



The Last Pagans of Rome

By Alan Cameron

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Rufinus' vivid account of the battle between the Eastern Emperor Theodosius and the Western usurper Eugenius by the River Frigidus in 394 represents it as the final confrontation between paganism and Christianity. It is indeed widely believed that a largely pagan aristocracy remained a powerful and active force well into the fifth century, sponsoring pagan literary circles, patronage of the classics, and propaganda for the old cults in art and literature. The main focus of much modern scholarship on the end of paganism in the West has been on its supposed stubborn resistance to Christianity. The dismantling of this romantic myth is one of the main goals of Alan Cameron's book. Actually, the book argues, Western paganism petered out much earlier and more rapidly than hitherto assumed.

The subject of this book is not the conversion of the last pagans but rather the duration, nature, and consequences of their survival. By re-examining the abundant textual evidence, both Christian (Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Paulinus, Prudentius) and "pagan" (Claudian, Macrobius, and Ammianus Marcellinus), as well as the visual evidence (ivory diptychs, illuminated manuscripts, silverware), Cameron shows that most of the activities and artifacts previously identified as hallmarks of a pagan revival were in fact just as important to the life of cultivated Christians. Far from being a subversive activity designed to rally pagans, the acceptance of classical literature, learning, and art by most elite Christians may actually have helped the last reluctant pagans to finally abandon the old cults and adopt Christianity. The culmination of decades of research, *The Last Pagans of Rome* overturns many long-held assumptions about pagan and Christian culture in the late antique West.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*The Last Pagans of Rome* is a book of a generation. A model of erudition and integrity of argument, it is also a book that will be with us for many generations to come."--Peter Brown, *New York Review of Books*

"As befits a scholar whose work in this area since 1964 includes countless articles and reviews and six books, the weighing of ancient evidence and modern scholarly opinion in *The Last Pagans of Rome* is meticulous. It is also controlled by the broader understanding of cultural processes and human motivations that makes a thinking senior scholar a scholar worth reading rather than a scholiast who has made it to old age."--Tom Palaima, *Times Higher Education*

"This impressive book is a masterpiece, result of decades of research in the field of Late Antique Literature and History. Alan Cameron provides a sharp and stimulating reassessment of common assumptions about the confrontation between pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity. We must hope that people will take the time to read right through this very dense and rich book, which will undoubtedly become essential reading in the field of late Antique literature, religions, and history."--Bryn Mawr *Classical Review*

"Alan Cameron provides students of historical inquiry with one of the finest examples of methodology in this magnum opus. He proves that he has few equals in the interpretation of the events surrounding the transition of Roman culture from predominantly pagan to predominantly Christian. *The Last Pagans of Rome* is an important work that will become a dog-eared necessity in the teaching of late antiquity. Few who manage to digest its contents will argue against the might and mastery of Cameron's conclusions."--*The Councilor: The Journal of the Illinois Councilor for the Social Studies*

"Alan Cameron's *Last Pagans of Rome* is one of the best and most important books ever published on the Later Roman Empire or Late Antiquity, and it has profound consequences for our understanding of the culture of the entire Greco-Roman world. It represents the summation of decades of original contributions by one whose best published work is the equal in quality and significance to that of any classical scholar living or dead."--Timothy Barnes, University of Edinburgh

"A work of sheer brilliance that will endure for a long time in view of its definitive presentation of central issues in the story of Christianity and paganism in late antiquity. Cameron takes his reader on an exhilarating journey through debates on religion, literature, politics, art, and ancient antiquarian scholarship. Its cumulative power is immense, and all its chapters, with their vast arsenal of learning and bibliography, are beautifully interconnected. There is nothing like it, and there will not be for generations to come."--G. W. Bowersock, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton

"Encyclopedic in its learning and relentless in its argument, Alan Cameron's *Last Pagans of Rome* is a landmark in late Roman studies...a breath-taking sortie across the cultural landscape of fourth- and early fifth-century Rome."--*Classical Journal*

"[T]here should be no doubt of the importance of Cameron's conclusions...Alan Cameron's brilliant and persuasive account offers an alternative view of a cultured aristocracy whose interest in the classical tradition was shared by educated Christians across the Mediterranean world, and who posed no real threat to the Empire's new religion."--*The Times Literary Supplement*

"...written in a highly detailed but remarkably readable manner with prose that is sometimes humorous other times blunt, but always engaging."--Dennis P. Quinn

About the Author

Alan Cameron is Charles Anthon Professor Emeritus of Latin at Columbia University. His previous books include *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius*, *The Greek Anthology: From Meleager to Planudes*, *Callimachus and his Critics*, and *Greek Mythography in the Roman World*. He is the winner of the 2013 Kenyon Medal for Classical Studies and Archaeology from the British Academy.

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