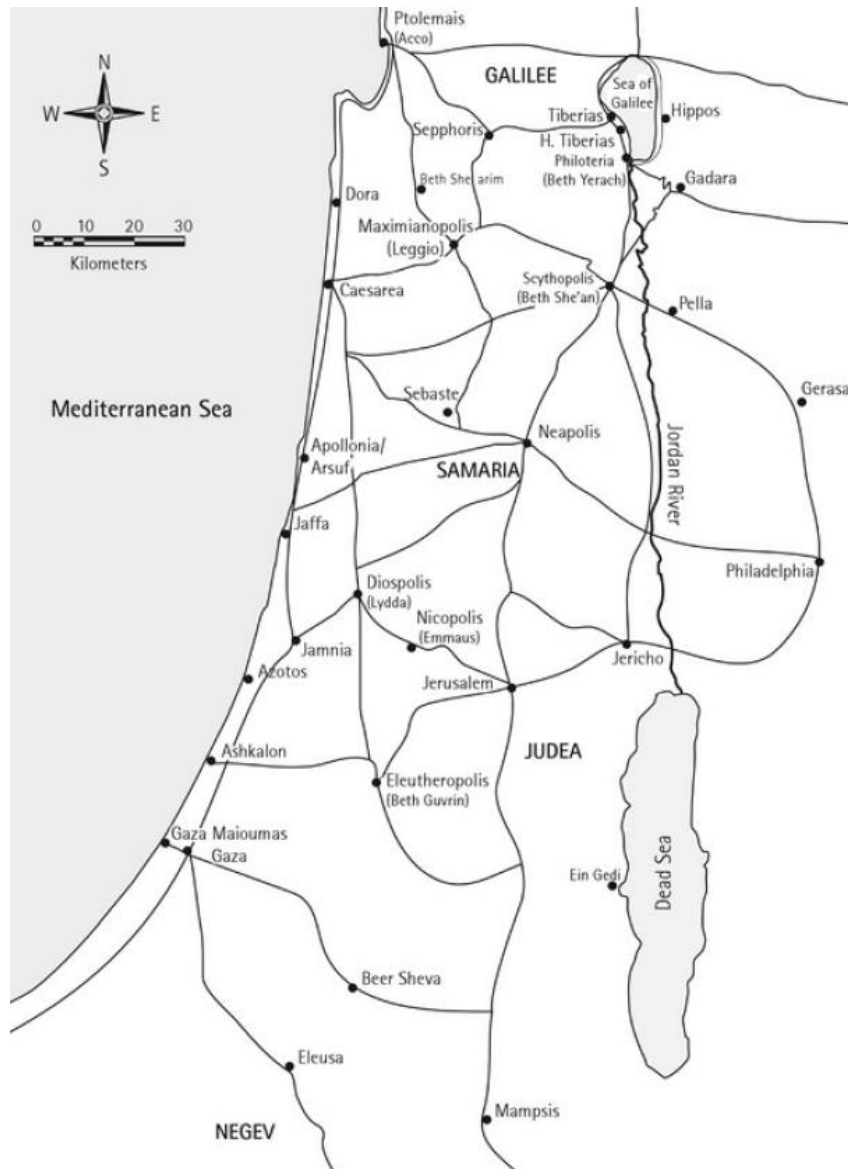
In light of these considerations, it is most appropriate to analyze the progress of Christianity separately in four key areas, each with its own distinctive characteristics: Egypt, with its ancient and deeply rooted religious traditions; Africa, particularly the region of Roman Africa Proconsularis, with its unique blend of Punic, Berber, and Roman influences. Finally, Palestine, the birthplace of Christianity and a region of significant religious diversity. By focusing on these diverse regions, we can gain deeper insights into the varied ways in which Christianity interacted with existing cultural, religious, and social structures, ultimately leading to its establishment as the dominant religion of the late Roman world.

### 6.1. PALESTINE

The fourth Century was a pivotal period in the development of Christianity, though its diffusion across the Roman Empire was far from uniform (Fig. 20). The

reign of Constantine (313-337) marked the beginning of a gradual Christianization of the Empire.

Figure 20. 'Map of Roman Palestine', in Catherine Hezser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (2010; online edn, *Oxford Academic*, 18 Sept. 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199216437.002.0009>, accessed 16 Sept. 2



Christianity in Late Antiquity, even after its embrace by emperors, was characterized by significant internal differences. Orthodoxy and homogeneity were achieved only after considerable efforts and controversies, and new divisions or

challenges frequently emerged, rapidly disrupting previous agreements. Even following the Edict of Thessalonica, the development of Christianity was neither linear nor marked by sudden homogenization<sup>195</sup>.

The Christianization of Palestine exhibited unique characteristics due to several factors. Firstly, substantial imperial investment in church construction, the abundance of sacred sites, and the influx of pilgrims contributed to an accelerated and relatively early conversion process<sup>196</sup>. The areas most involved in the spread of Christianity were those associated with Jesus' ministry: Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Lower Galilee, and the Sea of Galilee. Secondly, during the fourth Century, many pagan temples near Christian holy sites were destroyed and partially replaced by churches. These factors facilitated a more rapid Christianization of Palestine, resulting in a clear Christian majority by the mid-Fifth Century<sup>197</sup>.

The territory, extending approximately from Galilee to the Negev and from the Moab mountains to the Mediterranean coast, had long been characterized by a heterogeneous religious landscape. Jews, Samaritans, and pagans coexisted alongside Christians, a profile still observable in the late Roman and/or Byzantine period. However, from the fourth Century onward, the religious framework began to shift decisively in favor of Christianity.

It should be noted, however, that not all areas of Palestine were Christianized at the same time. The specific characteristics of the region, the distinct cultures and lifestyles of the population, along with other external factors, contributed to significant differences in the pace of Christianization between urban and rural

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<sup>195</sup> Pricoco, S. (2001). Da Giuliano a Teodosio (361-395). In G. Filoramo y D. Menozzi (Coords.), *Storia del Cristianesimo. L'antichità* (305-328). Laterza. Roma; Rinaldi, G. (2015). Da perseguitati a favoriti, da favoriti a persecutori. Il cristianesimo nell'Impero romano fra IV e V secolo. In E. Prinzivalli, *Storia del cristianesimo. L'età antica (secoli I-VII)* (219-249). Carocci. Roma; Rinaldi, G. (2019). *Cristianesimi nell'antichità. Sviluppi storici e contesti geografici (Secoli I-VIII)*. GBU. Chieti. pp. 681-782.

<sup>196</sup> An important study on the reuse of pagan temple foundations in the construction of Christian churches in Byzantine Palestine is: Dolci, J. (2020). Il riuso delle fondazioni dei templi pagani nella costruzione di chiese cristiane nella Palestina bizantina. *LANX. Rivista della Scuola di Specializzazione in Beni Archeologici-Università degli Studi di Milano*, (28), 16-37.

<sup>197</sup> Bar, D. (2003). The Christianization of Rural Palestine during Late Antiquity. *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54.3, 401-421.

areas. Nomadic tribes in the vicinity converted relatively quickly, but in rural regions, the population adopted the new religious, social, and economic innovations more gradually. As a result, Christianity spread progressively throughout these areas.

The establishment of a new Patriarchate in the mid-Fifth Century, initiated through the claims of Bishop Juvenal (422–458), played a crucial role in transforming Palestine into the Holy Land for Christians<sup>198</sup>. Before this period, Palestine, as an ecclesiastical province, had been under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Antioch.

The ecclesiastical organization provides a useful approximation of the Christianization process. Through episcopal lists that record the participation of bishops in synods, we observe that during the late Byzantine period, there was a notable increase in the number of episcopal sees in Palestine. However, it is worth noting that the presence of a bishop may have been linked to relatively small communities. At the Council of Nicaea in 325, there were around twenty episcopal sees, unevenly distributed around Jerusalem and along the coast, stretching from Caesarea to Gaza<sup>199</sup>. By the Councils of Jerusalem in 518 and 536, the number of bishops had risen to thirty-four in the first and forty-seven in the second, nearly all from Palestine.

By the end of the Byzantine period, almost all of Palestine's coastal cities had their own bishop, a phenomenon that was particularly pronounced around Gaza—a region that paradoxically had been a stronghold of paganism in the fourth

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<sup>198</sup> Rapp, C. (2021). The early Patriarchate (325-726). En C. Gastgeber, E. Mitsiou, J. Preiser-Kapeller y V. Zervan (Eds.), *A Companion to the Patriarchate of Constantinople*. (1-23). Brill. Leiden/Boston.

<sup>199</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Kim, Y. R. (Ed.). (2021). *The Cambridge companion to the Council of Nicaea*. Cambridge University Press; Grant, R. M. (1975). Religion and Politics at the Council at Nicaea. *The Journal of Religion*, 55(1), 1-12; Henderson, D. E., & Kirkpatrick, F. (2016). *Constantine and the Council of Nicaea: Defining orthodoxy and heresy in Christianity, 325 CE*. UNC Press Books; Lyman, R. (2024). The Theology of the Council of Nicaea'. *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*; Bassett, S., Brandt, I. J. R., Steen, O., Freely, J., & Cakmak, A. S. (2016). ECUMENICAL COUNCILS (AD 325–787). *Great Events in Religion: An Encyclopedia of Pivotal Events in Religious History [3 volumes]*, 224; Tanner, N. (2004). The Book of the Councils: Nicaea I to Vatican II. *Studies in Church History*, 38, 11-21.

Century. In contrast, no episcopal see is attested in Nazareth, which remained predominantly a Jewish village until the Sixth Century<sup>200</sup>.

As noted by D. Bar<sup>201</sup>, the study of Christian communities in Palestine, particularly through an analysis of church construction, their dates, sponsors, and locations, provides key insights into the dynamics of Christian expansion in rural areas. The erection of a church signified an important milestone, demonstrating both the consolidation of the group and a certain level of recognition within the wider community. Unlike churches in sacred sites or cities, which were often funded by imperial or ecclesiastical sources, rural churches were generally financed by local means.

The presence of these churches is indicative of the strategic efforts to spread Christianity. During the first half of the Byzantine period (up to 450), church construction was predominantly focused on sacred sites, while rural Christian churches were rare. However, archaeological evidence and dedicatory inscriptions from the second half of the period suggest a reversal of this trend, with the majority of churches being built in villages<sup>202</sup>. It was in the latter half of the Fifth Century and into the Sixth Century that bishops began to focus on more remote areas.

Examples of such churches can be found in regions like western Galilee and the Hebron hills, where Christianity became widespread by the end of Late Antiquity. Notable churches in these regions include those at Horvat Anim and Horvat Yattir, located near the Hebron hills. In western Galilee, archaeological evidence highlights around fifty churches and monasteries from the second half of

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<sup>200</sup> Di Segni, L. (2004). The territory of Gaza: notes of historical geography. In B. Bitton-Ashkelony y A. Kofsky (Eds.), *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity. Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture, Volume: 3.* (41-59). Leiden. Brill.

<sup>201</sup> Bar, D. (2003). The Christianization of Rural Palestine during Late Antiquity. *The Journal Of Ecclesiastical History* 54.3, 401-421.

<sup>202</sup> Di Segni, L. (1999). Epigraphic documentation on buildings in the provinces of Palestine and Arabia, fourth–7<sup>th</sup> centuries. En J. H. Humphrey (Ed.), *The Roman and Byzantine Near East Vol. II Some Recent Archaeological Research* (149-178). Portsmouth. Rhode Island.

the Byzantine period<sup>203</sup>. Of these, twelve are identified as monastic churches, four were built in village centers, and fifteen on the outskirts. Among them is the church of Horvat Heseq in the village of Horvat Mahoz, which was constructed in 519 by local family members in memory of a deceased relative<sup>204</sup>.

As we transition from examining the spread of Christianity in rural Palestine through the construction of churches, it is crucial to consider the parallel developments within the Jewish community, particularly the role of the synagogue. While churches emerged as both spiritual and communal centers for early Christian populations, synagogues held a similarly pivotal role in Jewish society. These structures were not only places of worship but also served as centers for learning, community gatherings, and the preservation of Jewish identity, especially in the face of external pressures and diasporic experiences. The synagogue, with its deep historical roots in the Second Temple period, evolved into an essential institution in Jewish religious and cultural life. This evolution provides an illuminating contrast to the rise of Christian spaces of worship, offering a broader understanding of how religious communities shaped their spaces and, in turn, how those spaces influenced the social and religious dynamics within their respective populations.

By delving into the history of the synagogue, we can gain valuable insights into the ways in which the Jewish community in Palestine, and beyond, responded to historical shifts, such as the destruction of the Second Temple and subsequent Roman rule. Understanding the development of the synagogue will enable us to

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<sup>203</sup> Ashkenazi, J. y Mordechai, A. (2012). Monasteries, Monks, and Villages in Western Galilee in Late Antiquity. *Journal of Late Antiquity* 5.2, 269-297; Ashkenazi, J. (2014). Holy Man versus Monk—Village and Monastery in the Late Antique Levant: Between Hagiography and Archaeology. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 57.5, 745-765; Ashkenazi, J. y Mordechai, A. (2014). Small monasteries in Galilee in late antiquity: the test case of Karmiel. En G. C. Bottini, L. D. Chrupcala, Y. Patrikh (Eds.), *Knowledge and Wisdom: Archaeological and Historical Essays in Honour of Leah Di Segni*. *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Collectio Maior* 54, (161-178). Milán

<sup>204</sup> Ashkenazi, J. (2018). Family Rural Churches in Late Antique Palestine and the Competition in the 'Field of Religious Goods': A Socio-Historical View. *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 69.4, 709-727.

appreciate its role in maintaining Jewish traditions and fostering communal resilience throughout the Centuries.

### 6.1.1. Synagogue in Late Antiquity

The earliest concrete evidence for the existence of synagogues is found in a series of inscriptions from Ptolemaic Egypt dating back to the Third Century BC, which refer to a *proseuche* (a place of prayer). To date, around twelve such inscriptions and papyri from the Hellenistic period have been uncovered. Additionally, the earliest known archaeological remains of a synagogue building are located on the island of Delos in the Aegean, with estimates suggesting a construction date in the Second Century BC, or possibly as early as the mid-first Century BC. It is only in the First Century AD that the synagogue becomes clearly recognized as the central communal institution for Jewish communities both in Judaea and across the Diaspora. Prominent cities such as Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome, and likely Antioch, were home to multiple synagogues, while smaller towns, villages, and cities throughout the Roman Empire typically had at least one synagogue serving as a hub for religious and communal life<sup>205</sup>.

The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD had a profound and traumatic effect on the Jewish population in Roman Palestine, resulting in the dismantling of the city's leadership and institutions. This event led to the complete elimination of the Jerusalem Temple, which had been the central religious and national symbol for the Jewish people. The rituals and ceremonies that had long defined Jewish worship were suddenly eradicated. However, there was historical precedence for coping with such a loss. Following the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BC, Judaism continued to evolve, and eventually, the Temple was rebuilt. By 70 AD, Jewish communities in the Diaspora had already developed ways to adapt to their physical distance from the Temple, minimizing its impact on their daily religious practices. This may have also been the case, albeit to a lesser degree, for Jews living in Galilee.

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<sup>205</sup> Levine, L. I. (2005). *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*. Yale University Press, pag. 22.

Some sects during the Second Temple period had already introduced alternative forms of worship that supplemented, and in some cases, even replaced the Temple's rituals. Despite these precedents, the events of 70 AD, which occurred after a period of significant Jewish demographic and social expansion, sent shockwaves throughout the Jewish world, fundamentally altering the religious landscape. Those living in close proximity to Jerusalem were likely the most affected, particularly Jews in Judaea, followed by those in Galilee, with the impact decreasing for Diaspora communities. Geographical closeness likely corresponded to a greater sense of attachment and loss. Among the institutions most impacted by the destruction of the Temple was the synagogue. Prior to 70 AD, the synagogue played a relatively limited role in local religious life, but in the aftermath of the Temple's destruction, it took on an increasingly central role in Jewish religious practice<sup>206</sup>. However, regional differences must be noted. Synagogue practices

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<sup>206</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Bonnie, R., Hakola, R., & Tervahauta, U. (Eds.). (2021). *The Synagogue in ancient Palestine: Current issues and emerging trends*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Levine, L. I. (2021). 1. Diversity in the Ancient Synagogue of Roman-Byzantine Palestine: Historical Implications. *Diversity and Rabbinization: Jewish Texts and Societies between 400 and 1000 CE*, 8; Fine, S. (2016). *This holy place: on the sanctity of the synagogue during the greco-roman period*. Wipf and Stock Publishers; Groh, D. E. (1998). The Stratigraphic Chronology of the Galilean Synagogue from the Early Roman Period Through the Early Byzantine Period (ca. 420 CE). In *Ancient Synagogues, Volume 1* (pp. 51-69). Brill; Weiss, Z. (2020). The Synagogue in an Age of Transition, from the Second Temple Period to Roman Times: Recent Developments in Research. *Synagogues in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods: Archaeological Finds, New Methods, New Theories*, 11, 25; Rajak, T. (2003). Synagogue and Community in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora. In *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman cities* (pp. 34-50). Routledge; Levine, L. I. (2004). The first-century synagogue: critical reassessments and assessments of the critical. In *Religion and Society in Roman Palestine* (pp. 90-122). Routledge; Levine, L. (2000). This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue During the Greco-Roman Period. *Hebrew Studies*, 41(1), 306-311; Fitzpatrick-McKinley, A. (2003). Synagogue communities in the Graeco-Roman cities. In *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities* (pp. 67-99). Routledge; Safrai, S., Stern, M., Flusser, D., & van Unnik, W. C. (1976). The synagogue. In *The Jewish People in the First Century, Volume 2* (pp. 908-944). Brill; Rajak, T. (2001). The Synagogue in the Greco-Roman City. In *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome* (pp. 463-478). Brill; Rosenfeld, B. Z., & Menirav, J. (1999). The ancient synagogue as an economic center. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 58(4), 259-276; Kasher, A. (1995).

varied, with Diaspora communities tending to have more elaborate rituals compared to their Palestinian counterparts, and there may have been liturgical differences between Galilean and Judaeen synagogues. Synagogues within Jerusalem likely had a more constrained religious function, given the Temple's presence. Nonetheless, it is clear that synagogues throughout Palestine were significantly impacted by the destruction of the Temple, and the subsequent development of the synagogue as a religious institution was heavily influenced by this catastrophic event. While the formal recognition of Christianity in 324 AD by Constantine can be cited as an important milestone, this did not immediately lead to a radical change in attitudes toward Judaism. The fourth Century was a transitional period, where the treatment of Jews varied. At times, Jewish communities faced challenges, but they also occasionally benefited from imperial support. The status of the Patriarchate, for example, continued to enjoy relative prominence during this time. It took several generations for the full impact of Christianization to manifest, and this process gradually unfolded throughout the fourth Century, with key moments such as the reshaping of Jerusalem into a Christian city, Julian's failed attempt to rebuild the Temple in 363, and Christianity becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380.

The period spanning the fourth to seventh Centuries in Byzantine Palestine marked a significant phase in the development of synagogues. This era witnessed a proliferation of synagogue structures across a broader geographical expanse

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Synagogues as Houses of Prayer and Holy Places in the Jewish Communities of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. *Ancient Synagogues: historical analysis and archaeological discovery*, 2, 205-20; Kee, H. C. (1995). Defining the First-Century CE Synagogue: Problems and Progress. *New Testament Studies*, 41(4), 481-500; Kee, H. C. (1990). The transformation of the synagogue after 70 CE: Its import for early Christianity. *New Testament Studies*, 36(1), 1-24; Levine, L. I. (1996). The nature and origin of the Palestinian synagogue reconsidered. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 115(3), 425-448; Magness, J. (2001). The question of the synagogue: the problem of typology. In *Judaism in Late Antiquity 3. Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism* (pp. 1-48). Brill; Chiat, M. J. S. (1982). *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*. Chico, CA: Scholars Press; Hezser, C. (2024). Byzantine Synagogue Legislation, Christianization, and Postcolonial Theory. *Expropriation and Destruction of Synagogues in Antiquity*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, forthcoming; Weiss, Z. (2024). Synagogue Architecture, Decoration, and Furnishings. In *The Routledge Handbook of Jews and Judaism in Late Antiquity* (pp. 351-370). Routledge.

compared to previous times, signaling a zenith in their architectural and cultural significance. The synagogue's role as a religious institution became more pronounced, accompanied by an enrichment and diversification of liturgical practices.

This evolution, however, was not merely an extension of prior trends. The ascendancy of Christianity in Palestine from the fourth Century onwards introduced a new dynamic that profoundly influenced Jewish communal life, particularly the synagogue's form, function, and societal position. The Christian presence acted as both a disruptive and catalytic force on Jewish religious expression.

As Christianity's influence burgeoned throughout the Empire, particularly from the late fourth Century onwards, Jewish communities faced mounting pressures. These manifested in various forms: restrictive Imperial edicts, antagonistic Church legislation, and inflammatory rhetoric from Christian religious leaders who portrayed Judaism as obsolete and divinely rejected. In some instances, this hostility escalated to physical violence, resulting in damage to synagogues and loss of Jewish lives. The frequency of such incidents necessitated regular Imperial interventions to prevent further destruction<sup>207</sup>.

Archaeological and literary evidence suggests that in certain locations, such as Stobi, Gerasa, and Apamea, synagogues were appropriated and repurposed as churches. Similar occurrences were documented in various regions including Callinicum, Ravenna, parts of Italy, Mauretania, Spain, Gaul, Syria, and Minorca<sup>208</sup>.

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<sup>207</sup> For a general introduction see: Parkes, J., *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1961).

<sup>208</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Millar, F. (1978). *The Jews of Palestine: a Political History from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest*. By M. Avi-Yonah. Pp. xviii+ 286. New York: Schocken Books; Oxford: Blackwell, 1976. *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 29(2), 201-202; Bradbury, S. (Ed.). (1996). *Severus of Minorca: Letter on the Conversion of the Jews*. Clarendon Press; Bradbury, S. (Ed.). (1996). *Severus of Minorca: Letter on the Conversion of the Jews*. Clarendon Press; Cormack, R. (1990). *The temple as the cathedral*. Eds. C. Roueché–KT Erim, *Aphrodisias Papers: Recent Work on Architecture and Sculpture*. *Journal of*

Despite these challenges, the synagogue as an institution demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. The architectural remains, artistic elements, and epigraphic evidence from this period attest to a vibrant and evolving Jewish religious life, reflecting both continuity with tradition and innovation in response to changing sociocultural contexts. On the outskirts of Judaea, to the east and west, and particularly in the southern region, approximately a dozen synagogues have been unearthed so far<sup>209</sup>. Considering Hadrian's ban on Jewish settlement near Jerusalem, the widespread devastation in Judaea following the Bar-Kokhba revolt, and the strong emphasis on Galilee in rabbinic texts, the discovery of these Judaeian synagogues is quite remarkable. However, the most surprising findings have been in the Golan, where most of the 25 synagogues uncovered to date flourished during the Byzantine period. As previously mentioned, the vast majority of synagogues excavated in Palestine date from the Byzantine era. While many were built during that time, even those constructed earlier, apart from the few pre-70 structures, remained in use for most, if not all, of the period.

### 6.1.2. Christianisation of Palestine: Periphery and Centre

Having briefly reviewed the historical development of the synagogue, we now shift our focus to a critical aspect of the region's transformation: the Christianization of Palestine. This process, marked by the spread of Christianity

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*Roman Archaeology Supplemental Series, 1, 75-88; Goodman, M. (1998). Jews, Greeks, and Romans. Jews in a Graeco-Roman world, 3-14; Juster, J. (1914). Les Juifs dans l'Empire romain/1. Les juifs dans l'Empire romain leur condition juridique économique et sociale; Katz, S. (1933). Pope Gregory the Great and the Jews. The Jewish Quarterly Review, 24(2), 113-136; Parkes, J. W. (1974). The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism; Israel, V. (1986). A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425). Trans. H. McKeating. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Trombley, F. R. (1993). Hellenic religion and Christianization: c. 370-529 (Vol. 2). Brill; Trombley, F. R. (2001). Hellenic religion and Christianization c. 370-529/1. Hellenic religion and Christianization c. 370-529.*

<sup>209</sup> Amit, D. (1992). " 'The Curtain Would Be Removed for Them' (Yoma 54a) in Ancient Synagogue Depictions," *Tarbiz* 61. Hebrew; Amit, D. (1993). "Excavations at Ma'on and 'Anim: Their Contribution to the Study of Ancient Synagogues in Southern Judea," *Cathedra* 68. Hebrew; Ilan, Z. (1989). "The Synagogue and Bet Midrash of Meroth," *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, ed. R. Hachlili, B.A.R. International Series 499 (Oxford: B.A.R.).

across diverse geographical areas, unfolded in complex ways, with notable distinctions between peripheral and central regions. By analyzing these regional dynamics, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of how Christianity established itself, particularly in relation to existing religious traditions.

One of the most valuable lenses through which to explore this phenomenon is the study of synagogues, which were integral to Jewish religious and communal life. Synagogues, serving as spaces for religious services, the reading of the Torah, and other essential Jewish rituals, offer us a comparative point of reference to assess how religious practices and sacred spaces evolved during the Christianization process. In particular, by examining the role and continuity of synagogues in rural areas of Palestine, we can begin to discern patterns of religious coexistence, competition, and adaptation. The comparison of these Jewish religious buildings with emerging Christian structures sheds light on the broader socio-religious changes of the period. This comparative approach, focusing on both the preservation and transformation of religious spaces, is essential for understanding how Christianization permeated different layers of society, especially in regions that were less directly influenced by central ecclesiastical authorities. Thus, through the lens of synagogue usage and its relationship to new Christian practices, we can gain insight into the complexities of religious and cultural transformation in late antique Palestine.

The construction of a church in early Christian communities marked a significant milestone, symbolizing not only the establishment of the group but also its recognition by the wider community. In contrast to churches in sacred sites or urban centers, which were often funded by imperial or ecclesiastical resources, rural churches were typically financed by the local population. The presence of these rural churches serves as a key indicator of the spread of Christianity and the strategies involved in this expansion. During the first half of the Byzantine period, church construction was concentrated primarily in sacred locations, with rural areas seeing fewer Christian buildings. However, archaeological findings and inscriptions from the second half of the Byzantine period reveal a shift, with most churches being established in villages. It was during the late Fifth and Sixth Centuries that bishops began focusing their attention on these more remote areas.

This rural Christianization can be observed in regions such as Western Galilee and the Hebron Hills, where Christianity had become widespread by the

close of Late Antiquity. Notable examples include large churches at Horvat Anim and Horvat Yattir, located on the edges of the Hebron Hills. In Western Galilee, archaeological evidence reveals around fifty churches and monasteries dating from the latter half of the Byzantine period. Among these, twelve were monastic, four were located in settlement centers, and fifteen were situated on the outskirts. One notable example is the church at Horvat Heseq in Horvat Mahoz, constructed in 519 AD by a local family in memory of a deceased relative, according to inscriptions.

To better understand the dynamics of Christianization in rural Palestine, it is useful to compare the construction of Christian churches with that of synagogues, the religious centers of the Jewish community during the same period. Synagogues played a vital role in Jewish religious life, serving not only as places of worship and Torah reading but also as community centers where villagers gathered to discuss local matters, provide for the needy, and celebrate festivals in adjoining spaces. Most synagogues were centrally located within the village, reflecting their importance in both religious and social contexts. Their central location fulfilled two purposes: making them easily accessible to all and serving as a symbolic hub for expressing Jewish identity within the community. Furthermore, many synagogues were financed by the local population, emphasizing their communal significance<sup>210</sup>.

In contrast, the pattern of Christian church construction in small villages during the Byzantine period seems to suggest a different development path. As noted, many of these churches were built on the outskirts of settlements, possibly indicating that early Christian communities lacked the numbers or influence to build in the village center. This pattern suggests that Christianity, particularly in rural Palestine, spread gradually and locally, often beginning on the periphery before becoming more central. Another notable difference lies in the size of the settlements where synagogues and churches were built. Synagogues tended to be

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<sup>210</sup> David, M. (2007). *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine. In the shadow of the Church, in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, Vol.65*, pp.1-17, 84-87. Leiden; Fine, S. (2014). *Art, History and the Historiography of Judaism in Roman Antiquity*. (Eds.) A.J. Avery-Peck y W.S. Green, Vol.34, pp.63-86, 195-214. Brill; Hachlili, R. (1998). *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora*. Brill. Leiden. pp. 12-23, 67-78; Levine, L. I. (2005). *The Ancient Synagogue*. Yale University Press. New Haven London, pp.135-209.

located in larger settlements, whereas churches were found in villages of varying sizes, including small rural communities. In some cases, small chapels were built near rural settlements, suggesting that the desire to establish churches might have originated in smaller villages. Based on these observations, it could be argued that the spread of Christianity in rural Palestine began at the grassroots level. Given their limited social standing, early Christian communities may have been compelled to construct churches on private or peripheral land, at least initially. By contrast, synagogues were founded by larger communities, intended to serve the entire population, and often attracted visitors from nearby areas.

With regard to religious conversions, it appears that Christianity initially took root among the pagan population, while Jewish and Samaritan communities maintained their religious independence for a longer period<sup>211</sup>. These groups, in many cases, resisted conversion unless coerced, which highlights the diverse and often contested religious landscape of Palestine during the Byzantine era.

Monasticism also played a key role in the spread of Christianity across Palestine during the period from 324 to 642 AD. By the late fourth Century, monastic communities had become a significant force in the region's religious life, with many members of the church hierarchy emerging from these communities. Monasteries were constructed in a variety of locations, including major cities, rural villages, pilgrimage sites, and remote desert areas such as the Judean Desert and southern Sinai<sup>212</sup>. The presence of monasteries in these different environments greatly facilitated the spread of Christianity. Literary sources also point to frequent interactions between monks and nearby rural communities, a pattern commonly observed throughout the Mediterranean region<sup>213</sup>. Studying the distribution of

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<sup>211</sup> Zeev, R y Levin, Y.L. (1983). Christianity in Byzantine Palestine-missionary activity and religious coercion. *The Jerusalem Cathedra. Studies in the History, Archaeology, Geography and Ethnography of the Land of Israel* 3, 97-113.

<sup>212</sup> Bar, D. (2005). Rural monasticism as a key element in the Christianization of Byzantine Palestine. *Harvard Theological Review* 98.1, 49-65.

<sup>213</sup> Vailhé, S. (1899). Répertoire alphabétique des monastères de Palestine. *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 4, 512-542.

these religious buildings is crucial to understanding the process of Christianization in Palestine's peripheral areas<sup>214</sup>.

The diverse geographical settings in which churches and monasteries were built point to a range of motivations behind their establishment. These factors likely included the desire to control agriculturally valuable land, as well as the pursuit of remote and quiet locations suited for ascetic or contemplative lifestyles. This variety of influences highlights the complexity of Christianization in rural Palestine and underscores the need to consider both practical and spiritual factors when analyzing the religious transformations of Late Antiquity<sup>215</sup>.

### 6.1.3. What about pagan cults?

Following the discussion on the process of Christianization in Palestine, with its distinct variations between the periphery and the center, it is essential to address the persistence of pagan cults during this transformative period. Recent archaeological discoveries at the Te'omim Cave, near Jerusalem, have shed new light on this subject. These findings suggest that pagan practices were not entirely abandoned but rather adapted to the evolving social and political landscape. This adaptation likely involved changes in the forms and locations of worship, reflecting a complex interplay between continuity and change in religious practices during the early Christian era.

The Te'omim Cave, situated on the western fringe of the Jerusalem hills, acquired its name from XIX Century local inhabitants who referred to it as Mũghâret Umm et Tûeimîn, translating to "the cave of the mother of twins". The initial comprehensive investigation of the cave was conducted on October 17, 1873, by C. R. Conder and H. H. Kitchener as part of The Survey of Western Palestine. Their efforts resulted in a detailed map of the cave and the identification of a

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<sup>214</sup> For a current study on the economy of monasteries in Palestine during Late Antiquity, see: L. Blanche, J. Cromwell (Eds.), *Monastic Economies in Late Antique Egypt and Palestine*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-38.

<sup>215</sup> Hirschfeld, Y. (1992). *The Judean desert monasteries in the Byzantine period*. Yale University Press. New Haven, pp. 1-101.

profound pit at its northern extremity. Their account also provided insights into the traditions and customs of the local populace, who attributed curative properties to the spring water flowing within the cave.

In the late 1920s, excavations in the main chamber's floor were carried out by René Neuville, who held the position of French consul in Jerusalem. His discoveries included artifacts made of ceramic, wood, and stone, spanning various historical periods from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic eras to the Early Bronze, Middle Bronze, and Iron Ages, as well as the Roman and Byzantine epochs<sup>216</sup>.

Between 1970 and 1974, Gideon Mann, a physician and speleologist, conducted research on behalf of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel. Mann's contributions included mapping a portion of the cave, uncovering passages leading to concealed inner chambers, and unearthing an array of artifacts, including pottery and glassware.

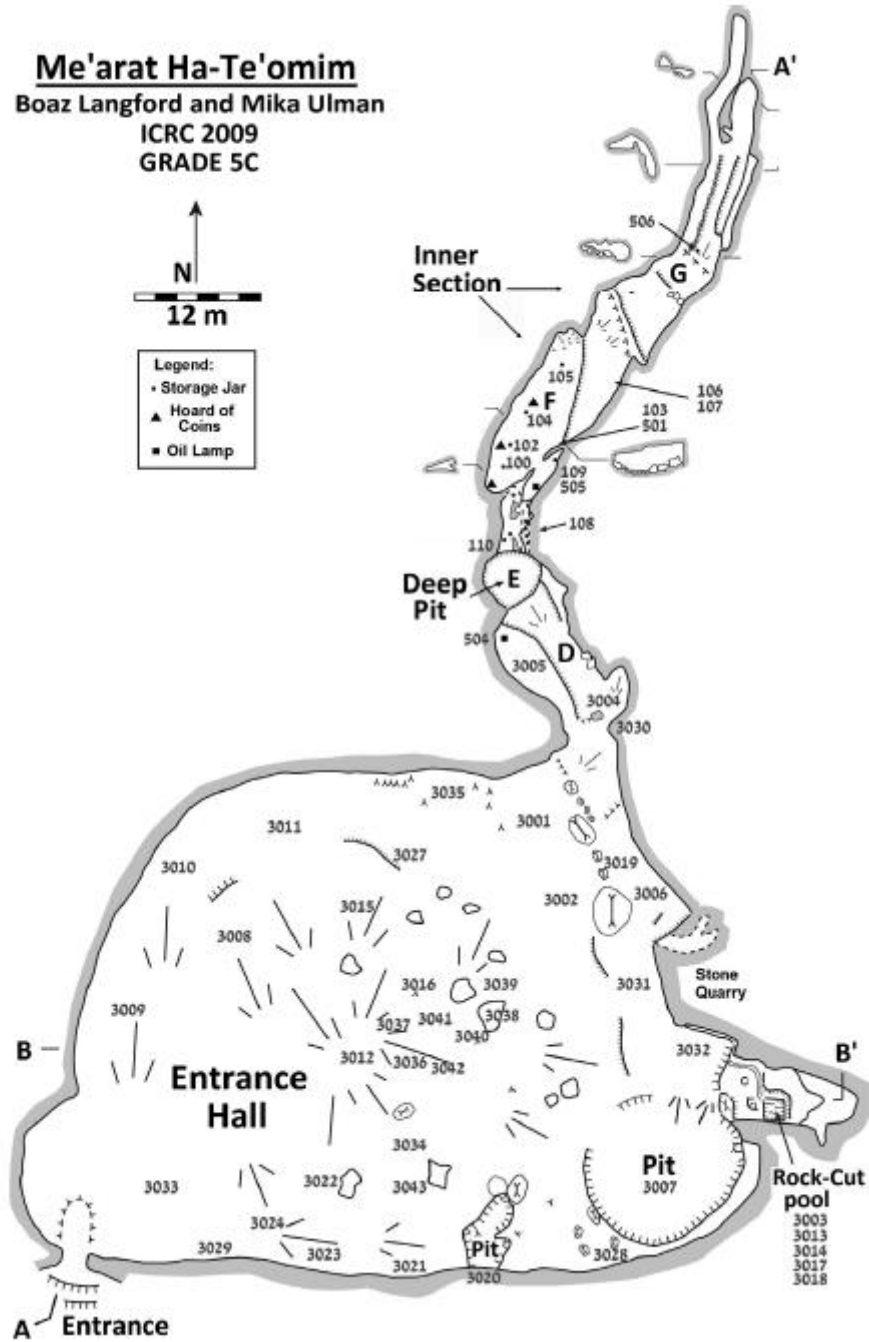
Since 2009, exploration of the cave has continued through a collaborative research project between the Martin (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University and the Cave Research Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The cave's entrance, a natural opening expanded through human intervention, is positioned above the wadi's channel (Fig. 21). Upon entering, one descends northward into a capacious chamber, measuring approximately 50 by 70 meters, largely dominated by an extensive accumulation of rock debris. This rubble is interspersed with various passages and fissures, leading to subterranean crevices and cavities that have yielded a wealth of archaeological material.

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<sup>216</sup> Neuville, R. (1939). "Notes de préhistoire palestinienne. La grotte d'et-Taouamin," *JPOS* 10, 64–75.

Figure 21. Plan of the Te'omim Cave (B. Langford, M. Ullman under the Te'omim Cave). From Klein, E., & Zissu, B. (2023). *Oil Lamps, Spearheads and Skulls: Possible Evidence of Necromancy during Late Antiquity in the Te'omim Cave, Judean Hills.* *Harvard theological review*, 116(3), 401.



On the chamber's northern periphery, amidst stalagmites and columns, an easily navigable route leads to passage D, a broad and lofty corridor extending northward. Approximately 20 meters along this passage, progress is prevented by a karst shaft (E), whose diameter ranges from 4 meters at its apex to 6 meters at its base. The shaft's floor lies about 15 meters below the level of passage D, while its upper section forms a dome rising approximately 3 meters above the passage's ceiling. The total vertical distance from the shaft's ceiling to its bottom reaches 23 meters.

A square, rock-hewn basin, measuring 2 meters on each side, collects water dripping from the ceiling. This water then flows westward through a carved channel. Currently, the water is absorbed into the ground, though historically it was collected in a constructed pool at a lower elevation. Additional channels were carved at various locations in the entrance chamber to gather dripping water into pools or storage vessels.

Recent explorations have uncovered artifacts spanning numerous periods, from the Neolithic era to the present day. Three main periods of occupation have been identified: the Middle Bronze Age (circa 2000–1550 BC), the conclusion of the Bar Kokhba revolt (circa 132–136 AD), and the Late Roman–Early Byzantine period (late Second to Fourth Centuries).

#### 6.1.3.1. *The Late Roman–Early Byzantine Phase*

From the late Second Century AD onwards, the cave, particularly its deep pit and interior spring, served as a site of religious significance. Previous research has suggested its dedication to a chthonic deity associated with the underworld.

A substantial collection of artifacts from the Late Roman and Byzantine periods was unearthed in the main chamber and its offshoots. This assemblage included approximately 120 well-preserved oil lamps dating from the late Second to Fourth Centuries AD, discovered in various cavities and crevices throughout the cave (Fig. 22).

*Figure 22. Group of intact oil lamps discovered in the Te'omim Cave (mostly in L. 3036) in the 2012 season (photo: B. Zissu under the Te'omim Cave Archaeological Project). From Klein, E., & Zissu, B. (2023). Oil*

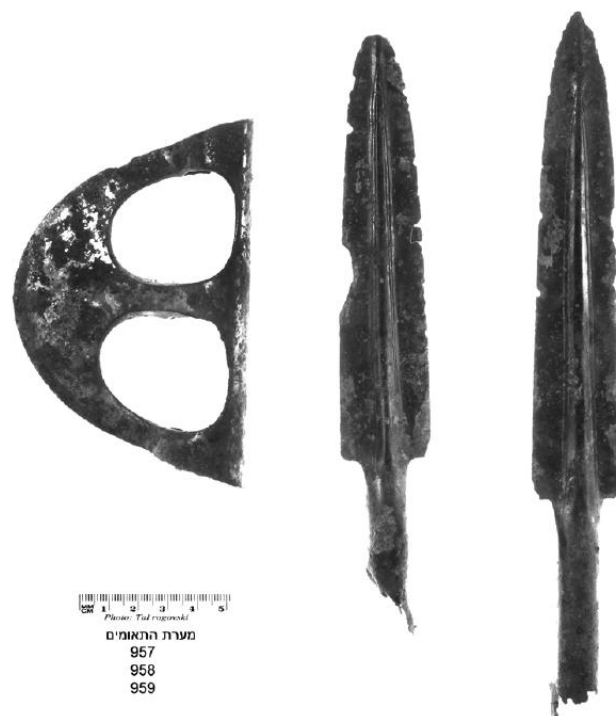
*Lamps, Spearheads and Skulls: Possible Evidence of Necromancy during Late Antiquity in the Te'omim Cave, Judean Hills. Harvard theological review, 116(3), 404.*



These lamps were intentionally placed in narrow, deep fissures, many of which were only accessible through challenging crawl spaces. The retrieval of these artifacts often necessitated the use of extended poles with iron hooks, suggesting a similar method was likely employed for their initial placement. The deliberate concealment of these lamps in such hard-to-reach locations implies that their purpose extended beyond mere illumination of the cave's darkness.

In a particularly narrow crevice in the southern section of locus 3004, an intriguing assemblage was discovered. This collection, only reachable by extending one's arm between boulders, comprised three bronze objects from the Intermediate Bronze Age - an axe (B.957) and two socketed spearheads (B.958–959) - alongside an Early Bronze Age juglet (Fig. 23).

Figure 23. Photo of three bronze objects (an “eye axe” and two socketed spearheads) (photo: Tal Rogovski under the Te’omim Cave Archaeological Project). From Klein, E., & Zissu, B. (2023). *Oil Lamps, Spearheads and Skulls: Possible Evidence of Necromancy during Late Antiquity in the Te’omim Cave, Judean Hills*. *Harvard theological review*, 116(3), 405.



These ancient artifacts were found in close proximity to three Late Roman lamps, raising questions about their co-deposition. The presence of items spanning three distinct periods in such a confined space suggests that these older objects were likely gathered and redeposited during the Late Roman-Early Byzantine period as part of ritualistic activities.

Locus 3036, a network of interconnected crevices beneath large, collapsed boulders in the entrance chamber's center, yielded another significant find. Here, five Late Roman-Early Byzantine oil lamps were discovered in situ, deposited

alongside a Middle Bronze II bowl). The juxtaposition of these chronologically disparate artifacts suggests intentional placement during Late Antiquity.

The survey of the cave also revealed three human craniums in challenging locations within the central chamber. One cranium, found in situ within a hard-to-reach crevice (L. 3049), was positioned atop four ceramic oil lamps typical of the Third and Fourth Centuries AD (Fig.24).

*Figure 24. Finds from L. 3049: oil lamps found underneath the upper part of a human skull (frontal and parietal bones) (photo: B. Zissu under the Te'omim Cave Archaeological Project). From Klein, E., & Zissu, B. (2023). Oil Lamps, Spearheads and Skulls: Possible Evidence of Necromancy during Late Antiquity in the Te'omim Cave, Judean Hills. Harvard theological review, 116(3), 406.*



This discovery supports the hypothesis that the craniums' locations were deliberate rather than coincidental, likely placed contemporaneously with the lamps during the Late Roman period for a specific purpose.

Given the archaeological context and the location of these finds within the cave, it is posited that the craniums were deliberately placed alongside the oil lamps as part of magical rituals conducted during this period. The combination of

human craniums, lamps, bowls, metal weapons, and artifacts from much earlier periods suggests a complex ritual practice<sup>217</sup>.

The identification of magical practices through archaeological evidence presents significant challenges. Magic typically encompasses ritualistic actions performed, predominantly by individuals, to achieve specific outcomes<sup>218</sup>. These practices may necessitate execution in particular locations or involve the use of specific material culture. Consequently, to discern magical activities within archaeological contexts, it is essential to identify material evidence indicative of such practices.

Andrew Wilburn has proposed utilizing classical literary and documentary sources to recognize items frequently employed in magical rites. Among the material categories mentioned in ancient magical texts, Wilburn highlights the use of human and animal body parts to establish connections with intended subjects, as well as the repurposing of household items for magical purposes.

Adopting this perspective, the subsequent analysis will examine the various artifacts discovered within the cave, considering their applications as described in ancient magical literature and their occurrence in comparable archaeological contexts. This approach aims to elucidate the potential magical significance of the assemblage and its broader implications for understanding ritualistic practices in antiquity.

By contextualizing the cave's findings within the framework of ancient magical traditions and parallel archaeological discoveries, this investigation seeks to shed light on the nature and purpose of the activities conducted within this subterranean space. This methodology allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the material culture, potentially revealing insights into the beliefs, practices, and social dynamics of the individuals who utilized this cave for ritualistic purposes.

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<sup>217</sup> Klein, E., & Zissu, B. (2023). Oil Lamps, Spearheads and Skulls: Possible Evidence of Necromancy during Late Antiquity in the Te'omim Cave, Judean Hills. *Harvard theological review*, 116(3), 399-421.

<sup>218</sup> Wilburn, A. T. (2019). Building ritual agency: foundations, floors, doors, and walls. In *Guide to the study of ancient magic* (pp. 555-602). Brill.

### 6.1.3.2. *Ritual of Necromancy*

The practice of necromancy, the act of communicating with the deceased to gain knowledge or influence future events, has a long and complex history in the ancient Near East and Levant<sup>219</sup>. This controversial practice, while often viewed with suspicion or outright condemnation by religious authorities, nevertheless persisted throughout various cultures and time periods in the region.

Biblical sources provide significant evidence for the prevalence of necromantic practices in ancient Israelite society, despite official prohibitions. A notable example is the account of King Saul's consultation with the spirit of the prophet Samuel through a medium at Ein Dor, as recounted in the First Book of Samuel (1 Sam 28:7–24)<sup>220</sup>. This narrative not only illustrates the existence of such practices but also highlights the tension between official religious doctrine and popular beliefs.

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<sup>219</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Klaassen, F. (2019). Necromancy. In *The Routledge history of medieval magic* (pp. 201-211). Routledge; Schmidt, B. B. (1996). *Israel's beneficent dead: ancestor cult and necromancy in ancient Israelite religion and tradition*. Eisenbrauns; Garrad, J. (2009, June). A Necessary Evil: Necromancy and Christian Death. In *Religion-Belief-Superstition*; Eitrem, S. (1928). The necromancy in the Persai of Aischylos. *Symbolae Osloenses*, 6(1), 1-16; Vitek, T. (2021). Greek Necromancy: Reality or Myth?. *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 60(1-2), 27-51; Ritner, R. K. (2002). Necromancy in ancient Egypt. In *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World* (pp. 89-96). Brill; Faraone, C. A. (2005). Necromancy Goes Underground: the disguise of skull-and corpse-divination in the Paris Magical Papyri (PGM IV 1928-2144). In *Mantikê* (pp. 255-282). Brill; Hamori, E. J. (2015). *Women's divination in biblical literature: prophecy, necromancy, and other arts of knowledge*. Yale University Press; Collins, B. J. (2015). Necromancy, fertility and the dark earth: the use of ritual pits in Hittite cult. In *Magic and ritual in the ancient world* (pp. 224-241). Brill; Kalvig, A. (2017). 'Necromancy Is a Religion': Tylor's Discussion of Spiritualism in Primitive Culture and in His Diary. *Religion and Culture*, 123; Van der Toorn, K. (1988). Echoes of Judaeon Necromancy in Isaiah 28, 7–22; Grypeou, E. (2019). Talking heads: Necromancy in Jewish and Christian Accounts from Mesopotamia and beyond. *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*, 16, 1-30; Mendez, H. E. (2009). *Condemnations of necromancy in the Hebrew Bible: an investigation of rationale* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia); Ogden, D. (2002). *Greek and Roman necromancy*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>220</sup> Arnold, B. T. (2004). Necromancy and Cleromancy in 1 and 2 Samuel. *The catholic biblical quarterly*, 66(2), 199-213.

The biblical stance on necromancy is unequivocally negative, characterizing it as an adoption of foreign customs that contravened the principles of Israelite monotheism. The severity with which this practice was viewed is reflected in the biblical texts, which prescribe capital punishment for those engaging in necromantic rituals. This harsh penalty underscores the perceived threat that necromancy posed to the established religious order.

However, the prevalence of necromancy in the broader ancient Near Eastern context suggests that it was a widespread and deeply ingrained practice in the region. Mesopotamian sources, in particular, provide rich documentation of necromantic rituals<sup>221</sup>. Cuneiform tablets dating to the First millennium BC have been discovered containing detailed cultic texts that describe specific rituals for communicating with spirits. These texts are particularly noteworthy for their mention of the use of human skulls in these practices, providing a tangible link between the spiritual realm and physical human remains.

The presence of such detailed ritual instructions in Mesopotamian texts indicates a level of institutionalization and acceptance of necromantic practices in certain societies of the ancient Near East. This stands in contrast to the official condemnation found in biblical sources, highlighting the complex and varied attitudes towards necromancy across different cultures in the region.

The study of necromancy in the ancient Near East and Levant offers valuable insights into the religious, social, and cultural dynamics of these societies. It reveals the tension between official religious doctrines and popular practices, the persistence of beliefs in supernatural communication, and the ways in which different cultures approached the enigmatic boundary between the living and the dead.

Furthermore, the archaeological evidence of necromantic practices, such as the use of human skulls mentioned in Mesopotamian texts, provides a tangible connection to these ancient beliefs. This material evidence allows researchers to correlate textual accounts with physical artifacts, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how these rituals may have been performed.

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<sup>221</sup> Finkel, I. L. (1983). Necromancy in ancient Mesopotamia. *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 29, 1-17.

In examining the role of necromancy in these ancient societies, scholars must navigate a complex landscape of religious texts, archaeological findings, and cultural contexts. This multidisciplinary approach not only sheds light on specific religious practices but also contributes to our broader understanding of belief systems, social structures, and cultural exchanges in the ancient Near East and Levant.

Classical literature provides limited references to the consecration or utilization of human skulls, a scarcity likely attributable to their predominant use in clandestine rituals associated with necromancy and communication with the deceased. These practices were primarily the domain of individuals identified as witches or sorcerers. While such rites were typically conducted within the confines of tombs or burial caves<sup>222</sup>, they occasionally took place in specialized locations known as *nekyomanteia* (or *nekromanteia*), which translates to "oracles of the dead."

These oracular sites were characteristically situated in caves or in proximity to water sources, locations believed to serve as potential gateways to the underworld. The mythology surrounding these caves often incorporated legends related to Persephone's descent into the underworld or the emergence of Cerberus from the realm of the dead. A consistent feature of these sites was the presence of a shaft or opening, perceived as a conduit through which the spirits of the deceased could ascend to communicate with the living.

The association of these locations with subterranean spaces and water sources reflects a widespread belief in the ancient world regarding the liminal nature of such environments. Caves, with their dark, enclosed spaces extending into the earth, were naturally linked to concepts of the underworld. Similarly, certain water sources, particularly those with unknown depths or underground connections, were viewed as potential portals to the realm of the dead.

The specific mention of Persephone and Cerberus in connection with these sites underscores their significance in Greek mythology and their role in shaping beliefs about the underworld. Persephone's cyclical journey between the world of the living and the dead, as well as Cerberus's role as guardian of the underworld's

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<sup>222</sup> Bohak, G. (2017). Magic in the cemeteries of Late Antique Palestine. Expressions of Cult in the Southern Levant in the Greco-Roman Period, 157, 174.

entrance, reinforced the concept of these locations as intersections between the mortal and spiritual realms.

The presence of a shaft or opening in these oracular sites served both practical and symbolic functions. Practically, it may have facilitated the performance of certain rituals or the creation of atmospheric effects to enhance the experience of communication with the dead. Symbolically, it represented a physical manifestation of the believed connection between the world of the living and the realm of the deceased.

This understanding of *nekyomanteia* provides valuable context for interpreting archaeological findings related to potential necromantic practices. The identification of caves or water-proximate locations with evidence of ritual activity, particularly those featuring shafts or significant vertical elements, may indicate sites of ancient oracles of the dead. Such findings would contribute to our understanding of how ancient societies conceptualized and interacted with the afterlife, as well as the physical manifestations of these beliefs in sacred landscapes.

Necromancy, the practice of communicating with the dead, features prominently in both Greek and Roman literary traditions, offering valuable insights into ancient perceptions of the afterlife and the boundaries between the mortal and spiritual realms<sup>223</sup>. The earliest notable reference to necromantic practices in Western literature appears in Homer's *Odyssey*, where the protagonist, Odysseus, under the guidance of the sorceress Circe, engages in a ritual to consult the shade of the prophet Teiresias<sup>224</sup>. This seminal text establishes a precedent for the literary treatment of necromancy, framing it as a means of acquiring otherworldly wisdom.

As Roman society evolved, attitudes towards necromancy became increasingly complex and contentious. The practice was often viewed with suspicion and associated with darker aspects of magic, including human sacrifice. This negative perception led to the implementation of legal measures against various forms of divination and supernatural practices. A significant milestone in

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<sup>223</sup> Ogden, D. (2002). *Magic, witchcraft, and ghosts in the Greek and Roman worlds: a sourcebook*. Oxford University Press, USA, pp. 179-209.

<sup>224</sup> Hom., *Od.* 10.488–540, 11.13–149 (LCL 104:378–83, 387–97).

this legislative trend occurred in 97 BC when the Roman Senate officially proscribed human sacrifice, reflecting growing concerns about certain ritualistic practices<sup>225</sup>.

Despite official condemnation, historical evidence suggests that necromancy continued to exert a fascination even at the highest echelons of Roman society. Several emperors, including Nero, Hadrian, Commodus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus, are reported to have engaged in necromantic rituals, primarily as a means of divining future events.

The late Second and early Third Centuries AD witnessed an apparent increase in references to necromantic activities. This period coincides with significant social, political, and religious changes in the Roman Empire, possibly contributing to a renewed interest in or concern about such practices. The historian Eusebius provides a particularly account of the emperor Valerian (253–260 AD), alleging that he was persuaded by an Egyptian sorcerer to engage in infanticide and haruspicy (divination by examining entrails) as means of ensuring prosperity and success. Similar accusations were leveled against the emperor Maxentius (306–312 AD).

The culmination of legal measures against necromancy and related practices came in 357 AD under the emperor Constantius II. This comprehensive legislation, preserved in the Codex Theodosianus and Codex Justinianus, prohibited a wide range of divinatory and magical practices, including communication with demons, disturbance of the spirits of the dead, and nocturnal sacrifices. The historian Ammianus Marcellinus reports that the penalty for violating this law was death, underscoring the severity with which such practices were viewed by the imperial authorities<sup>226</sup>.

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<sup>225</sup> Plin., *HN* 30.3.12 (LCL 418:286–87).

<sup>226</sup> Amm. Marc., *History* 19.12.14–15 (LCL 300:540–43): “[14] For if anyone wore on his neck an amulet against the quartan ague or any other complaint, or was accused by the testimony of the evil-disposed of passing by a grave in the evening, on the ground that he was a dealer in poisons, or a gatherer of the horrors of tombs and the vain illusions of the ghosts that walk there, he was condemned to capital punishment and so perished. [15] In

The motivations behind Constantius II's sweeping ban on necromancy and related practices were complex, reflecting both religious and political concerns. The emperor's fear that sorcery might be employed against him personally highlights the perceived power of these practices and their potential for political destabilization. This legislation marks a significant shift in the official stance towards supernatural practices, aligning with the broader trends of religious and social reform in the late Roman Empire.

The trajectory of necromancy in Greco-Roman culture, from its literary representations to its legal prohibitions, offers a fascinating lens through which to examine changing attitudes towards magic, religion, and political power in the ancient world. The persistence of necromantic practices, despite increasing legal and social sanctions, attests to the enduring human fascination with the mysteries of death and the afterlife. Moreover, the evolving treatment of necromancy in legal and historical texts provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between popular beliefs, official religion, and state authority in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Literary sources from the Second to the Fifth Centuries AD describe the use of human skulls or heads in rituals intended to raise the dead at oracular sites. Lucius Apuleius, in his mid-Second-Century AD work *Apologia*, hints at the practice of using skulls for necromancy<sup>227</sup>. Philostratus (Second–Third Centuries AD) recounts an oracle on the island of Lesbos where one could hear the prophecies of Orpheus from his severed head, an oracle known from Babylonia to Persia<sup>228</sup>. The practice of using skulls in magic rituals is also recorded in Greek papyri from the fourth and Fifth Centuries AD, part of the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) collection found in Egypt. These texts, which span from the Second Century BC to

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fact, the matter was handled exactly as if many men had importuned Claros, the oaks of Dodona, and the once famous oracles of Delphi with regard [p. 543] to the death of the emperor. Ammianus Marcellinus. With An English Translation. John C. Rolfe, Ph.D., Litt.D. Cambridge. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, Ltd. 1935-1940. From <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2007.01.0082%3Abook%3D19%3Achapter%3D12%3Asection%3D14> (Accessed 19-09-2024).

<sup>227</sup> Apul., *Apol.* 34 (LCL 534:93).

<sup>228</sup> Philostr., *Her.* 28.8–13 (LCL 521:210–13).

the Fifth Century AD, are diverse in origin and content, containing spells, magical formulas, and compilations collected by sorcerers<sup>229</sup>.

Given their discovery in Roman Egypt, these papyri reflect significant religious and cultural pluralism, showing influences from Egyptian, Greek, Jewish, and other traditions<sup>230</sup>. One spell details how to restrain and seal the mouths of skulls, preventing them from speaking or acting, while another describes how to summon the spirit of the dead using a skull inscribed with a spell written in black ink on a flax leaf. A different spell involves obtaining protection and assistance from spirits using the skull of Typhon (likely a donkey), on which a spell is inscribed in the blood of a black dog. These instructions resemble a recently published Jewish incantation in Aramaic found on a human skull of unknown origin, which was acquired by collector Shlomo Moussaieff from the antiquities market and likely originated in Babylonia (Mesopotamia). Dan Levene examined this skull and others from museum collections in Philadelphia and Berlin that feature oath inscriptions, suggesting that these skulls are akin to incantation bowls used by Babylonian Jews from the Third to the Seventh Centuries AD to ward off demons. Although rare in Jewish contexts, this practice illustrates the broader use of human skulls for protection against spirits and demons, prevalent in Babylonia, Egypt, and the wider Greco-Roman world.

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<sup>229</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Betz, H. D. (Ed.). (2022). *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells, Volume 1: Texts*. University of Chicago Press; Bernand, A. (1990). Hans Dieter Betz (ed.). *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation including the Demotic Spells*. *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 207(3), 326-327; Faraone, C. A. (2005). Necromancy Goes Underground: the disguise of skull-and corpse-divination in the Paris Magical Papyri (PGM IV 1928-2144). In *Mantikê* (pp. 255-282). Brill.

<sup>230</sup> For a comprehensive study see: LiDonnici, L. (2007). "According to the jews:" Identified (and identifying)'jewish'elements in the greek magical papyri. In *Heavenly Tablets* (pp. 87-108). Brill; Stratton, K. B. (2009). Gideon Bohak. *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 496 pp. *AJS review*, 33(2), 396-399; Boustan, R. A., & Sanzo, J. E. (2017). Christian magicians, Jewish magical idioms, and the shared magical culture of late antiquity. *Harvard Theological Review*, 110(2), 217-240; Naether, F. (2019). Magical Practices in Egyptian Literary Texts: In Quest of Cultural Plurality. *Cultural Plurality in Ancient Magical Texts and Practices*, 27-41.

## 6.2. EGYPT

The origins of Christianity in Egypt can be traced back to Alexandria, undoubtedly the most prominent among the numerous urban centers established by Alexander the Great<sup>231</sup>. This metropolis, which would become a cornerstone of early Christian development, was founded in 331 BC. Interestingly, the site chosen for Alexandria was not vacant but already inhabited by an indigenous settlement known as Rhakotis, as documented by the ancient geographer Strabo in his work "*Geographica*" (17.1.6).

The name Rhakotis continued to hold significance in the city's history. From the Third Century BC onwards, it was employed to denote the quarter of Alexandria predominantly inhabited by native Egyptians<sup>232</sup>. Moreover, in Coptic literature, the term Rhakotis evolved to encompass the entire city, demonstrating the enduring influence of the pre-existing settlement on Alexandria's cultural identity.

The political landscape of Egypt underwent a significant transformation following Alexander's unexpected demise in 323 BC. The region came under the governance of Ptolemy, a Macedonian military leader who had served as one of Alexander's closest confidants. This marked the beginning of the Ptolemaic dynasty, which would profoundly shape Egypt's cultural and religious landscape in the Centuries to come.

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<sup>231</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Ashton, S.-A. 2004. 'Ptolemaic Alexandria and the Egyptian Tradition', in A. Hirst and M. Silk (eds), *Alexandria, Real and Imagined*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 15–40; Delia, D. 1988. 'The Population of Roman Alexandria', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 118: 275–92; Empereur, J.-Y. 1998. *Alexandria Rediscovered*, trans. Margaret Maehler. New York: Braziller; Fraser, P. M. (1972). *Ptolemaic Alexandria*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Haas, C. 1997. *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; McKenzie, J. 2007. *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt c.300 BC to AD700*. New Haven: Yale University Press; Rowlandson, J., and A. Harker. 2004. 'Roman Alexandria from the Perspective of the Papyri', in A. Hirst and M. Silk (eds), *Alexandria, Real and Imagined*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 79–111;

<sup>232</sup> Pearson, B. (2006). Egypt. In M. M. Mitchell & F. M. Young (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (p.334). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The convergence of Greek, Egyptian, and later Roman influences in Alexandria created a unique intellectual and cultural milieu. This cosmopolitan environment would prove instrumental in the development and spread of early Christianity in Egypt, setting the stage for Alexandria to become one of the most important centers of Christian theology and scholarship in the ancient world.

The inception of Christianity in Egypt remains shrouded in mystery, with historical records providing no concrete evidence until the early Second Century AD. It is at this juncture that we begin to observe the emergence of Alexandrian Christian literature and the reflection of early Christian doctrines in various texts and testimonies.

While the Coptic Church traditionally attributes the establishment of the Alexandrian church to the apostle Mark, this claim, first documented in the fourth Century by Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.16), is regarded with considerable skepticism by modern scholars. Similarly, the narrative of Mark's cousin Barnabas engaging in Christian missionary activities in Alexandria, as recounted in the Pseudo-Clementine literature (*Homilies* 1.8.3-15.9), is also viewed as historically dubious.

Given the paucity of early evidence, historians have been compelled to extrapolate from Second-Century sources to understand the origins of Egyptian Christianity. One influential, albeit controversial, perspective is that of Walter Bauer<sup>233</sup>. He posits that the scarcity of early evidence may be attributed to suppression by ecclesiastical leaders, who were aware that the earliest form of Christianity in the region was "heretical," specifically "Gnostic." This hypothesis gains some credence from the fact that the earliest known Christian teachers active

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<sup>233</sup> Bauer, W., Kraft, R. A., Krodel, G., & Strecker, G. (1971). *Orthodoxy and heresy in earliest Christianity* (p. 135). Philadelphia: Fortress Press; McCue, J. F. (1979). *Orthodoxy and Heresy: Walter Bauer and the Valentinians*. *Vigiliae christianae*, 118-130; Decker, R. J. (2015). *The Bauer thesis: An overview*. *Orthodoxy and heresy in Early Christian contexts: Reconsidering the Bauer thesis*, 6-33; Robinson, T. A. (1985). *Orthodoxy and heresy in western Asia Minor in the first Christian century: a dialogical response to Walter Bauer* (Doctoral dissertation); Flora, J. R. (1972). *A critical analysis of Walter Bauer's theory of early Christian orthodoxy and heresy*. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Turner, H. E. W. (2004). *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

in early Second-Century Alexandria - Valentinus, Basilides and his son Isidore, and Carpocrates and his son Epiphanes - were later branded as "arch-heretics."

However, Bauer's theory faces criticism for its tendency to categorize early Alexandrian Christian literature, such as the Epistle of Barnabas and the fragmentary apocryphal works like the Gospel of the Hebrews and Gospel of the Egyptians, as "heretical" or "Gnostic." Furthermore, it overlooks significant sources like the Kerygma Petri, which does not align with Gnostic teachings.

An alternative and more widely accepted view has been proposed by papyrologist Colin Roberts<sup>234</sup>. Based on his analysis of the earliest Christian literary papyri, Roberts found no evidence to support Bauer's assertion that Gnosticism was the primary form of early Egyptian Christianity. Roberts' work on the nomina sacra - abbreviated forms of sacred names in Christian manuscripts - which he traces back to the Jerusalem church, led him to conclude that the earliest Christianity in Alexandria was fundamentally Jewish in nature.

Some scholars have suggested that the Jewish revolt of 115-117 AD resulted in the annihilation of primitive Christianity in Egypt, along with the broader Jewish community. According to this perspective, the Judaeo-Christianity that existed prior to 117 AD was supplanted by "pagan-Christian groups" that had refrained from participating in the revolt. While the revolt undoubtedly had significant implications for Egyptian Christians, the complete rupture proposed by this theory is questionable. The extant Second-Century evidence points to substantial continuities between Alexandrian Judaism and post-117 Alexandrian Christianity in terms of theology, lifestyle, and social organization.

This complex and nuanced understanding of early Egyptian Christianity underscores the need for careful interpretation of limited historical evidence and highlights the ongoing scholarly debates surrounding this crucial period in the development of the Christian faith.

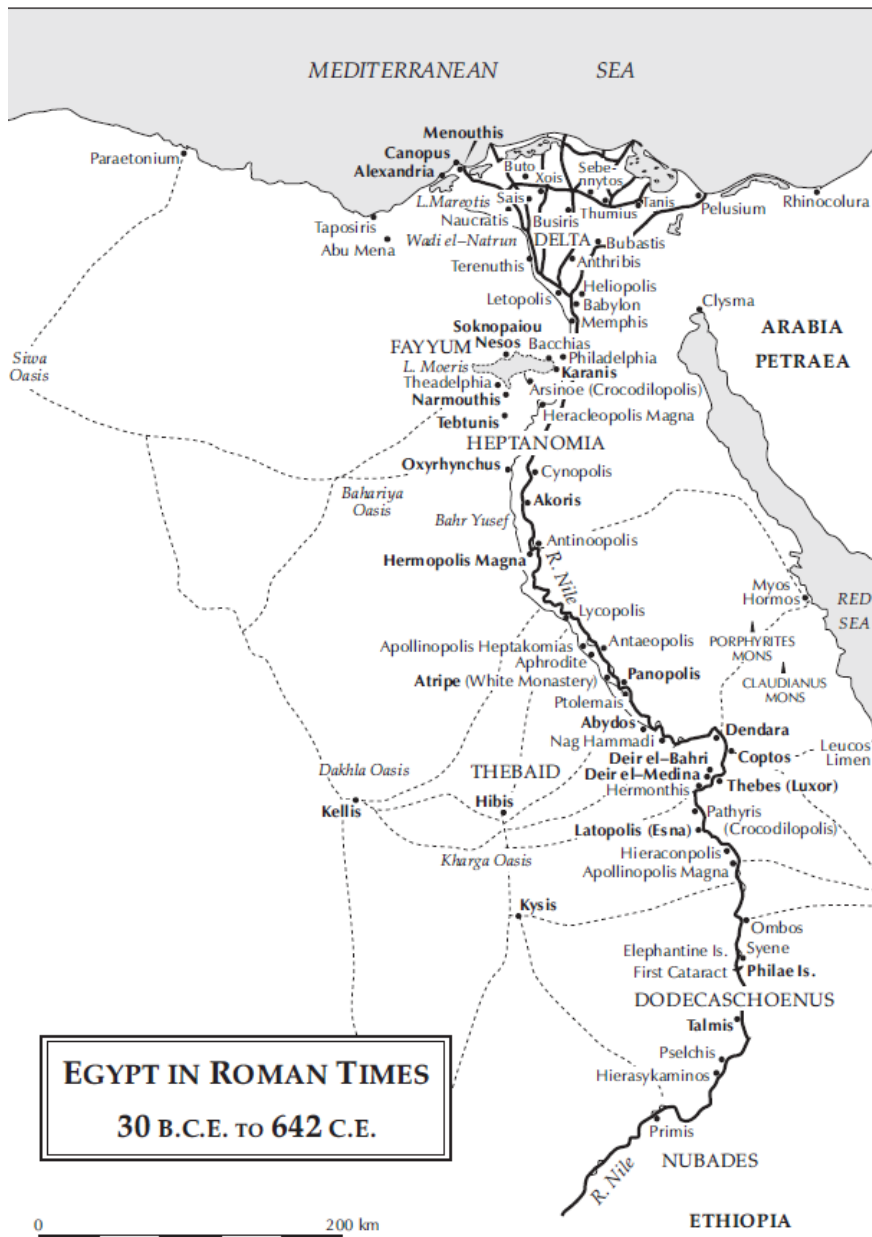
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<sup>234</sup> Roberts, C. H. (1979). *Manuscript, society and belief in early Christian Egypt*. Oxford Univ. Press.

6.2.1. Egyptian Religion in Late Antiquity

The reconstruction of religious practices in Roman-era Egypt relies on a diverse array of archaeological and textual evidence (Fig. 25).

Figure 25. Egypt in Roman Times, 30 BC to 642 AD. From Frankfurter, D. (2020). *Religion in Roman Egypt: assimilation and resistance*, p. 2



This multifaceted approach allows scholars to piece together a comprehensive picture of both popular and official religious life during this period.

One significant source of information comes from extensive collections of terra-cotta artifacts, including figurines, lamps, and jugs. These objects provide valuable insights into domestic religious practices and the deities that held particular significance in everyday life. Intriguingly, some of these forms and manufacturing techniques persisted into the Christian era, suggesting a degree of continuity in material culture despite religious changes.

Papyrological evidence offers a uniquely intimate glimpse into religious life, albeit often in a condensed or cryptic form. These documents reveal the day-to-day activities of priests, the preparations made by ordinary individuals for religious festivals, and the petitions of supplicants seeking divine guidance. The immediacy of these sources provides an unparalleled window into the lived experience of religion in Roman Egypt.

Epigraphic evidence, including both formal dedicatory inscriptions and informal graffiti, further enriches our understanding. These sources often document the extent of devotion to particular cults through records of structural dedications or votive offerings. A key advantage of epigraphic and papyrological evidence is the frequent inclusion of precise dates, allowing for accurate chronological placement of religious practices and developments.

The most comprehensive insights into localized religious life often come from caches or archives of papyri, particularly when these are found in conjunction with properly excavated archaeological sites. Several locations have proven especially fruitful in this regard. The Fayyum region, with sites such as Karanis, Soknopaiou Nesos, and Tebtunis, has yielded rich evidence of Egyptian cultural and religious practices. The city of Oxyrhynchus, with its vast and still-emerging papyrological corpus, continues to be a crucial source of information. Oasis towns like Kysis and

Kellis (the latter still under active investigation) have also provided significant material<sup>235</sup>.

Perhaps the most illuminating case study comes from the Upper Egyptian city of Panopolis. Its various papyrus archives offer detailed documentation of religious and priestly activities throughout the fourth Century AD. This wealth of information is further complemented by the subsequent writings of Shenoute of Atripe, a Fifth-Century abbot whose direct testimony provides invaluable insights into the religious landscape of late antique Egypt.

This multi-layered approach, combining material culture, textual sources, and archaeological context, allows for a nuanced reconstruction of Egyptian religious life under Roman rule, highlighting both continuities and changes in practices and beliefs over time.

The religious landscape of Egypt during Late Antiquity presents a complex and seemingly paradoxical picture, characterized by both the rapid establishment of Christianity in the fourth Century and the persistent, idiosyncratic nature of the country's religious transformation up to the Arab conquest. This nuanced reality challenges simplistic narratives of religious change and highlights the importance of careful interpretation of diverse evidence.

The fourth Century, following Constantine's embrace of Christianity, undoubtedly witnessed significant shifts in religious affiliation across the Roman Empire. However, the concept of "conversion" in this context requires careful consideration. Nevertheless, onomastic evidence from papyri dating to this period reveals a notable increase in the use of biblical and Christian names for children by

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<sup>235</sup> Frankfurter, D. (2020). Religion in Roman Egypt: assimilation and resistance, pp.31-32; Rees, B. R. (1950). Popular Religion in Graeco-Roman Egypt: II. The Transition to Christianity. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 36(1), 86-100; Bagnall, R. S. (2009). *Early Christian Books in Egypt*. Princeton University Press; Bell, H. I. (1944). Evidences of Christianity in Egypt during the Roman period. *Harvard Theological Review*, 37(3), 185-208; Bagnall, R. S. (2003). Later Roman Egypt. *Society, Religion, Economy and Administration*; Capponi, L. (2011). *Roman Egypt* (Vol. 34). A&C Black; Bagnall, R. S. (2008). Models and evidence in the study of religion in late Roman Egypt. *From Temple to Church*, 274-90; Kloppenborg, J. S. (2020). *Ptolemaic and Early Roman Egypt* (Vol. 246). Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.

the Century's end<sup>236</sup>. This trend appears to corroborate the general narrative of Christianity's "triumph" during this era.

Yet, to accurately assess the broader religious landscape, one must juxtapose these naming practices against the substantial and varied evidence for the continuation of indigenous cultic practices well into the Fifth Century and beyond. This persistence of traditional religious forms complicates any straightforward narrative of Christianization.

A comprehensive examination of archaeological and literary evidence from the eastern Mediterranean region reveals that indigenous religions maintained considerable appeal in many areas, often persisting up to and sometimes beyond the Muslim conquest.

Egypt, despite offering the most extensive documentation on the antiquity, spread, subcultures, and political establishment of Christianity in a single territory from the First Century onwards, presents a similar picture of enduring native cults. The geographical distribution of these persistent traditional cultic centers, when mapped, spans virtually every major region of Egypt. This widespread continuation of indigenous religious practices strongly suggests the resilience of even more undocumented temples and cults.

This evidence underscores the complexity of religious change in Late Antique Egypt. It reveals a landscape where emerging Christianity coexisted with tenacious traditional practices, forming a religious palimpsest that defies simplistic characterizations. The persistence of indigenous cults alongside the growth of Christianity highlights the multifaceted nature of religious identity and practice during this transformative period.

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<sup>236</sup> Bagnall, R. S. (1982). Religious conversion and onomastic change in early Byzantine Egypt. *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, 19(3/4), 105–124; Bagnall, R. S. (1987). Conversion and Onomastics: A Reply. *Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie Und Epigraphik*, 69, 243–250; van Minnen, P. (1994). The Roots of Egyptian Christianity. *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete*, 40(1), 71–86; Wipszycka, Ewa. 'La christianisation de l'Égypte aux IVe–VIe siècles. Aspects sociaux et ethniques', *Aegyptus* 68 (1988): 117–65.

The initial substantial evidence of individuals adopting a Christian identity can be observed in nomenclature patterns<sup>237</sup>. Papyrological records from various Egyptian urban centers, including Karanis, Hermopolis, Dionysias, and Arsinoe, indicate that by the Second half of the Fourth Century AD, a considerable number of parents were selecting names for their offspring that reflected biblical and gospel figures (such as Elias, Maria, and Paul) rather than traditional Egyptian deities. Additionally, there was a notable increase in the use of names associated with a seemingly monotheistic deity<sup>238</sup>. It is crucial to contextualize the evidence of Christian-influenced naming practices in certain Egyptian cities with equally compelling data from other regions of Egypt. This data demonstrates the persistence of local temple cults and their associated traditional rituals, including festival processions, celebrations, various forms of divination, the ritualistic opening and closing of portable shrines containing sacred images, the continuation of Nile-related devotions, and the distribution of amulets and divine blessings.

Despite the reduced scale of many cults following the economic turmoil of the Third Century, traditional Egyptian religious practices continued to elicit fervent popular devotion. This is evident in the *proskynēmata*, or devotional inscriptions, found on prominent areas of temple walls. These inscriptions, predominantly in Greek, ranged from elaborate, metrical compositions to simple name dedications such as "Sansnos" or "Panouchem, son of Tabolbolou."

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<sup>237</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Depauw, M., & Clarysse, W. (2013). How Christian was fourth century Egypt? Onomastic perspectives on conversion. *Vigiliae Christianae*, 67(4), 407-435; Bagnall, R. S. (1982). Religious conversion and onomastic change in early Byzantine Egypt. *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, 19(3/4), 105-124; Frankfurter, D. (2014). Onomastic statistics and the Christianization of Egypt: A response to Depauw and Clarysse. *Vigiliae Christianae*, 68(3), 284-289; Nobbs, A. (2022). What's in a Name? Papyrus Evidence for Christian Female Onomastic Practice in Egypt during the Period of Christianisation to the Early Byzantine Period. In *Byzantium to China: Religion, History and Culture on the Silk Roads* (pp. 369-380). Brill; Depauw, M., & Clarysse, W. (2015). Christian onomastics: a response to Frankfurter. *Vigiliae Christianae*, 69(3), 327-329.

<sup>238</sup> Frankfurter, D. (2007). Christianity and paganism, I: Egypt. In A. Casiday & F. W. Norris (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (pp. 173–188). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 175.

Notable examples of enduring traditional cults include the worship of Bes, an ancient fertility deity, which attracted pilgrims from across the Mediterranean to Abydos as late as the mid-fourth Century. Similarly, the cult of Isis the Healer at Menouthis, near Alexandria, continued to promise divine favors and oneiromantic revelations until at least 489 AD. At Philae, on Egypt's southern frontier, public devotions to Isis persisted well into the Sixth Century, coexisting with a small Christian cult in the same precinct for several Centuries.

These well-documented centers of ongoing Egyptian religious practice not only suggest the existence of other, more localized cults but also underscore the fundamentally non-uniform nature of religious transformation across Egypt. This evidence highlights the complex and varied landscape of religious change in late antique Egypt, where traditional practices and emerging Christian identities coexisted and interacted in diverse ways across different regions and communities.

### 6.2.2. Egyptian Cults

The role of religion in the late antique Mediterranean world extended beyond mere belief systems, serving as a framework for identifying and harnessing supernatural forces for practical purposes. These purposes encompassed a range of everyday concerns, including health, safety, success, and the mitigation of social tensions. In Egypt, as in other regions of antiquity, local cults and ritual specialists had long addressed these needs through various means, such as the creation of amulets, the issuance of divine decrees, the use of specialized iconography, and the performance of specific rituals.

The concept of efficacious 'blessing' and its sources, along with the reverence for sacred landscapes, constituted significant aspects of Egyptian religious practice. These elements presented particular challenges for Christian monks, bishops, and ecclesiastical writers as they sought to establish and propagate their faith. In response, Christian authors often constructed a narrative of a pernicious Egyptian 'magic' as a foil to Christian ritual power. This characterization drew heavily on classical stereotypes of Egypt as a land teeming with sorcerers and mystical practices.

The polemics against Egyptian ritual practices employed by Christian writers were overt in their criticism. Such portrayals served to emphasize the perceived

superiority of Christian rituals and beliefs while simultaneously othering and delegitimizing traditional Egyptian religious practices.

This complex interplay between traditional practices and emerging Christian narratives highlights the multifaceted nature of religious transformation in late antique Egypt. It underscores the ongoing negotiation between established belief systems and new religious ideologies, as well as the strategies employed by Christian authorities to assert their spiritual and cultural dominance in a religiously diverse landscape.

The traditional scholarly perspective on Egyptian religion often posited a stark dichotomy between sacred and profane realms, with the former being rigorously demarcated and isolated from the latter. This view was largely predicated on the observation that numerous significant religious activities—such as the adorning and procession of divine images, the presentation of offerings, and the recitation of prayers and imprecations, were conducted within precincts accessible only to *waab* (ritually "pure") priests. This apparent segregation led some historians to postulate that popular religious expression, if it existed at all, occurred in an entirely separate sphere. Conversely, others concluded that these restricted rites were so intrinsic to Egyptian religion that their cessation (or the economic decline of temples) would render religious practice untenable.

However, evidence has long existed suggesting a vibrant popular piety surrounding Egyptian temples. This interaction manifested not only in ritual contexts but also in social (through festivals and associations) and economic (via patronage) dimensions.

The emerging portrait of Egyptian religion reveals communities that were substantially responsible for their own religious practices and expressions of piety. While the populace would undoubtedly have felt the impact of a cessation in official festival processions featuring the god's image through urban thoroughfares, their "active" piety allowed for considerable autonomy. This autonomy enabled communities to perpetuate life-affirming rites and traditions, adapt or scale back major communal rituals, or identify new focal points for devotional activities.

This nuanced understanding challenges simplistic notions of a rigidly stratified Egyptian religious landscape. Instead, it presents a more complex picture of religious life in Roman Egypt, characterized by a dynamic interplay between

institutional and popular forms of piety, and demonstrating the resilience and adaptability of religious practices in the face of changing social, economic, and political circumstances<sup>239</sup>.

The rituals associated with the Nile's annual inundation exhibit a distinct pattern of continuity, one that diverges from the resilience of traditional temple religion. This persistence is primarily rooted in a popular ritual tradition so inextricably linked to the rhythms of the agricultural cycle that it defied alteration by priestly, imperial, or even Christian institutions, maintaining its profound cultural significance throughout various periods of Egyptian history.

In a society where economic prosperity was fundamentally tied to the river's annual flood, Egyptians along the entire length of the Nile valley had long symbolized their connection to this vital phenomenon through a diverse array of rituals. These ceremonies, crucial for ensuring fertility and success, can be broadly categorized into two types: anticipatory rites and celebratory observances<sup>240</sup>.

The anticipatory rites, consisting of invocations and appeals, were timed according to astronomical calculations, reflecting the Egyptian mastery of celestial observations and their application to agricultural planning. In contrast, the celebratory rituals were more fluid in their timing, triggered when the Nile reached

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<sup>239</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Bagnall, R. S. (1996). *Egypt in late antiquity*. Princeton University Press; Montevecchi, O. (1997). [Review of *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, by R. S. Bagnall]. *Aegyptus*, 77(1/2), 149–153; Ruffini, G. (2018). Late antiquity. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 1(1); Thomas, T. K. (2010). Egyptian Art of Late Antiquity. *A Companion to Ancient Egypt*, 2, 1032–1063; Choat, M. (2009). Language and culture in late antique Egypt. *A companion to Late Antiquity*, 342–356; Heinen, H. (1999). [Review of *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, by R. S. Bagnall]. *Gnomon*, 71(8), 685–688; Wilson, P. (2016). Human and deltaic environments in northern Egypt in late antiquity. *Late Antique Archaeology*, 12(1), 42–62; Mikhail, M. S. (2004). *Egypt from late antiquity to early Islam: Copts, Melkites, and Muslims shaping a new society*. University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>240</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Teeter, E. (2011). *Religion and ritual in ancient Egypt*. Cambridge University Press; Oestigaard, T. (2018). *The religious Nile: Water, ritual and society since ancient Egypt*. Bloomsbury Publishing; Oestigaard, T. (2009). Christianity and Islam as Nile religions in Egypt: Syncretism and continuity. *Water, Culture and Identity*, 141; Cortese, D. (2015). The Nile: Its Role in the Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Fatimid Dynasty During its Rule of Egypt (969–1171). *History Compass*, 13(1), 20–29; Spence, L. (2007). *The Mysteries of Egypt: Secret Rites and Traditions of the Nile*. Cosimo, Inc.

a specific height or gave its "sign" - a phenomenon that gave rise to the festival's Roman-era designation as *sēmasia*.

While Roman observers often interpreted this widespread reverence for the Nile as evidence of a unified national religion, a closer examination reveals significant regional and local variations in these practices. The primary distinctions lay in the identity of the deity believed responsible for invoking the flood or from whose powers the Nile was seen as an extension. Additionally, the extent to which the king was celebrated in connection with the Nile varied across different locales and historical periods.

These variations underscore the complex interplay between institutionalized temple religion and popular traditions. Throughout much of Egyptian history, there was an ongoing process whereby temples appropriated and centralized local, popular traditions within their precincts. This assimilation is evident in our earliest documentation of Nile cults, which primarily derives from temple sources.

For instance, popular appeals for the inundation were gradually systematized as a function of the temple deity. This transformation culminated in annual processions where the god would be ceremonially escorted to the bank of the Nile to make a formal appeal, often with great pomp and circumstance. This ritual evolution represents a focusing and elevation of popular sentiment, channeling it through the established religious institutions.

This process of appropriation and centralization, however, did not entirely supplant local traditions. Instead, it created a layered religious landscape where official temple rituals coexisted with and drew upon persistent popular practices. This dynamic relationship between institutional and popular religion contributed to the remarkable longevity of Nile-related rituals, allowing them to adapt to changing political and religious contexts while maintaining their essential cultural significance.

The endurance of these Nile-centric rituals, even in the face of significant cultural and religious shifts, attests to their deep roots in Egyptian society. It highlights the capacity of popular religious traditions to persist and evolve, often outlasting the formal religious structures that sought to incorporate them. This resilience underscores the fundamental importance of the Nile in Egyptian life and

thought, transcending changes in official religion and political authority to remain a constant feature of Egyptian cultural identity<sup>241</sup>.

In the Dakhla oasis, situated over two hundred kilometers west of the Nile, temple inscriptions continued to extol the Nile's inundation and its fecundity-inducing powers as the source of local irrigation. This practice demonstrates the far-reaching influence of Nile-centric religious beliefs, extending well beyond the immediate vicinity of the river itself<sup>242</sup>.

The process of incorporating and formalizing popular traditions within institutional religious frameworks is a widely observed phenomenon in religious history. Indeed, this practice is fundamental to the role and function of priesthoods across various cultures and time periods. In the Egyptian context, this systematization of folk beliefs and practices is particularly evident in the construction of Nilometers within temple precincts.

Nilometers, structures designed to measure the Nile's water levels, served both practical and symbolic functions. Their placement within sacred spaces underscores the intertwining of empirical observation with religious significance. This integration exemplifies how Egyptian priesthoods adeptly merged popular

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<sup>241</sup> Frankfurter, David (1998). *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*. Princeton University Press, p. 42.

<sup>242</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Morenz, S. (1973). *Egyptian Religion* (A.E. Keep, Trans.; 1st ed.). Routledge; Bonneau, D. (1964). *La Crue du Nil: divinité égyptienne à travers mille ans d'histoire (332 av.-641 ap. J.-C.); d'après les auteurs grecs et latins, et les documents des époques ptolémaïque, romaine et byzantine*. *Études et commentaires*, 5200; Bonneau, D. (1971). *Le fisc et le Nil: incidences des irrégularités de la crue du Nil sur la fiscalité foncière dans l'Égypte grecque et romaine*; Kaper, O. E. (1997). *Temples and Gods in Roman Dakhleh: Studies in the indigenous cults of an Egyptian Oasis*; Brookes, I. A. (1993). *Geomorphology and Quaternary geology of the Dakhla Oasis region, Egypt*. *Quaternary Science Reviews*, 12(7), 529-552; Kucera, P. (2012). *Al-Qasr: the Roman castrum of Dakhleh oasis*. *The Oasis Paper*, 6, 305-316; Minas-Nerpel, M. (2007). *A demotic inscribed icosahedron from Dakhleh Oasis*. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 93(1), 137-148; Kaper, O. E. (2012). *Epigraphic evidence from the Dakhleh Oasis in the Late Period*. In *The Oasis Papers 6: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference of the Dakhleh Oasis Project*, Oxbow Books, Oxford (pp. 167-76); E. Kaper, Olaf (1991). *The god Tutu (Tithoes) and his temple in the Dakhleh Oasis*. Macquarie University. Journal contribution; Tedeschi, G. (2011). *Intrattenimenti e spettacoli nell'Egitto ellenistico-romano*. EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste.

concerns about agricultural productivity with official religious practices, thereby reinforcing their authority and relevance to the broader population.

This phenomenon illustrates the dynamic nature of Egyptian religion, where popular beliefs and institutional practices were not rigidly separated but rather existed in a state of continuous interaction and mutual influence. The priesthood's ability to assimilate and elevate local traditions within the framework of official cult practices contributed to the longevity and resilience of Egyptian religious institutions, allowing them to maintain relevance and authority even as they adapted to changing social and environmental conditions.

#### 6.2.2.1. *Temple Festivals*

The religious festival in Roman Egypt provides particularly significant insights into the life of indigenous religion, as it is during these festivals that the temple and the surrounding social and physical environment engage in a more intimate interaction. This interaction is marked, on one side, by the public display of the gods' images outside the temple, and on the other, by the audience's fervent engagement with the temple, its symbols, and its officials.

Historically, the Egyptian religious festival is fundamentally characterized by the public presentation of a divine image, usually kept and ritually maintained within the temple by priests, and its procession along a traditional route, often accompanied by ritual chants and acclamations<sup>243</sup>. However, it is crucial to consider the festival in its wider context, including comparative examples from other cultures, such as the processions of saints in rural Christian practices. Cross-culturally, festivals often serve similar functions: they display symbols that define a specific locale, region, or broader social group; they reassert and celebrate social solidarity through enthusiastic participation; they reconfigure social and cosmic order through rituals that symbolize or enact disorder; they structure social time

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<sup>243</sup> Fairman, H.W. (1954). Worship and festivals in an Egyptian temple. *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 37, pp. 182-203; BLEEKER, C. (1967). Egyptian Festivals, Enactments of Religious Renewal (Suppl. to *Numen* 13); Alston, R. (1996). (F.) Perpillou-Thomas *Fêtes d'Égypte ptolémaïque et romaine d'après la documentation papyrologique grecque*. Louvain: Studia Hellenistica, 1993. Pp. xxix + 293. Fr. b. 1600. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 116, 222–223.

by aligning with a festival calendar; they sanctify the natural (e.g., agricultural) cycle by connecting it with mythology; they integrate overarching priestly traditions with local customs and experiences; they provide a tangible means of dispensing power for personal and domestic needs through divine images, priests' gestures and prayers, and substances dispersed during the procession; and they offer a safe or auspicious moment for personal encounters with deities or spirits<sup>244</sup>.

### 6.2.3. Pagan cults in Late Antiquity

The archaeological record and papyrological evidence provide scholars with substantial insights into the varied domestic configurations prevalent in Egypt during Late Antiquity. These sources also illuminate recurring patterns that potentially influenced religious customs and ritual practices. The household, encompassing its physical structure and occupants, served as a fundamental locus of social interaction. Research has consistently recognized the home as an environment where familial identity is shaped and perpetuated across generations through established routines and traditions. Moreover, the domestic sphere functioned as a space for delineating and manifesting gender roles, social stratification, status distinctions, and economic activities—often reflected in the very layout and partitioning of living spaces.

The domestic realm and its environs were rich with narratives and artifacts that underscored the vitality and significance of religious practices and concerns. These manifestations, exemplified by figurines, magical texts, and hagiographies, often reflected deep-seated anxieties about successful childbearing and infant survival. Such preoccupations can be contextualized within the patrilocal household structure, where young wives found themselves subject to their mothers-in-law's authority. Hagiographical accounts and miracle narratives

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<sup>244</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Bleeker, C. J. (1967). Egyptian festivals. In *Studies in Egyptian Religion, Dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee* (pp. 27-50). Brill; Abdennour, S. (2007). *Egyptian customs and festivals* (Vol. 3). Oxford University Press; Anwar, H. E. D. (2019). The Religious Festivals in Ancient Egypt. *Egyptian Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*, 26(2), 1-22; McPherson, J. W. (2023). *The Moulids of Egypt: Egyptian Saint's Day Festivals*. Gingko Library; Frankfort, H. (1952). State festivals in Egypt and Mesopotamia. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 15(1-2), 1-12.

frequently depict women journeying to sacred sites in pursuit of fertility, highlighting the intrinsic link between a woman's social standing, familial prosperity, and reproductive success<sup>245</sup>. The concept of the domestic sphere, as construed here, encompasses not only the immediate household but also the various locales family members visited to ensure the safety, harmony, and continuity of their lineage. These sites ranged from saints' shrines to revered local ruins imbued with supernatural significance.

One particular text associated with the shrine of St. Menas indicates that the festival of the Virgin was considered an opportune time for such supplication. Another account describes a woman, plagued by a deaf-mute son and subsequent miscarriages, being advised to spend the night at the shrine of the Three Hebrew Youths in Alexandria during their mystical arrival—a time when malevolent spirits were thought to be banished.

The home itself was conceptualized as a complex system of protective boundaries, vulnerable to supernatural intrusion that could jeopardize familial well-being. Archaeological evidence from the broader Roman and late antique Mediterranean region reveals the widespread use of apotropaic symbols, images, and inscriptions to safeguard domestic thresholds. Conversely, those seeking to exert control over others would strategically place power objects or charms at the entrances and paths leading to their targets' dwellings, as instructed in certain spells<sup>246</sup>.

The religious landscape of Egypt during the Greco-Roman period was characterized by a complex interweaving of Greek, Roman, and traditional Egyptian beliefs. This syncretic process gave rise to new deities such as Serapis and Hermecate, who became prominent figures in magical practices and spells, as evidenced by papyrological records. Despite this cultural fusion, Roman authorities, beginning with Augustus, actively supported the continuation of Egyptian religious traditions. This is exemplified by the completion of the

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<sup>245</sup> Behlmer, Heike. "Women and the Holy in Coptic Hagiography" In *Actes du huitieme congres international d'études coptes*, edited by N. Bosson and A. Boud'hors, 2:405-16. Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2007.

<sup>246</sup> Frankfurter, D. (2018). *Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity*. Princeton University Press, pp. 39-40.

ambitious dual sanctuary of Sobek and Horus the Great at Kom Ombo, initiated during the Ptolemaic era and finalized under the Roman emperors Macrinus and Diadumenianus in 218 AD<sup>247</sup>.

Local deities maintained significant influence, as demonstrated by the prevalence of theophoric names in various regions. In the Panopolis area, for instance, many children from elite families bore names associated with the local goddess Triphis, either in Greek (Triphodoros) or Egyptian (Petetripis). These naming practices often reflected ritual circumstances surrounding conception or invoked local protective deities for children.

The persistence of traditional cults is further evidenced by the dedication of small temples to the god Montu in the Theban region under Antoninus Pius, which continued at least until the late Third Century. Moreover, an archaic cult of the deity Min, sometimes identified with the Greek Pan, survived into the Fifth Century<sup>248</sup>.

The Nubian god *Mandulis* exemplifies the cross-cultural appeal of certain deities<sup>249</sup>. His temple at Talmis attracted both Greek and Roman pilgrims, maintaining an oracular function for incubation rituals until the Third Century and continuing in use until the Fifth Century. The significance of Mandulis dates back to the efforts of Ptolemy Philadelphus and later Augustus to establish common sacred sites for military personnel and the nomadic tribes they were tasked with controlling.

Protective deities closely associated with agricultural life and common people's concerns formed an important part of the religious milieu. This included apotropaic deities common throughout the Mediterranean. Seth, a figure with both

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<sup>247</sup> See Sartre, M. (1994). *El Oriente Romano. Provincias y Sociedades Provinciales del Mediterráneo Oriental, de Augusto a los Severos (31 a. C. - 235 d. C.)*. Madrid, p. 542.

<sup>248</sup> Baumgartel, E. J. (1947). Herodotus on Min. *Antiquity* 21.83, 145-150; Weeks, N.K. (1997). Herodotus and Egypt: discerning the native tradition in Book II. *Ancient Society* 7 (1), (25-34).

<sup>249</sup> Nock, A. D. (1972). A Vision of Mandulis Aion. En S. Zeph (Ed.), *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World. 2 vols.* (356-400). Oxford. Clarendon ; Potter, D. (2016). Mandulis. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Classics*; Metwally, I., Elelemi, F., & Shelaih, R. M. (2022). Solar Aspects of Child Gods During the Greco-Roman Period in Egypt. *Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism and Hospitality*.

positive and negative associations in Egyptian religion, maintained a significant presence. His cult is attested in Ombos, the western oases, and the northeastern Nile Delta. In the Dakhla Oasis, Seth was venerated as a protector and fertility god, while in Kellis, a graffito depicts him as a winged figure piercing a serpent<sup>250</sup>.

Tutu, celebrated as the vanquisher of Apophis (the traditional enemy of the sun and cosmic order), was represented on apotropaic stelae, temple reliefs, amulets, and coins, often in sphinx form. His gaze, unusually directed at the viewer, was believed to repel evil forces. Tutu was particularly associated with maternal fertility in Roman Egypt<sup>251</sup>.

The deity Petbe-Nemesis featured prominently in Egyptian names and festivals of the Roman period, with Coptic invocations persisting from the Fifth to seventh Centuries<sup>252</sup>. Domestic deities like Bes and Taweret, represented by statuettes in wall niches, were connected to aspects of daily life. These domestic cults were likely linked to practices in local temples, forming a key mechanism for the survival and propagation of traditional beliefs.

The Coptic narrative of the fall of the temple of Kothos, found in the *Panegyric on Macarius of Tkow*, provides valuable insight into the popular defense of local temples against Christianization attempts, attesting to the continuity of traditional domestic cults into the Fifth Century<sup>253</sup>.

<sup>250</sup> Capart, J. (1946). Contribution à l'iconographie du dieu Seth. *Chronique d'Égypte* (29-31); Wagner, G., *Les oasis d'Égypte à l'époque grecque, romaine et byzantine d'après les documents grecs*, Bibliothèque d'étude 100, Cairo: IFAO.

<sup>251</sup> Frankfurter D. (1998), *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*, Princeton University Press 1998, pp. 115-116.

<sup>252</sup> Collection Lange, ed. Lange 1932:162–63, in M. Marvin y R. Smith (Eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*. San Francisco. Harper 1994. In Frankfurter D. (1998), *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*. Princeton University Press, pp. 134-135, 313.

<sup>253</sup> *Panegirico* 5.5, 1:31-32, 2:24. In Johnson D.W. *A Panegyric on Macarius, Bishop of Tkôw, Attributed to Dioscorus of Alexandria*. 2 Vols. CSCO pp. 415-16, S. Coptici pp. 41-42. Louvaian Secrétariat du CSCO, 1980 ; Frankfurter, D. (2007). the cult of kothos. *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity: Language, Literature, and Social Context: Essays in Honor of David W. Johnson*, 176; Shoucri, R. M. (2017). *The Egyptian Roots of Egyptian Monasticism and Its*

Terracotta figurines, often found in domestic contexts, frequently depicted deities such as Harpocrates, a youthful form of Horus distinct from the royal or warrior Horus. Harpocrates was associated with field fertility, protection of herds, and family welfare. By the early Second Century, this deity also held social significance, as evidenced by festivals in the Fayyum region<sup>254</sup>.

Certain Egyptian cities evolved into pilgrimage centers, attracting those seeking wisdom, divine revelations, healing, or esoteric knowledge, further illustrating the enduring appeal of traditional religious practices in late antique Egypt<sup>255</sup>.

### 6.3. AFRICA

Prior to the advent of Christianity, Africa's cultural landscape was shaped by a diverse array of peoples. Ancient coastal inhabitants, referred to as Libyans in Greek historical accounts, left their mark through inscriptions dating as late as the Second Century AD and influenced the languages of the Tuareg. Archaeological evidence indicates trade relations between these Libyans and both Egyptian and Greek civilizations. The highland Numidians, later known as Berbers from the eighth Century onwards, feature in Punic mythology surrounding Dido's founding of Carthage, and their language continues to evolve and persist in modern times.

Around 1100 BC, Phoenician traders specializing in luxury goods established small coastal settlements, culminating in the founding of Carthage circa 814 BC. This city-state became the epicenter of a hybrid Libyco-Punic culture, with its

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Impact on Christian Monasticism. *Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies*, 9; Ritner, R. K. (2021). The God Kothos. *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete*, 67(1), 138-145.

<sup>254</sup> In *Harpocrateia* in Françoise, P-T. (1993). Fêtes d'Égypte ptolémaïque et romaine d'après la documentation papyrologique grecque. *Studia Hellenistica* 31 (88-89). Louvain. *Studia Hellenistica*. In Frankfurter, D. (1998), *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*. Princeton University Press, p.149; Abdel-Aziz, H. (1995). Ithyphallic Harpocrates in Graeco-Egyptian magic. In *Alessandria e il mondo ellenistico-romano: 1. centenario del Museo greco-romano: Alessandria, 23-27 novembre 1992: atti del 2. Congresso internazionale italo-egiziano* (pp. 9-11). "L'Erma" di Bretschneider.

<sup>255</sup> Frankfurter, D. (1998). *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*. Princeton University Press, pp. 97-144

economy rooted in trade, agriculture, and craftsmanship in glass and metals. Carthage's political structure was oligarchic, governed by wealthy and accomplished elders, though the general populace's influence grew over time. While trade with Greece continued, the expanding Phoenician commercial network gradually dominated the western Mediterranean, absorbing Greek colonies and eventually leading to conflict with Rome<sup>256</sup>. Following the Punic Wars (264-146 BC), Rome assumed control of Carthage and its surrounding territories in northeast Tunisia, administering it as a praetorian province that supplied grain to the Roman capital. In 67 BC, Rome incorporated Cyrene into its African holdings, and in 46 BC, annexed Juba I's Mauretania, merging their existing African territory (Africa Vetus) with this new acquisition (Africa Nova) into a single proconsular province.

Initially, civil unrest and the need to secure Rome's grain supply motivated the consolidation of these territories. However, in 42 BC, the western region was divided into two imperial provinces: Mauretania Caesariensis and Mauretania Tingitana. In 25 BC, the eastern part, Caesariensis, was granted to Juba II to govern. Raised in Rome, Juba introduced Roman culture to his ancestral lands. Tingitana, the western sector, hosted one of the empire's largest concentrations of Roman troops, and while few Roman cities were established there, many local recruits followed their fathers into military service.

The ascension of the Severan dynasty, of African origin, at the beginning of the Second Century AD brought about further administrative changes. Drawing on their local knowledge, they separated Numidia from Africa Proconsularis. Under Diocletian's rule, Proconsularis and Cyrene were divided into three provinces - Africa, Byzacena, and Tripolitana - while Numidia was split into Numidia Cirtensis, Sitifensis, and Militiana. Tingitana was incorporated into Hispania.

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<sup>256</sup> Tilley, M. (2006). North Africa. In M. M. Mitchell & F. M. Young (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (pp. 382-383). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

These administrative reorganizations facilitated Romanization and improved management of the ill-defined frontiers, as various tribes such as the Maures, Baquates, and Gaetuli pushed northwards<sup>257</sup>.

The documentary evidence for early Christianity in North Africa during the first three Centuries AD is primarily derived from the works of several prominent figures: Tertullian (c.160–c.225 AD) Minucius Felix (active in the Second or Third Century), Cyprian (d. 258), Commodian (flourished mid-Third Century), and Pseudo-Cyprian (post-258)<sup>258</sup>. Additionally, various homilies and martyrdom accounts contribute to this body of literature. These sources provide insights into the beliefs, organizational structures, and practices of the early Christian

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<sup>257</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Shaw, B. (1981). Rural markets in North Africa and the political economy of the Roman Empire. *Antiquités africaines*, 17(1), 37-83; Millar, F. (1968). Local Cultures in the Roman Empire: Libyan, Punic and Latin in Roman Africa. *The journal of roman studies*, 58(1-2), 126-134; Stone, D. L. (2014). Africa in the Roman Empire: connectivity, the economy, and artificial port structures. *American Journal of Archaeology*, 118(4), 565-600; McLaughlin, R. (2014). *The Roman Empire and the Indian Ocean: The ancient world economy and the kingdoms of Africa, Arabia and India*. Pen and Sword; Mattingly, D. J., & Hitchner, R. B. (1995). Roman Africa: an archaeological review. *The journal of roman studies*, 85, 165-213; Adolph F. Pauli. (1935). [Review of *The Romanization of Africa Proconsularis*, by T. R. S. Broughton]. *The Classical Weekly*, 29(2), 13–15.

<sup>258</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Brown, P. (1968). Christianity and local culture in late Roman Africa. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 58(1-2), 85-95; Bass, A. (2021). Contemporary historiography on christianity in Roman Africa. *Revista de historiografia*: 36, 2, 2021, 341-358; Gifford, P. (1999). AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present. By ELIZABETH ISICHEI. London: SPCK, 1995. Pp. xi+ 420.£ 25, paperback (ISBN 0-281-04764-2). *The Journal of African History*, 40(2), 297-350; Isichei, E. (2022). Christianity, Historiography in Africa. In *Encyclopedia of African Religions and Philosophy* (pp. 115-117). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands; Cabrita, J. (2018). Christian history and historiography. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*. Bongmba, E. K. (2016). Writing African Christianity: Perspectives from the History of the Historiography of African Christianity. *Religion and Theology*, 23(3-4), 275-312; Etherington, N. (1996). Recent trends in the historiography of Christianity in Southern Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22(2), 201-219; Hitchner, R. B. (2022). The Historiography of North Africa in Antiquity: An Overview. *A Companion to North Africa in Antiquity*, 1-8, Oden, T. C. (2010). *How Africa shaped the Christian mind: Rediscovering the African seedbed of western Christianity*. InterVarsity Press. Walls, A. F. (1996). African Christianity in the history of religions. *Studies in world Christianity*, 2(2), 183-203; Maxwell, D. (1997). New perspectives on the history of African Christianity. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23(1), 141-148.

communities in the region. While North Africa boasts numerous archaeological sites, none offer direct physical evidence of Christianity's formative years in the region. Even Carthage, a significant center of early Christianity, lacks archaeological remains predating the Fourth Century AD.

Unlike other early Christian communities, such as Alexandria with its association to Mark or India's connection to Thomas, North African Christianity did not claim a founding apostle. While there was significant respect for the Christian community in Rome, there is no tradition suggesting a Roman origin for North African Christianity. Instead, the distinctive practices of African Christianity point towards alternative origins.

Many scholars posit a connection between early North African Christianity and the Jewish communities in and around Carthage. This hypothesis is supported by several pieces of evidence: Hebraisms present in their Latin Bible translation, Tertullian's familiarity with oral traditions later codified in the Talmud and Mishnah, and the interment of both Jews and Christian Jews in the Gamart cemetery.

Furthermore, North African Christianity exhibits characteristics associated with the 'Jewish Christianity' of the early Centuries. These include: the continued normative treatment of the apostolic decree from Acts 15:19-20 as late as the times of Tertullian and Minucius Felix; Tertullian's awareness that Jews referred to Christians as Nazarenes, a heretical sect; the angel-Christology found in pseudo-Cyprian's *De centesima*; and the observance of certain Jewish festivals by Christians as late as 436 AD, as evidenced by the Fourth Council of Carthage.

The governance structure of local churches, overseen by a board of elders known as *seniores laici* ('lay elders'), bears similarities to Jewish congregational organization or possibly to the Punic suffetes. While the cumulative evidence is not definitive, it presents a compelling case that places the onus on those proposing alternative explanations, such as attributing these characteristics to a general Semitic or Punic cultural influence, to provide substantive counter-arguments<sup>259</sup>.

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<sup>259</sup> Tilley, M. (2006). North Africa. In M. M. Mitchell & F. M. Young (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (pp. 386). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This unique blend of influences and practices in North African Christianity underscores the complex cultural and religious landscape of the region during the early Centuries of the Common Era, and highlights the need for nuanced analysis in understanding the origins and development of Christianity in this area.

The earliest written record referencing Christians in North Africa is the *Martyrum Scillitanorum acta*, dating from approximately 180 AD. Its composition in Latin is likely attributed to its origin as a court document. However, this does not necessarily reflect the linguistic practices of the early African Christian community.

Evidence suggests that Greek was the primary language of the initial African Christian groups. This linguistic preference may indicate origins within Greek-speaking diaspora communities, possibly connected to Jewish traders. The prevalence of Greek is further substantiated by Tertullian's works, some of which were originally composed in Greek before being translated into Latin. Additionally, the account of Perpetua's martyrdom reveals that Greek was employed as the liturgical language in her time.

This linguistic shift from Greek to Latin in North African Christianity presents an intriguing area for scholarly investigation. It raises questions about the socio-cultural dynamics at play during the early spread of Christianity in the region, the influence of various diaspora communities, and the process of linguistic adaptation as the faith became more established in local contexts. The transition from Greek to Latin usage in Christian texts and liturgy may reflect broader changes in the demographic composition of the Christian community or alterations in its relationship with the wider Greco-Roman .

### **6.3.1. Paganism and Christianity**

The propagation of Christianity across North Africa was characterized by multifaceted interactions on various fronts. Initially, these interactions primarily occurred between adherents of traditional pagan beliefs and the emerging Christian communities. As Christianity became more established, internal divisions led to schisms within the church itself, further complicating the religious landscape.

The process of Christianization in North Africa was accompanied by a gradual accumulation of both religious and secular/economic power by the clergy.

The early Christian communities in North Africa existed within a complex religious landscape, characterized by frequent interactions and tensions with local pagan traditions. This dynamic relationship between emerging Christianity and established pagan practices played a significant role in shaping the religious and cultural milieu of the region during the early Centuries of Christian expansion.

Augustine of Hippo's life and works provide valuable insights into these interactions<sup>260</sup>. His personal experiences, as recounted in his autobiographical "Confessions" and other writings, offer a window into the religious plurality of Fourth-Century North Africa. Augustine's own spiritual journey, which included a period of adherence to Manichaeism before his conversion to Christianity, exemplifies the diverse religious options available to individuals during this era<sup>261</sup>.

The vitality of pagan traditions in Fourth-Century North Africa is evident from various sources. Archaeological evidence, including the persistence of pagan temples and shrines, attests to the continued practice of traditional religions. Epigraphic records and literary sources also indicate the ongoing celebration of pagan festivals and rituals well into the Christian era.

The interaction between Christianity and paganism in North Africa was not uniformly antagonistic. Instances of syncretism and mutual influence can be observed, particularly in rural areas where Christian practices sometimes

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<sup>260</sup> For a key bibliography on St Augustine and religion in Africa see: Cook, W. S. (2012). Saint Augustine and the spread of Christianity. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 36(3), 220; Van Oort, J. (2013). *Augustine and Manichaean Christianity*. Brill; Shaw, B. D. (2011). *Sacred violence: African Christians and sectarian hatred in the age of Augustine*. Cambridge University Press; Shaw, B. D. (1992). African Christianity: Disputes, Definitions, and 'Donatists'. *Orthodoxy and heresy in religious movements*, 4-34; Ruso, D. (2005). *Themes in St. Augustine's understanding of the Church developed within the context of the North African schism* (Doctoral dissertation, Concordia University); Tommasi, C. O. (2021). Local Religions in Roman North Africa on the Eve of the Middle Ages. *Revista de historiografia (RevHisto)*, (36), 53-68.

<sup>261</sup> Brown, P. (2013). *Augustine of Hippo: a biography*. University O'Donnell, J. J. (2009). *Augustine: A new biography*. Harper Perennial. of California Press; Vessey, M. (2012). Augustine among the Writers of the Church. *A Companion to Augustine*, 240-254; Chadwick, H. (2009). *Augustine of Hippo: A life*. Oxford University Press; Kaufman, P. I. (1994). Augustine, Martyrs, and Misery. *Church History*, 63(1), 1-14; Wetzell, J. (Ed.). (2012). *Augustine's City of God: A critical guide*. Cambridge University Press.

incorporated elements of local pagan traditions. This syncretism is evident in the adaptation of certain pagan sites for Christian use, the christianization of pagan festivals, and the incorporation of local cultural elements into Christian worship and iconography.

Moreover, the persistence of pagan practices among nominally Christian populations remained a concern for church authorities well into the Fifth and Sixth Centuries, as evidenced by canons from North African church councils addressing issues of crypto-paganism and mixed religious practices.

The gradual process of Christianization in North Africa thus involved a complex negotiation between the new faith and existing religious traditions. This negotiation was characterized by periods of conflict, coexistence, and eventual assimilation, reflecting the broader patterns of religious change in the late antique Mediterranean world.

Understanding these interactions provides crucial context for analyzing the development of distinctive features of North African Christianity, including its theology, ecclesiology, and liturgical practices. It also offers insights into the broader sociocultural transformations that accompanied the spread of Christianity in the region, including changes in urban landscapes, social hierarchies, and patterns of patronage and power.

Assessing the complete scope of pagan religious practices presents significant methodological challenges. Following temple closures, ritualistic activities potentially either ceased or transitioned into domestic settings.

Scholars face considerable obstacles in delineating clear boundaries between Roman religious practices and cultic activities. Similarly complex is the assessment of Christian-pagan tensions and confrontations during Late Antiquity. The available evidence exhibits marked variations between urban and rural contexts, with the latter presenting particular challenges for archaeological investigation due to limited material remains.

The question of pagan continuity, manifested through material culture, religious infrastructure, sacerdotal functions, and traditional practices, warrants thorough examination. While Augustinian and contemporary sources enable certain broader observations, these require reassessment through an archaeological

lens. Current interpretative frameworks, particularly regarding textual sources, remain constrained by our incomplete comprehension of pagan cultic practices.

Augustine's accounts indicate sustained pagan practices in rural regions, specifically noting the persistence of food offerings in religious ceremonies as late as 398 AD<sup>262</sup>.

The sermonic corpus of Augustine exhibits distinctive characteristics of extemporaneous delivery, characterized by informal discourse patterns and syntactical variations that demonstrate their spontaneous nature. These orations were documented through stenographic processes, whereby scribes employed shorthand notation during delivery before producing comprehensive transcriptions. Historical documentation, specifically the Possidian catalog, confirms that Augustine maintained sermonic archives within his Hippo library.

Contemporary scholarship, particularly through Dolbeau's significant contributions to the field<sup>263</sup>, has enhanced our capacity to evaluate the textual integrity of surviving sermons attributed to Augustine. While manuscript transmission has not preserved all sermons in their original form, and copyists systematically eliminated references to delivery circumstances, numerous texts retain evidence of dynamic preacher-audience interactions. This interactive dimension parallels the dialogic nature observed in epistolary communications.

The sermonic discourse demonstrates sophisticated rhetorical strategies analogous to those employed in epistolary exchanges, where the orator strategically engages his audience through carefully constructed narratives that require nuanced analytical interpretation to fully comprehend. Moreover, these sermons document an evolutionary process whereby Augustine's theological and pastoral perspectives were partially modified through sustained engagement with his congregation's responses and perspectives.

This corpus thus constitutes valuable historical evidence for examining the integration and manifestation of Christian practices within quotidian life during this period. The sermons reveal both the immediate rhetorical strategies employed

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<sup>262</sup> Augustine, *Epistula* 46.

<sup>263</sup> Dolbeau, F. (1993). Nouveaux sermons de saint Augustin pour la conversion des païens et des donatistes (VI). *Revue des études augustiniennes*, 39, 371-423.

by Augustine and the longer-term development of religious discourse through preacher-audience interaction<sup>264</sup>.

This reformulation maintains the scholarly implications while restructuring the presentation of ideas in original language. It preserves the fundamental observations about Augustine's preaching style, documentation methods, and the significance of these texts for understanding early Christian social history.

One of his sermon from approximately 399 AD suggests continued temple attendance in rural areas despite anti-pagan legislation<sup>265</sup>. Urban contexts also demonstrated religious persistence, exemplified by Augustine's reference to Dionysian worship among a fraternal organization in Madauros.

Conversely, evidence exists of sporadic violent confrontations and material destruction between religious communities. Augustine documents how the destruction of a Hercules statue by Christians in Sufes, Byzacena, resulted in sixty

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<sup>264</sup> Rebillard, É. (2012). *Christians and their many identities in late antiquity, North Africa, 200–450 CE*. Cornell University Press, pp. 62-63.

<sup>265</sup> Leone, A. (2013). *The end of the pagan city: religion, economy, and urbanism in late antique North Africa*. OUP Oxford, p. 9

fatalities<sup>266</sup>. A comparable incident occurred in Calama, where Christian interference with pagan festivities led to violence amid official inaction<sup>267</sup>.

Augustine's writings also illuminate the fate of pagan monuments, particularly statuary. While acknowledging instances of destruction, he simultaneously notes the preservation of idols in private rural estates near Calama. Rather than advocating direct destruction, Augustine promoted legislative channels for religious transformation, suggesting that pagans should voluntarily abandon their idols.

The textual record generally indicates sporadic destruction and conflict within a broader context of religious tolerance and coexistence. Augustine's writings particularly suggest the emergence of neutral urban spaces facilitating peaceful cohabitation among diverse religious communities and sects.

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<sup>266</sup>Augustine, *Epistula* 50:

*“Humanitatis vestrae famosissimum scelus et inopinata crudelitas terram concutit et percutit caelum, ut in plateis ac delubris vestris eluceat sanguis et resonet homicidium. Apud vos Romanae sepultae sunt leges, iudiciorum rectorum calcatus est terror, imperatorum certe nulla veneratio nec timor.*

*Apud vos sexaginta numero fratrum innocens effusus est sanguis et, si quis plures occidit, finctus est laudibus et in vestram curiam tenuit principatum. Age nunc principalem venimus ad causam. Si Herculem vestrum dixeritis, porro reddemus; adsunt metalla, saxa nec desunt; accedunt et marmorum genera, suppeditat artificum copia.*

*Ceterum deus vester cum diligentia sculpitur, tornatur et ornatur; addimus et rubricam, quae pingat ruborem, quo possint vota vestra sacra sonare. Nam si vestrum Herculem dixeritis, conlati singulis nummis ab artifice vestro vobis emimus deum. Reddite igitur animas, quas truculenta vestra manus, contorsit, et, sicuti a nobis vester Hercules redhibetur, sic etiam a vobis tantorum animarum reddantur”.*

From:

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0552%3Aletter%3D16> (Accessed 21-10-2024)

<sup>267</sup> Leone, A. (2013). *The end of the pagan city: religion, economy, and urbanism in late antique North Africa*. OUP Oxford, p. 10.

The persistence of festivals, celebrations, and *ludi* into the Fourth Century is documented in the pagan Codex-Calendar of AD 354<sup>268</sup>. This remarkable document, presumably commissioned for a Roman Christian aristocrat, presented pagan and Christian dates in parallel columns, though only the pagan entries featured illustrations. This calendar represents a transitional document, arguably the last of its genre, incorporating pagan festivities and iconography while acknowledging emerging Christian interests, thus addressing both religious communities within the urban landscape. The document suggests that urban daily life remained primarily synchronized with pagan rather than Christian liturgical calendars.

Certain festivities retained their distinctly pagan character, particularly the December celebrations, which emphasized *spectacula* and imperial games rather than the nativity of Christ. These events, which attracted criticism from Augustine, demonstrated remarkable resilience throughout the empire. Augustine specifically noted the substantial theatrical activity at Bulla Regia, despite the town's Christian conversion. A particularly telling incident occurred in AD 409, when Aurelius, the Bishop of Carthage, invited Augustine to deliver sermons during December celebrations. These religious services experienced minimal attendance as the populace favored theatrical performances, amphitheatre events, and circus entertainments over ecclesiastical gatherings<sup>269</sup>.

Determining the precise chronology of continuity and cessation of games and festivals presents significant scholarly challenges. Archaeological evidence

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<sup>268</sup> For comprehensive studies see: Salzman, M. R. (1990). *On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity*. University of California Press; Divjak, J., & Wischmeyer, W. (2014). *Das Kalenderhandbuch von 354-Der Chronograph des Filocalus, Teil II: Teil II-Der Textteil-Listen der Verwaltung*. Holzhausen; Stern, H. (1953). *Le calendrier de 354: Étude sur son texte et ses illustrations. Bibliothèque archéologique et historique*; Burgess, R. W. (2012). The Chronograph of 354: its manuscripts, contents, and history. *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 5(2), 345-396; Bagnall, R. S., Cameron, A., Schwartz, S. R., & Worp, K. A. (1987). *Consuls of the later Roman Empire*. Published for the American Philological Association by Scholars Press; Rüpke, J. (2011). *The Roman calendar from Numa to Constantine: time, history, and the fasti*. John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>269</sup> Leone, A. (2013). *The end of the pagan city: religion, economy, and urbanism in late antique North Africa*. OUP Oxford, p. 13.

indicates that while most theatres and amphitheatres fell into disuse during the Vandal period, circus facilities maintained longer operational viability. The Codex-Calendar emphasized celebrations accessible to both religious communities, particularly those associated with imperial worship and civic commemorations. Imperial cult celebrations, demonstrated remarkable longevity in certain forms.

The *Codex Theodosianus* provides evidence for the continuation of ludi and circus spectacles into the Fifth Century. Notably, legislation directed at North Africa reframed these activities as *voluptates* (amusements), attempting to dissociate them from their religious origins. This secularization process occurred gradually, making precise chronological demarcation of the definitive transformation practically impossible. Augustine's writings serve as contemporary testimony to this transition, frequently expressing concerns regarding the persistence of pagan festivities.

#### 6.3.1.1. *Temples*

The transformation and persistence of temple complexes and their associated rituals serve as critical indicators for analyzing the evolution of pagan traditions during Late Antiquity. These architectural structures fulfilled a dual function, simultaneously manifesting imperial Roman authority and religious expression. Their monumental presence played an instrumental role in defining North African urban morphology from the inception and throughout the duration of Roman imperial presence in the region.

The cessation of temple activities represents a pivotal moment in the metamorphosis of Classical urban infrastructure. However, scholarly investigation into the post-Roman trajectory of these sacred precincts encounters significant methodological challenges. These include a limited corpus of both archaeological and textual evidence, coupled with the interpretative complexities inherent in analyzing available material remains.

Archaeological evidence concerning temple complexes indicates three primary trajectories of architectural transformation: premature abandonment, deliberate destruction, and adaptive reuse. While these processes correlate chronologically with anti-pagan legislation, they were not exclusively driven by religious proscription.

Archaeological investigations document widespread instances of temple abandonment predating official cultic prohibitions. The Sabratha<sup>270</sup> (Tripolitana) case exemplifies this pattern, where temple complexes were decommissioned and architectural materials systematically stored within the Capitolium's substructure, possibly following seismic activity or Astoriani incursions. Similar patterns of architectural material preservation emerge across North African sites, with excavation reports frequently documenting the relocation of marble elements to basement spaces or auxiliary chambers within religious complexes.

The repurposing of sacred space for domestic occupation presents another indicator of early architectural decline, as evidenced at Sitifis<sup>271</sup> (Mauretania Sifensis), where late Fourth-Century residential occupation of religious structures continued into the Vandal period. Material evidence suggests that decorative elements often remained in situ until structural collapse, with statuary frequently discovered proximate to original bases at elevated stratigraphic levels, indicating gradual depositional accumulation. This pattern is exemplified at Bulla Regia<sup>272</sup>'s

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<sup>270</sup> Bakir, T. (1968). Archaeological news 1968 (Tripolitania). *Libya antiqua: Annual of the Department of Archaeology of Libya: new series: V, 1968*, 195-204; Aiosa, S. (2012). Cristiani fra le rovine. Ipotesi sul riuso del Tempio di Ercole a Sabratha. *Bonacasa Carra, RM (a cura di), Pagani e Cristiani a Sabratha e Leptis Magna tra III e VI secolo dC Monumenti e reperti, tradizioni e immagini, Palermo: Antipodes*, 13-30; Verhoogen, V. (1954). [Review of *Il tempio d'Iside in Sabratha. (Monografie di Archeologia Libica. IV)*, by G. Pesce]. *L'Antiquité Classique*, 23(1), 284-286; Aiosa, S. (2016). Sabratha 2009-2010, Area a nord del tempio di Ercole. Casa della piscina. *Libya Antiqua*, 6, 161-167; Munzi, M. (2013). Quaranta anni di archeologia coloniale a Sabratha, 1911-1951. *Museo di Sabratha nei disegni di Diego Vincifori: architettura e archeologia nella Libia degli anni trenta*, 202-214; Matthews, K. D. (2017). *Cities in the Sand: Leptis Magna and Sabratha in Roman Africa*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>271</sup> Blanchard-Lemee, M. I. C. H. È. L. E. (2005). Le triclinium à la mosaïque dionysiaque de Sétif (Algérie). *Collection-Ecole Francaise De Rome*, 352(1), 291; Février, P. A. (1964). Les basiliques chrétiennes de Sétif et leurs mosaïques. *Bulletin de la Société nationale des Antiquaires de France*, 1962(1), 84-87;

<sup>272</sup> Chaouali, M., Fenwick, C., & Booms, D. (2018). Bulla Regia I: a new church and Christian cemetery. *Libyan Studies*, 49, 187-197; Fenwick, C., Chaouali, M., Alexander, M., Booms, D., Cox, S. L., Di Muro, A., ... & Ray, N. (2023). Bulla Regia II: Excavations in the Christian cemetery. *Libyan Studies*, 54, 123-134; Chaouali, M., & Rhouma, H. (2018). The

Temple of Apollo, where despite the mid-Fourth Century urban center's relocation toward a newly constructed Christian basilica, statuary remained near original positions while architectural marble was preserved in auxiliary spaces.

Temple demolition, while less common, served various purposes. This practice predated Late Antiquity, as documented by Pliny<sup>273</sup>, and sometimes reflected ideological rather than purely practical motivations. The Gholaja fort (Bou Njem) demonstrates selective destruction based on symbolic significance, suggesting local resistance to Roman religious syncretism. Byzantine-era demolitions often facilitated military construction, as evidenced at Thugga, where temple materials were repurposed for fortifications.

Systematic demolition, being resource-intensive, typically occurred only when necessary. Historical sources document military involvement in official destructions, while alleged zealot-driven demolitions lack clear archaeological confirmation in the study region. The transformation of temples into churches manifested differently between Eastern and Western empire, with higher frequency in the East. This disparity likely reflects divergent urban planning traditions: Western cities typically concentrated pagan cult activities around the forum, while Eastern sanctuaries were more widely distributed throughout urban landscapes, often serving as processional focal points that shaped urban morphology.

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usefulness of a shelter for the archaeological site of Bulla Regia, Tunisia. *Protective Shelters*; Leone, A. (2017). TM Kristensen, Making and breaking the Gods: christian responses to pagan sculpture in Late Antiquity (Aarhus Studies in Mediterranean Antiquity 12). Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2013. Pp. 297, Birk, TM Kristensen and B. Poulsen (EDS), using images in Late Antiquity. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 107, 462-464; Leone, A. (2016). Imperial statues in urban contexts in Late Antique North Africa. *De Africa Romaque: Merging Cultures across North Africa*, 249-56.

<sup>273</sup> Plin., *Ep.*, X, 96.10:

“ Certe satis constat prope iam desolata templa coepisse celebrari, et sacra sollemnia diu in termissa repeti passimque venire carnem victimarum, cuius adhuc rarissimus emptor in veniebatur. Ex quo facile est opinari, quae turba hominum emendari possit, si sit paenitentiae locus.”

From: <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plin.+Ep.+10.96> (Accessed 21-10-2024)

This architectural metamorphosis, while representing a broader Late Antique phenomenon, exhibited significant regional, urban, and even intra-urban variation in its specific manifestations<sup>274</sup>.

#### 6.3.1.2. *Private Cults*

While legislative frameworks progressively restricted formal temple worship, religious practices potentially transitioned into domestic settings throughout the empire. Private residences emerge as the primary architectural contexts where pagan ritualistic activities might have persisted. Although archaeological identification of domestic cult spaces presents significant methodological challenges, textual sources offer interpretative frameworks.

Ciceronian sources illuminate the nature of private sacraria, exemplified by the domestic shrine of Gaius Heius in Messana. This case study reveals two significant characteristics: the hereditary transmission of sacred spaces and their distinctive religious character, transcending traditional *Lares* or *Penates* worship. The shrine featured diverse statuary representing multiple deities, including Cupidus and Hercules, complemented by female caryatid figures, with arulae positioned before each sculptural element<sup>275</sup>.

Domestic cult identification relies on dual evidentiary categories: decorative elements and architectural configurations. The Dionysiac cult presence at Thysdrus manifests through mosaic iconography depicting herotes in the House of the Dionysiac Procession. Similar cultic associations emerge at Hadrumetum's Maison des Masques, suggesting Bacchic/Dionysiac practices.

Architectural indicators of sacraria typically include podium structures, columnar elements, and niched features, though these components alone do not definitively establish cultic function. Some spaces previously interpreted as reception areas may have served religious purposes. Notable examples include Room 9 in Acholla's House of the Red Columns, featuring an elevated apsidal

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<sup>274</sup> Leone, A. (2013). *The end of the pagan city: religion, economy, and urbanism in late antique North Africa*. OUP Oxford, pp. 28-34.

<sup>275</sup> Cicero, *Verrinae*, IV, II. 4-7.

element, and Room 11 in Althiburos's Maison des Muses, characterized by a raised apsidal configuration<sup>276</sup>.

This reformulation maintains the scholarly analysis while reorganizing the information through different syntactical structures and vocabulary choices, preserving the core archaeological and historical observations regarding domestic religious spaces in Late Antiquity.

### 6.3.2. Pagan cults in the Periphery

In the African provinces of the Empire, epigraphic and archaeological records predominantly show official cults, that is, only one of the contexts in which the population worshipped their deities. However, there was a more intimate aspect of religious life, not related to public religion, but rather personal, namely, the belief that their gods were willing to satisfy needs linked to daily life. Late Roman-African paganism seemed to be more focused on individuals' relationship with their gods and less with the political order. This inner sentiment permeated different levels of society<sup>277</sup>.

One of the deities that had great importance in Roman Africa was the *Dea Caelestis*, known as Tanit by African worshippers. The Romans associated her with Juno. She was honored with many temples and cults in different private contexts, as demonstrated by archaeological and epigraphic evidence. The first fruits of the harvest were offered to her, and her cult reached great importance in the north-central African countryside, attested by inscriptions from Africa Proconsularis, Henchir-bel-Azeiz, Cirta, and the province of Numidia<sup>278</sup>. Although her famous temple was destroyed in 399, Salvian of Marseilles shows the ardent devotion that

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<sup>276</sup> Leone, A. (2013). *The end of the pagan city: religion, economy, and urbanism in late antique North Africa*. OUP Oxford, pp. 48.

<sup>277</sup> Riggs, D. (2001). The Continuity of Paganism between the Cities and Countryside of Late Roman Africa, en *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity*, eds. Burns T. S., Eadie J. W., Michigan State University Press, pp. 285-300.

<sup>278</sup> Le Glay, M., Un centre de syncrétisme en Afrique: Thamugadi de Numidie, en *Africa Romana 8*, (1991), pp. 67-68; Rives, J.B., *Religion and authority in the territory of Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine*, Oxford, 1995 pp. 100-172.

was still shown in Carthage to the Celestial Goddess (Tanit) at the very gates of the city's capture by the Vandals in 439.<sup>279</sup>

There were other important deities to whom temples were dedicated, such as Saturn, Pluto, Jupiter, Mars, Ceres, Neptune, Hercules, and Minerva. A clue to their survival during the Fifth Century comes from some decisions taken during the Council of Carthage in 411. Canons 58 and 60 order the destruction of idols remaining in Africa, still present in many coastal and rural areas, and the request to ban religious banquets contrary to the decrees, in which Christians were encouraged by pagans to participate regularly, thus apparently frequently committing idolatry and sacrilege<sup>280</sup>.

From the mid-Fourth Century until the Byzantine period, there were many sacred places reused as part of fortifications, granaries, warehouses, etc. This phenomenon was probably related to the growing influence of Christianity and various laws prohibiting any form of sacrifice<sup>281</sup>. But these massive conversions, although favored by a strong episcopal network and the erection of churches, especially in urban environments, changed little some beliefs and manifestations of the people. Augustine of Hippo himself acknowledges that many baptized Christians believed that the god they regularly worshipped was Saturn

At the rural and provincial level, even in certain cities, the remains of paganism were the norm and, in fact, some of these customs would merge with the new religion, or never disappear, especially in the countryside. Similarly, the existence of wise leaders, fortune-tellers, prophets, pilgrimages, magical and sacred objects, and the belief in evil spirits, along with the tradition of not representing the deity in human form, made it much easier for those fervent to the extreme with Saturn to later be so with Christ, and who later also ended up embracing Islam. In Numidia, where Saturn's followers were most faithful and addicted, the most

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<sup>279</sup> Salviano De Marsella, *De Gubernatione Dei* VIII 2.

<sup>280</sup> This Christian concern was studied by Kahlos, M. (2013). Polluted by Sacrifices. Christian Repugnance at Participation in Sacrificial Rituals in Late Antiquity, en *Religious participation in Ancient and Medieval Societies. Rituals, Interaction and Identity. Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae Vol. 41*, eds. Katajala-Peltomaa S., Vuolanto V, Roma, pp. 159-171.

<sup>281</sup> Sears, G. (2011). The fate of the Temples in North Africa, en *Archaeology of Late Antique 'Paganism'*, eds. Lavan L., Mulryan M., Brill, Leiden Boston, pp. 229-259.

fanatical and rigorous variant of Muslims, Kharijism, also flourished. But regarding our topic, the gap created by the abandonment of Romanized paganism is immediately filled with the Christian version of Donatism. As Frend<sup>282</sup> pointed out, in Africa, the Donatist clergy came "on the heels" of Saturn's priest. Even funeral rites and the distribution of places of worship are very similar when comparing Punic Saturn with local Christianity. The great abundance of magical elements in the Numidian and Mauritanian Christian environment also connects directly with ancient African paganism. In fact, Christianity was seen as powerful magic, and Jesus as a prominent miracle worker. Donatist Christianity also knew how to associate itself with local dress style, opposed to Roman, so we can conclude that it notably took advantage of this "renaissance" of Punic culture in Late Antiquity. The Roman-style worship of Saturn that occurred in African cities also differed from the Berber religiosity of rural areas, which looked upon it with displeasure<sup>283</sup>.

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<sup>282</sup> Frend, W. H. C., *The Donatist Church*, Oxford, 1952, pp. 77-78 and 85.

<sup>283</sup> Frend, W. H. C., *The Donatist Church*. Oxford, 1952, pp. 77-78, 101-103, 105; Fernández Ardanaz, S. (1991), Pervivencia del mundo púnico en el mediterráneo occidental de los Siglos IV-V d. C.: Estudio filológico y crítico-histórico de los testimonios literarios, en *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 8 (1991), pp.137-167. This agrarian and Italic Saturn was the extreme opposite of the terrible god, without temples and images, of the African countryside.



## **VII – CONCLUSIONS**

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## VII - CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has examined the enduring presence of pagan and Christian practices across different geographical regions during Late Antiquity, focusing on how these traditions persisted, interacted, and evolved. The research has shown that the survival of these religious practices varied significantly between central and peripheral territories, reflecting the complex and regionally specific nature of religious transformation within the Roman Empire.

In the Eastern Mediterranean, the spread of Christianity followed a distinct trajectory when compared to other parts of the Empire, largely due to the region's unique political, cultural, and religious landscape. In the cities, particularly Alexandria and Antioch, Christianity gained a foothold early on, thanks to imperial support and the influential roles of Christian leaders. Figures such as Shenute, the abbot of the White Monastery in Egypt, were central to the Christianization of these regions<sup>284</sup>. Shenute's campaigns against both local landowners and the pagan population were instrumental in diminishing pagan influence, particularly in urban centers where Christianity flourished under state sponsorship. Despite this, indigenous religious traditions continued to hold sway in rural areas. In Upper Egypt, for instance, while Hellenized elites in cities like Alexandria adopted Christianity, smaller towns such as Pneuith remained strongholds of traditional pagan practices. Similarly, in parts of the eastern Mediterranean, paganism proved resilient. The worship of ancient deities like Baal in Heliopolis (modern Baalbek) and the moon-god Sin in Harran persisted well into Late Antiquity. These regions,

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<sup>284</sup> Hedstrom, D. L. B. (2005). *An Archaeological Mission for the White Monastery*. n.; Davis, S. J., Blanke, L., & Bolman, E. (2010). *Archaeology at the white monastery, 2005–2010*. *Coptica*, 9, 25-58; Krawiec, R. (2002). *Shenoute & the women of the White Monastery: Egyptian monasticism in late antiquity*. Oxford University Press, USA; Brooks Hedstrom, D. L., Bolman, E. S., Rahim, M. A., Mohammed, S., McCormack, D., Herbich, T., Pyke, G., Blanke, L., Musacchio, T., & Khalifa, M. (2011). *The White Monastery Federation Project: Survey and Mapping at the Monastery of Apa Shenoute (Dayr al-Anba Shinūda), Sohag, 2005-2007*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 65/66, 333–364; Behlmer, H. (1998). *Visitors to Shenoute's monastery*. In *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (pp. 341-371). Brill.

particularly outside the urban centers, remained bastions of paganism long after Christianity became the dominant religion in more cosmopolitan areas. The resilience of these practices demonstrates the difficulty Christianity faced in supplanting deeply rooted local religions, especially in regions where Roman and Hellenic cultural influences were less pronounced. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Christian leaders themselves often recognized the value of Hellenic culture. In places like Athens and Aphrodisias, pagan intellectuals were able to maintain their traditions, albeit under increasing pressure from the expanding Christian church. This accommodation of certain elements of pagan culture by Christian authorities allowed for a prolonged coexistence of the two belief systems in certain areas.

In Italy, particularly within Rome, the transition from paganism to Christianity was not an abrupt process but rather a gradual integration that reflected the city's unique political and social structure. Rome, as the heart of both imperial and ecclesiastical authority, was central to the propagation of Christianity, with the transformation of urban spaces from pagan temples to Christian basilicas being a key symbol of this shift. By the late Fourth Century, under the guidance of bishops such as Damasus, a systematic effort to Christianize the urban landscape was evident through the construction of monumental churches, many of which were built on former pagan sites. The epigraphic and prosopographic evidence strongly supports the textual accounts, indicating that by the early Fifth Century, Christianity had become the predominant religion among Rome's senatorial aristocracy. By the end of the Sixth Century, there were approximately 250 episcopal sees in Italy, with around one-Fifth of them in the countryside. The expansion of Christianity into rural areas appears to have been bolstered by the emergence of rural monasticism during the Fifth Century. The Christianization of Rome also involved the establishment of a Christian liturgical calendar, with celebrations such as Christmas being aligned with former pagan festivals. This overlay of Christian practices on previously pagan traditions exemplifies how Christianity did not merely replace paganism but often adapted and transformed it to fit the new religious framework. However, while Rome stood as the epicenter of Christian authority, the rural areas of Italy experienced a slower conversion process. Pagan practices persisted in these regions well into the Sixth Century, as evidenced by the ongoing worship in small local temples and the slow spread of

rural monasticism. The political instability following the collapse of the Ostrogothic kingdom and the Lombard invasions further hindered the complete Christianization of the countryside. Thus, while Christianity became dominant in urban centers like Rome, the survival of pagan practices in rural Italy highlights the geographical disparities in the religious transition.

Moving northward, in Milan and other urban centers of *Italia annonaria*, the spread of Christianity was also closely tied to political power. Milan, having risen to prominence as an ecclesiastical hub in the Fourth Century, mirrored Rome's pattern of Christianization. The support of imperial patrons, such as Ambrose, who oversaw the construction of major basilicas, solidified the city's Christian identity. Yet, as in Rome, Milan's periphery and rural hinterlands retained elements of pagan worship, indicating that the central regions experienced a more accelerated religious transformation compared to their rural counterparts.

The difference between the Fourth and later Centuries is demonstrated by the presence of basilicas with donations made by wealthy members of the municipal elite. Examples of this type can be observed in Aquileia. In Italy, paganism remained entrenched until the Fourth Century even among the aristocratic class, although the process of Christianisation had already begun. In rural areas, pagan cults were most likely still practised for a long time, until the Sixth Century.

Britain presents a particularly complex case of religious survival due to its peripheral status within the Roman Empire and its geographic isolation. The Christianization of Britain was not as deeply rooted as in continental regions, with pagan practices persisting in both urban and rural areas. Archaeological evidence, such as the continued use of pagan temples well into the Fourth and Fifth Centuries, reveals that Christianity had only limited success in displacing indigenous religious traditions. Sites like Bath, where the worship of Sulis Minerva persisted, demonstrate that syncretic practices flourished, blending pagan and Christian elements. Even after the official withdrawal of Roman authority in 410, paganism continued to thrive, particularly in rural sanctuaries. The latest testimonies, such as those from Coventina's Well and the persistence of pagan shrines at Verulamium, indicate that Britain's Christianization was incomplete by the time of the Saxon invasions. Evidence from rural Roman Britain indicates ongoing pagan practices well into the late Fourth and early Fifth Centuries. In the

north, offerings of coins and other votive items were still made to the goddess at Coventina's Well, although the altars and stones were no longer visible. The longevity of these practices in rural environments points to a significant cultural conservatism among Romano-British populations outside urban centers. This observation aligns with the scholarly perspective, notably articulated by Rahtz and Watts (1979), which posits that the surviving cults owed their resilience to their indigenous character rather than Roman influence<sup>285</sup>. Several factors contributed to the prolonged existence of native pagan cults well into the Fifth, Sixth, and seventh Centuries, potentially extending even further. The ineffective organization and evangelization efforts of the Christian church, as noted by Friend (1992), coupled with the dual challenges of Saxon incursions and Roman withdrawal, created conditions conducive to the preservation of pre-Christian religious practices.

The Iberian Peninsula during late antiquity presented a remarkably complex religious environment, characterized by gradual transformation and nuanced coexistence between pagan traditions and emerging Christian practices<sup>286</sup>. Unlike other regions of the Roman Empire, Hispania demonstrated a distinctive pattern of religious evolution that reflected its unique historical and cultural context. In Hispania, the situation was more nuanced due to the region's long history of Romanization and urbanization. Cities like Tarraco and Italica became strongholds of Christian influence, with local bishops and wealthy patrons driving the construction of churches and the promotion of Christian practices. However, in the more rural areas of the Iberian Peninsula, paganism continued to play a significant role in local religious life. The presence of indigenous cults, especially in the northwestern regions, suggests that Christian influence was largely confined to the urban elite. Testimonies from late antiquity, such as inscriptions and archaeological remains, point to the persistence of local deities and traditional rituals well into the Fifth Century, marking Hispania as a region where pagan and Christian practices

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<sup>285</sup> Rahtz, P. and Watts, L. (1979) 'The end of Roman temples in the west of Britain', in P.J. Casey (ed.) *The End of Roman Britain*, Oxford: BAR, pp. 183–210.

<sup>286</sup> Andújar, I. M. S. (2016). Pervivencias paganas en la Hispania tardoantigua (ss. IV-VII): una aproximación desde la religiosidad popular. *Historias del Orbis Terrarum*, (17), 8-30; Serrano, R. S. (2007). Aristocracias paganas en Hispania tardía (s. V-VII). *Gerión*, 443; Lorente Muñoz, M. (2019). El Cristianismo en la Hispania romana: origen, sociedad e institucionalización. *Historia Digital*, 19(34), 208-228.

coexisted for an extended period. Excavations in a Fourth or Fifth-Century Christian cemetery at Tarragona reveal several signs of continued pagan practices. Our knowledge of pagan practices persisting in the Galician Suevic kingdom during the latter half of the Sixth Century is relatively substantial, primarily due to the vigorous efforts of St. Martin of Braga to eradicate such beliefs. It is important to mention that in Galicia in the Sixth Century, certain trees were worshipped, and St. Martin specifically mentions the practice of lighting candles in relation to them.

For the territories of the West, it can be said that pagan cults certainly survived until the Sixth Century and beyond.

In Palestine, during the first half of the Byzantine period, church construction was concentrated primarily in sacred locations, with rural areas seeing fewer Christian buildings. However, archaeological findings and inscriptions from the second half of the Byzantine period reveal a shift, with most churches being established in villages. It was during the late Fifth and Sixth Centuries that bishops began focusing their attention on more remote areas.

In Egypt, the archaic cult of the deity Min, survived into the Fifth Century. The deity Petbe-Nemesis featured prominently in Egyptian names and festivals of the Roman period, with Coptic invocations persisting from the Fifth to seventh Centuries. Domestic deities like Bes and Taweret, represented by statuettes in wall niches, were connected to aspects of daily life. These domestic cults were likely linked to practices in local temples, forming a key mechanism for the survival and propagation of traditional beliefs. The Coptic narrative of the fall of the temple of Kothos, found in the Panegyric on Macarius of Tkow, provides valuable insight into the popular defense of local temples against Christianization attempts, attesting to the continuity of traditional domestic cults into the Fifth Century.

In Africa, there were important deities to whom temples were dedicated, such as Saturn, Pluto, Jupiter, Mars, Ceres, Neptune, Hercules, and Minerva. A clue to their survival during the Fifth Century comes from some decisions taken during the Council of Carthage in 411. Moreover, the persistence of pagan practices among nominally Christian populations remained a concern for church authorities well into the Fifth and Sixth Centuries, as evidenced by canons from North African church councils addressing issues of crypto-paganism and mixed religious practices.

The gradual process of Christianization in North Africa thus involved a complex negotiation between the new faith and existing religious traditions. This negotiation was characterized by periods of conflict, coexistence, and eventual assimilation, reflecting the broader patterns of religious change in the late antique Mediterranean world. North Africa witnessed fierce resistance to Christianization, especially in its rural areas. Pagan practices, often linked to the veneration of local deities and ancestor worship, persisted in the countryside, with the latest testimonies suggesting that some of these practices continued until the Muslim conquest in the seventh Century. This long-lasting adherence to paganism in peripheral regions highlights the limitations of urban-based Christian authority in extending its influence across the vast, diverse territories of the Roman Empire.

In conclusion, the survival of pagan and Christian practices in the Western Roman Empire was deeply influenced by geographical, political, and social factors. Central urban areas, under the influence of imperial and ecclesiastical authority, often saw a more rapid Christianization, while peripheral regions, particularly rural areas, retained elements of pagan worship well into the post-Roman period. The persistence of these practices underscores the complexity of religious transformation in the ancient world and highlights the importance of local contexts in shaping the trajectory of religious change. As this study demonstrates, the transition from paganism to Christianity was not a linear process but a multifaceted and regionally diverse phenomenon, reflecting the intricate dynamics of power, culture, and belief in late antiquity. In the Eastern Roman Empire, the spread of Christianity was considerably faster and more structurally supported, largely due to the presence of imperial capitals like Constantinople and the dominance of Christian intellectual and theological centers such as Alexandria and Antioch. These cities, central to the political and cultural heart of the East, saw early Christian communities flourish, supported by emperors and high-ranking officials. The rise of figures such as Shenute in Egypt, who led aggressive campaigns against pagan traditions, exemplifies the proactive role Christian leaders played in the suppression of local religious practices, particularly in urban settings. However, rural areas in the East, such as Upper Egypt, retained pockets of traditional religious beliefs, with pagan practices enduring in small towns and agricultural regions long after Christianity had been established in cities.

The comparison between the Eastern and Western Roman Empires during the period of religious transformation, specifically the transition from paganism to Christianity, reveals both significant differences and interesting parallels shaped by their distinct cultural, political, and geographical landscapes.

The Western Roman Empire experienced a more fragmented and gradual Christianization process, reflecting its greater diversity in political unity, geography, and cultural heritage. In Italy, Christianity spread rapidly in urban centers like Rome and Milan, with imperial support leading to the transformation of many pagan temples into Christian churches by the Fourth Century. Yet, as in the East, rural areas experienced slower conversion rates. In Italy, rural paganism persisted well into the Sixth Century, with traditional religious practices continuing in the countryside and small towns. This contrast between urban and rural areas was even more pronounced in regions like Gaul, Hispania, and North Africa, where pagan practices in rural locales remained widespread for Centuries, often supported by the local aristocracy. The persistence of pagan rites in places like Aquitaine, where rural elites maintained ties to local deities, highlights the uneven nature of religious change across the empire.

One of the most significant parallels between the East and West is the adaptation and coexistence of pagan and Christian practices. In both regions, rather than a sudden eradication of paganism, the transition involved the gradual assimilation of local customs and religious festivals into the Christian framework. In the East, this is evidenced by the Christian acceptance of Hellenic intellectual traditions, allowing certain pagan philosophical and cultural practices to continue. In the West, Christian holidays often replaced or were timed to coincide with traditional pagan festivals, such as the alignment of Christmas with the pagan festival of Sol Invictus. This syncretism helped ease the transition, allowing for a slower integration of Christian practices into everyday life, particularly in rural areas. However, one key difference between the two regions is the nature of resistance to Christianization. In the East, strongholds of paganism like Heliopolis and Harran persisted well into the Fifth and Sixth Centuries, driven by deeply rooted local religious traditions. These regions maintained active pagan communities, supported by indigenous religious leaders who resisted the encroachment of Christianity, even as the state increasingly enforced Christian orthodoxy. In the West, resistance to Christianization was more decentralized, with

rural communities and certain aristocratic families maintaining pagan practices primarily in peripheral regions, such as Britain and North Africa. Augustine's accounts of rural North African paganism, with local populations still engaging in food offerings and ancestor worship well into the late Fourth Century, reflect the ongoing tension between Christianity and local customs.

The strength of this research lies in its comprehensive analysis of both urban and rural religious practices across multiple regions of the Western and Eastern Roman Empire. By focusing on the central-peripheral divide, the study illuminates the uneven nature of religious transformation, emphasizing the role of local geography, political power, and social structures in shaping the pace and extent of Christianization. The use of archaeological evidence, combined with literary testimonies, provides a robust foundation for understanding the survival of pagan practices and the gradual ascent of Christianity. However, the research is not without its limitations. The uneven availability of archaeological data, particularly in rural areas, presents a challenge in drawing definitive conclusions about the persistence of pagan practices. Additionally, the reliance on literary sources, which often reflect the biases of their Christian authors, may obscure the true extent of pagan survival. Future research could benefit from a more interdisciplinary approach, integrating landscape archaeology, epigraphy, and comparative religious studies to develop a more nuanced understanding of religious transformation in late antiquity. Looking forward, the potential developments in this field of research could benefit from a comparative, interdisciplinary approach that further examines the interplay between local religious traditions and the broader imperial context. For example, further archaeological investigations in rural areas, combined with textual analysis of both Christian and pagan sources, could provide more nuanced insights into the complex process of religious transformation. Additionally, a comparative study of how pagan practices influenced the development of early Christian liturgy and ritual across different regions of the empire could shed light on the ways in which local customs shaped the early Christian church.

Another promising avenue for research lies in exploring the socio-political roles of local elites in either supporting or resisting Christianization. Understanding the motivations behind the aristocratic patronage of both pagan and Christian religious sites could reveal deeper insights into the socio-political

dynamics of religious change. The relationship between imperial power and religious authority, particularly in the context of regional elites, also warrants further exploration, particularly in regions where Christianity encountered significant resistance, such as North Africa, Egypt, and Britain.

# VIII- LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

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## VIII - LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This research has examined the complex dynamics between paganism and Christianity in Late Antiquity across various regions of the Roman Empire. However, several limitations must be acknowledged that constrain the scope and depth of our conclusions.

The most significant limitation concerns the uneven distribution of archaeological and textual evidence across different geographical areas. While urban centers such as Rome, Constantinople, and Alexandria provide abundant documentation, rural and peripheral regions often lack comprehensive archaeological investigation. This disparity creates an incomplete picture of religious transformation, particularly in micro-regions where local variations may have been most pronounced. The scarcity of material evidence from rural contexts limits our understanding of how ordinary people experienced and adapted to religious change in their daily lives.

Additionally, the study relies heavily on literary sources that predominantly reflect elite Christian perspectives. These texts often present a biased view of pagan-Christian interactions, potentially obscuring the genuine extent of religious syncretism and the continuity of traditional practices. The voices of ordinary practitioners, both pagan and Christian, remain largely silent in the historical record, creating gaps in our understanding of grassroots religious experiences.

The temporal scope of this investigation, while comprehensive, cannot fully capture the long-term consequences of religious transformation that extended well beyond the sixth century. The gradual nature of Christianization processes requires longitudinal analysis that spans several centuries to understand the complete trajectory of religious change.

Future scholarship in this field would benefit significantly from embracing a more robust interdisciplinary approach that integrates multiple academic disciplines. The complexity of religious transformation requires the combined expertise of historians, archaeologists, theologians, anthropologists, sociologists, and specialists in religious studies. This collaborative methodology would enable researchers to examine religious dynamics from various analytical perspectives, creating a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Archaeological investigation represents a particularly promising avenue for future research. Systematic excavations in rural areas and peripheral regions could provide crucial material evidence for understanding local religious practices. The integration of landscape archaeology with traditional excavation methods would reveal how religious sites functioned within broader community networks. Furthermore, the application of advanced archaeological techniques, including remote sensing and geophysical survey methods, could identify previously unknown religious sites and settlement patterns.

The study of micro-regions and micro-areas deserves special attention in future research. Local case studies can illuminate the specific mechanisms through which religious transformation occurred at the community level. These focused investigations would reveal how geographical, economic, and social factors influenced the pace and character of religious change. Comparative analysis of multiple micro-regions would help identify patterns and variations in the Christianization process across different contexts.

Epigraphic studies offer another valuable research direction. The systematic analysis of inscriptions from both urban and rural contexts could provide insights into the religious identities and practices of diverse social groups. Digital databases and analytical tools now enable large-scale epigraphic analysis that can reveal patterns invisible in smaller datasets.

The integration of scientific methods represents an exciting frontier for future research. Radiocarbon dating, archaeometric analysis of religious artifacts, and environmental archaeology can provide precise chronological frameworks and detailed information about material culture. These methods are particularly valuable for understanding the transition periods when pagan and Christian practices coexisted.

Future scholarship should also prioritize the development of digital humanities approaches. The creation of comprehensive databases linking archaeological, textual, and epigraphic evidence would facilitate new forms of analysis and enable scholars to identify previously unrecognized patterns.

Comparative studies extending beyond the Roman Empire would provide valuable context for understanding religious transformation processes. Examining similar dynamics in other ancient societies could illuminate universal patterns in

religious change while highlighting the specific characteristics of the Roman experience.

Finally, future research should emphasize the importance of integrating knowledge across traditional academic boundaries. The complex nature of religious transformation requires scholars to move beyond disciplinary silos and embrace collaborative methodologies. Only through such integration can we hope to develop a truly comprehensive understanding of one of the most significant cultural transformations in Western history.



# **IX – BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SITOGRAPHY**

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## IX - BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SITOGRAPHY

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