

The representation and idealisation of the figure of the Roman emperor in terms and iconography that were shared by both the central state and local aristocracies served two main functions: a high degree of ideological unification of the western empire and a long-term reproduction of social power.

The book ends with a Bibliography preceded by a list of fifteen appendices, explaining the calculations behind the sets of coin percentages and cataloguing coins and inscriptions used as a source of evidence in the chapters.

As a whole, Noreña's work develops coherent arguments with the support of appropriate evidence and offers interesting insights into the nature and workings of slippery concepts such as ideology, power, propaganda, and the symbolism of social power. Although this monograph is dedicated to the Roman West of the first three centuries CE, Noreña's work provides the readership with ample material for further discussion of the same topic in the East and in Late Antiquity.

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ALAN CAMERON: *The Last Pagans of Rome*. Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2011. ISBN 978-0-19-974727-6. XII, 878 pp. GBP 55.

Alan Cameron's *The Last Pagans of Rome* is the synthesis of more than forty years' scholarly work on late antique history, literature and religion, especially on the last phases of official Roman paganism and of Roman aristocrats in the fourth century. The central notion in the book is that this official Roman paganism, meaning "the formal apparatus of the state cults as administered by the various priestly colleges" (p. 3), did not continue after the fourth century. Nor did the Roman aristocrats form a passionate pagan stand against the prevailing Christianity.

Cameron's work is part of a long-lasting scholarly debate on the end of Roman paganism. According to the 'traditional' view explicated especially by Andreas Alföldi and Herbert Bloch after World War II, pagan aristocrats were united into a heroic and cultured resistance to the rising Christianity and even rose up in a final battle near the Frigidus River in AD 394.

Cameron is the foremost representative and one of the introducers of the 'new radical' view that refutes the idea of the last pagan resistance as a romantic myth. There neither was a pagan reaction in the military sense nor a pagan revival in the cultural sense.

The responses to *The Last Pagans* have for the most part been positive and complimentary. Peter Brown (*The New York Review of Books*, April 7, 2011) praises the book with vivacious words: "One puts down his book with gratitude and draws a deep breath. For it has enabled us to fill our lungs with an atmosphere rendered clean, at last, through the ruthless pruning of so many false certitudes". Dennis Trout (*CJ* 108, 2012) calls it "encyclopedic in its learning and relentless in its argument" and "a far more sober assessment" (than the traditional view), whereas Ulrich Lambrecht (*HistLit* 2011-2-208 in *H-Soz-u-Kult*, June, 2011, [www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=33533](http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=33533)) welcomes *The Last Pagans* as a work that questions the *communis opinio* set by Alföldi and others and brings forth more realistic notions of the relationship between paganism and Christianity. Aude Busine (*BMCR* 2011.12.35 [bmc.brynmawr.edu/2011/2011-12-35.html](http://bmc.brynmawr.edu/2011/2011-12-35.html)) regards the book as "a masterpiece" and "a sharp and stimulating reassessment".

For Mark Vessey (*JAAR* 25, 2012), the foremost achievement of *The Last Pagans* is that "unburdened at last of the pagan classics", scholars are now better equipped to understand the literary history of Latin Late Antiquity. Edward Watts (*AHR* 116, 2011) appreciates "the great skill and erudition" but reminds us that the book is only about the last aristocratic pagans and thus does not reveal other segments of society. Éric Rebillard (*CW* 106, 2013) is somewhat more critical, remarking that Cameron is, "to some degree, captured by the very thesis he strives to refute". Mischa Meyer (*Sehepunkte* 12, 2012, [www.sehepunkte.de/2012/12/19388.html](http://www.sehepunkte.de/2012/12/19388.html)) regards *The Last Pagans* as a "thesenfreudig", an audacious and provocative book, but appreciates Cameron's intellectual acumen.

The most critical reviewers are François Paschoud (*AntTard* 20, 2012) and Stéphane Ratti (*Polémiques entre païens et chrétiens*, 2012). Paschoud dedicates 30 pages and Ratti the epilogue of his book to contesting Cameron's interpretations. (On Ratti's book, see my review in *BMCR* 2012.05.44, [bmcr.brynmaur.edu/2012/2012-05-44.html](http://bmcr.brynmaur.edu/2012/2012-05-44.html)). For several years, Paschoud's and Cameron's diverging interpretations on late antique pagans, especially Nicomachus Flavianus and his *Annales*, have been spiced with some academic nitpicking. In his review, though admitting that Cameron is right in attacking the exaggerations in the portrayal of paganism and Christianity, Paschoud writes that Cameron "has something in common with *Pravda*, at best a messianic ambition" and "It would be a pity if, for the anglophones cooped up in their monoglot fortress, he were to become the Law and the Prophets". For his part, Cameron (p. 628) jibes at Paschoud who has compared his own role to that of an astronomer; Cameron just remarks that astrology would be a more appropriate analogy.

When starting to read *The Last Pagans*, my first impression was that Cameron's apologetic tone is rather exaggerated and some battles were being fought in old trenches. However, as the discussion roused by the book shows, this is not simply the case. Several reviewers postulate the traditional view of the pagan reaction and revival as the *communis opinio* which Cameron's 'new' and 'radical' interpretation contests. There is a certain irony in the terms 'new' and 'radical', since Cameron's interpretations have been challenging the traditional view for over forty years.

The traditional view tends to live on in modern scholarship and pops up in different forms especially in non-specialist text books, even though not as vigorously or persistently as Cameron himself implies (e.g., p. 74: "All modern accounts of Eugenius' usurpation assume that he was pro-pagan"; or p. 628: "There is indeed such a consensus, at any rate among European scholars, but it is the quality of the argument that counts, not the number of believers"). Which one is the *communis opinio* seems to vary according to academic surroundings and traditions.

In historical research, our elucidations are inexorably bound to our contemporary world and all our interpretation is ultimately self-interpretation. The notion of the last pagan stand was promoted by Alföldi, Bloch and others especially during and after World War II, in a world in which it was perhaps characteristic to construe pagan-Christian relations in the frames of dichotomy and conflict. Our 'post-modern' way of outlining the world in its complexity is probably more multifaceted and nuanced than many interpretations immediately after the war. Furthermore, there are now more abundant and manifold sources available for late antique studies than before. Now, as Brown also remarks in his review, *The Last Pagans* is a book of a generation, that is, the post-postwar generation that set out to counter the dichotomies of the preceding generations. In their own way, even classicists were on the barricades in the 1960s!

The time-bound self-interpretation in Cameron's book can be seen in its systematic reassessment of the Christianization of Rome that the preceding generation of scholars had seen in terms of conflict and suppression.

Why then is the last pagan stand so persistent even today? Here I (of course) refer to the dichotomous and conflictual image of the pagan reaction that continues to attract scholars. One of the answers might be the fact that the melodrama of the last battle is neat and simple enough to be outlined. A high drama with heroes and resistance tends to be more captivating than not-so-exciting every-day nuisances with economic and social issues (such as who is paying for the performance of rituals and who spends the revenues earned by temples). "Center-Christians" and "center-pagans" whom Cameron posits in the middle of his five overlapping categories (pp. 176–77) just cannot raise as much fascination as the 'committed' categories. (For the attraction of melodramas, see also L. Lavan, "The End of Temples: Towards a New Narrative?", in *The Archaeology of Late Antique 'Paganism'*, eds. L. Lavan – M. Mulryan, Leiden 2011, xv–lxv: lv–lvi). In Christian literary sources, the committed or rigorist writers made much noise and it is this noise that has mostly influenced the scholarly tendency to see Christianization in conflictual terms. Obviously, the day-to-day social life filled with negotiations and compromises was more complex than the so-called Church Fathers intended.

Cameron proceeds with his re-evaluation in different fields, among them, terminology (Ch. 1); imperial policies and legislation (Ch. 2); priesthoods, initiations and dedications (Ch. 4); pagan converts (Ch. 5); poems against pagans (Ch. 9), including the so-called *Carmen contra paganos* (Ch. 8); late antique literature (Ch. 6) and literary life (Ch. 10–11), especially Macrobius' *Saturnalia* (Ch. 7); late antique historiography (Ch. 17–18), including the hottest potato in historiographical research, *Historia Augusta*; sarcophagi, ivory diptychs and con-torniates (Ch. 19); as well as the subscriptions of manuscripts (Ch. 12–13). Each of the 20 chapters and even each paragraph in *The Last Pagans* is so condensed and heavily loaded with argument that the text must be digested with time and care. The text is occasionally flavoured with illustrative and entertaining analogies from modern phenomena (and even popular culture), sarcastic remarks on opposing views, vivid rhetorical images such as "the arrogant, philistine land-grabbers" (p. 3) and proverbial asides such as Roman paganism petering out "with a whimper rather than a bang" (p. 12).

My favourite is Chapter 3, "The Frigidus", in which Cameron step by step uncovers how the usurpation by Arbogast and Eugenius was construed as a religious war in later Christian accounts (Rufinus, Augustine, Sozomen, Theodoret). (The construction of the pagan-Christian conflict has also been analysed by M. R. Salzman, "Ambrose and the Usurpation of Arbogastes and Eugenius: Reflections on Pagan-Christian Conflict Narratives", *JECS* 18 [2010] 191–223). As Cameron remarks, "all these accounts are stylized in ways that call into question their claim to be considered historical narratives at all in the modern sense" (p. 94), since their function is theological rather than historical.

In Chapters 10 and 11, "The Real Circle of Symmachus" and "The 'Pagan' Literary Revival", Cameron sets the pagan aristocrats and their pastimes into the proper wider context of late antique literary life. It is more appropriate to speak of 'classical', 'secular', or 'mythological' rather than 'pagan' culture. For the late antique elites, this culture had above all a social function. Classical culture was shared by all educated people – pagans and Christians alike. For the elite, "it was the only culture there was" (p. 398). In discussing the revival of Latin literature in the fourth century, Cameron demonstrates that this revival neither had anything

to do with paganism nor with Roman aristocrats: it began long before the late fourth century and flourished in many different areas around the Empire. This clearly questions the traditional view that interpreted it as a pagan revival, associating it with pagan aristocrats. A similar acute contextualization is done in Chapter 16 to the Vergil commentators, as Cameron analyses the tradition of Vergil commentaries and the polemic on Vergil during the early Empire, showing that the doctrine of Vergilian infallibility goes back long before pagan readers of Vergil may have known about Christian ideas on the infallibility of the Bible as a source of religious truth.

Cameron's approach can be characterized as what might be called minimalistic. If there is no evidence, there is no need to build hypothetical constructions of the pagan reaction or revival. Therefore, it is difficult to find solid support for theories such as the doctrine of the pagan conspiracy of silence. Silence there certainly is ("Silence is deafening enough", in Cameron's words, p. 256). It is probable that some writers occasionally avoided mentioning Christianity or spoke of Christians in a circumlocutionary way. However, if some late antique grammarians, orators, poets or historians never mention Christianity, it is not because of a conspiracy of silence. Similarly, it is hard to verify covert polemic. Cameron goes against the assumptions according to which a writer is pagan, therefore he must be hostile to Christianity, therefore he belongs to a pagan circle, therefore his writings are hidden polemic, and so forth. Because polemic is concealed, it cannot be uncovered. Minimalistic restraint is also seen in Cameron's discussion on the *Annales* of Nicomachus Flavianus (Ch. 17). All evidence we have is the word *annales* in *CIL* VI 1783. All we know therefore is that he wrote a history but no text and not even fragments survive. I find this sort of minimalism sensible: even though it is sometimes hard to accept, the fact is that sources are ultimately the only thing we have.

"A less grandiose explanation will suffice", Cameron writes (p. 205) when dismantling the famous inscription of Nicomachus Flavianus of the superfluous mythology attached to it (*CIL* VI 1783; not 1782 as indicated on p. 200, n. 129). This sentence describes the argumentation of the entire book: less grandiose explanations will suffice. Cameron is consistent in his refutation of over-interpretation of late antique sources, and his argumentation is to a large extent based on demolishing the opposing arguments. This kind of argumentation is unavoidably negative. As Cameron himself admits at the very end of his book (p. 801), "much of the argument ... has been negative" in the sense that there was no pagan revival, no pagan party, and so forth. However, what emerges as a "positive" outcome of the merciless deconstruction of romantic myths is setting more sensible proportions to pagan-Christian relations (for instance, in the case of the often overpublicized controversy of the Altar of Victory, see esp. pp. 38–40) and opening up a more complex and nuanced view of Late Antiquity. This does not imply that there was no resentment, hatred or even struggle in late Roman society. There were much bitterness and animosity in pagan circles in the East.

As Cameron stresses, his research is limited to the aristocrats of Rome and to official Roman paganism, that is, the state cults performed by priestly colleges. This inevitably is only a narrow glimpse of late pagan religiosity in Rome and, therefore, the book might be better titled "The Last Aristocratic Pagans of Rome". Indeed, *The Last Pagans* does not purport to portray the whole picture of late antique paganism, for example, covering other segments of late Roman society or other regions of the Empire in which various forms of religion and traditions lived on. Cameron (p. 784) is correct in remarking how problematic the complaints of Christian bishops on the continuing threat of paganism in their areas are. In these cases we have only the perspective of Christian leaders who were inclined to interpret every practice

and belief that deviated from their own as paganism (or alternatively, as heresy or magic). The experiences of the ordinary people escape us.

Cameron (p. 131) applies the metaphor of organism to paganism that (he states) was dying a natural death and was mortally ill even before Emperor Theodosius' coercive legislation in the late fourth century. However, the reports of the death of paganism may be greatly exaggerated. Speaking metaphorically, we could alternatively see this organism in a process of metamorphosis instead of being terminally ill. Archaeological evidence shows the continuity of local religiosity, and this is also true of Rome and its surroundings. For instance, in the case of Ostia, as Douglas Boin ("A Late Antique Statuary Collection at Ostia's Sanctuary of Magna Mater and New Evidence for the Visibility of Late Roman 'Religion'", *PBSR* 81, 2013) writes, "the strength of this visible tradition can be appreciated without an appeal to any purported Late Antique 'pagan revival'". *The Last Pagans* has already produced lively discussions and reappraisals in which Cameron's ideas are either reassessed, challenged or developed further, especially in the conferences organized by Rita Lizzi Testa, Marianne Saghy and Michele R. Salzman, held in Rome (2013) and Budapest (2014), the proceedings of both of which are forthcoming. The story of the last pagans is to be continued.

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SAROLTA ANNA TAKÁCS: *The Construction of Authority in Ancient Rome and Byzantium: The Rhetoric of Empire*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009. 978-0-5218-7865-4. 192 pp. EUR 60, GBP 40.

Takács' splendid and streamlined volume, now some years old, could with equal justification have been subtitled "The Empire of Rhetoric". The intensity with which rhetorics permeated the elite culture of much of Greco-Roman antiquity is, one may argue, something that can appear particularly foreign for modern mind, conditioned as it is by the traumatic circumstances of the past century to distrust most explicit forms of rhetorical persuasion. In fact Takács alludes to these factors in her Introduction, before setting out with great clarity her mission in this monograph: to mount an examination – designed for non-specialists – of Roman and Byzantine discourses on power, virtue, and the legitimisation of autocracy. The study is structured around four discrete chronological scenarios: the Late Republic until Caesar; from Augustus to the Antonines; the Christianised/-ising empire; and the Late Antique reception of earlier themes both in the Eastern Roman Empire and the Carolingian realm.

Chapter 1 ("Republican Rome's Rhetorical Pattern of Political Authority") sets off from quite a conventional point of embarkation: the Scipios and their projection of the *virtus* of Roman elite males (4–7, 16–24). As the Republican system became increasingly derailed by personal ambitions of the elite, as well as systemic handicaps, the 'rhetoric of the empire' increasingly developed into a moralising register of historiography, exemplified by Sallust. Like Sallust, other *homines novi* (Cato the Elder, Cicero) too seem to exhibit the strongest obsession with the *mores maiorum* (as well as being much occupied with 'Romanness', each in their own way), and Takács explains this dynamic very arrestingly (e.g. 24–32). She moreover demonstrates well how the nascent autocrats' appropriation of the discourse of moral excellence deprived the rest of the Roman elite males from their accustomed elements for self-promotion;