ASPECTS OF THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE ROMAN ARISTOCRACY

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Perhaps the most significant feature of the end of paganism in Rome is that we do know about it; in the words of one of the earliest students of this death of a religion, Beugnot, 'L'histoire n’a daigné qu’assister aux funérailles du paganisme.'¹ That this is so is due largely to the central position occupied in the religious history of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, by the senatorial aristocracy of Rome.

The direction of modern research has served to amplify our appreciation of their rôle. The 'Romans of Rome' continue to hold the centre of the stage. Ever since Beugnot, their paganism has been placed in a massive frame. Ample justice has been done to their claim to represent, in the cultural, the political and the social, as well as in the religious, life of the Later Roman Empire, the pars melior generis humani.² They can stand for the past; for the continuity of the Roman Senate³ and for the preservation of Roman classical culture.⁴ The careers and outlook of their religious leaders have come to be studied in great detail; Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, especially, now stands for the culmination of the most vital tendencies in Late Roman Paganism.⁵ The archaeology of this period, in Rome and Ostia, has revealed both their style of life and the tenacity and consistency of their devotion to those Roman and 'oriental' cults which are discussed in the Saturnalia of Macrobius.⁶ Quite apart from the religious situation of these men, we have come to appreciate that their gigantic wealth and unchallenged prestige had made it possible for them to influence decisively the political and social, as well as the religious, future of the Western Empire;⁷ and it is this awareness of the position of the senatorial class in the society of the Later Roman Empire which promises to add a new dimension to their official rôle as members of the Roman Senate, Prefects of the City and priests of the public Roman religion.⁸ Inevitably, since Seeck's monumental introduction to his works, Symmachus has remained at the centre of our picture, hardly through any renewed appreciation of his style, but just because his correspondence shows him at the centre of what had remained to him a small and, seemingly, unchallenged world.⁹ Perhaps the most interesting feature for an historian of this circle, in the recently-discovered poems of his friend, Naucellius, is that they have nothing new to contribute; they mirror exactly this quiet world, dominated, in its literary expression, by the traditional forms of the 'good life':

Parcus amator opum, blandorum victor honorum
hic studia et Musis otia amica colo
Iunius Ausoniae notus testudinis ales,
quodque voluptati est, hinc capio atque fruor:
rura, domus, rigui genuinis fontibus horti
dulciaque impurum marmora Pieridum.
Vivere sic placidamque iuvat proferre senectam,
docta revolventem scripta virum veterum.¹⁰

¹ A. Beugnot, Histoire de la destruction du paganisme en Occident, Paris 1835, Vol. 1, 2.
² Symmachus, Ep. 1, 52.
⁴ Especially F. Klingner, Vom Geistesleben Roms des ausgehenden Altertums, Halle, 1941.
⁵ He has received two detailed monographs in Dutch and Flemish respectively: Nicolaas, Prae-
⁸ See especially S. Mazzarino, Aspetti sociali del quarto secolo, Rome, 1951; and A. H. M. Jones, 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,' History 40, 1955, 209–226.
mata Bobiensia,' Zetemata, Heft, 21, Munich, 1959.
The upshot of this research has been a vivid cross-section of the pagan, senatorial class, extending, roughly, in time, over the period covered by the active life of Symmachus—that is from 375 to 402.

Like most cross-sections, however, it suffers from an inherent disadvantage; almost inevitably, and especially when it is taken across a class as ostensibly self-confident as the late Roman Senate, it is static. Yet Symmachus and his fellow-pagans lived in an age of rapid religious change, gleefully described by their Christian contemporaries as the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. In the next century, their descendants continued to represent the pars melior generis humani—but as Christians. Thus a question has been posed acutely by the state of our present knowledge; what we have reconstructed is the coherence of the conservative elements in the Late Roman aristocracy; what we still need to explain is their gradual transformation in the tempora Christiana.

This article cannot claim to offer a complete explanation of the Christianization of the Roman pagans. Its main purpose is to approach, from a limited viewpoint, a problem in the interpretation of the religious history of the Later Roman Empire.

It had been believed, by many Christians since Constantine, that the Christianization of the Empire had come to depend on the authority of an emperor militans pro Deo (Ambrose, Ep. 17). Inevitably, the disestablishment of the official pagan cults of Rome, by Gratian in 382, and, finally, by Theodosius, took the form of a definitive act of public authority. Indeed, this exercise of authority by the Emperor was held by contemporaries to be so important that Prudentius, in his Contra Symmachum of 402, could represent the end of paganism in Rome as having taken place in an atmosphere of impeccable legality, according to the traditional Roman forms: in a meeting of the Senate, presided over by the Emperor Theodosius, Jupiter was defeated by Christ in a division of the house! 11

Needless to say, this explanation by Prudentius is a poetic fiction; the exercise of his authority in so blunt a manner by a Christian Emperor could never, in itself, explain the religious transformation of Rome. For this reason, it has seemed important to place the emphasis, in this study, upon those factors which affected the diffusion of Christianity within the senatorial families themselves—to examine the working of the common ties of marriage and culture as they affected the religious transformation of this class.

There has been a tendency to neglect the Histoire des Moeurs of the Later Roman Empire, in Rome; 12 the main sources, such as the writings of Jerome, are Christian, and, in consulting these, the historian may feel that he has been led from the unambiguous 'realities' of Imperial legislation and senatorial politics into a hot-house world of piety. But, to appreciate a change as profound, and far-reaching in its consequences, as the spread of Christianity in the most influential class of the Western Empire, due attention must be paid to such 'internal' factors; they ensured that the change in the official religion of Rome took the form, not of a brutal rejection of the past by an authoritarian régime, but of a transformation in which much of the Roman secular tradition was preserved.

Such an approach must, also, attempt to define the position of the emperor in the religious life of the age. It is, therefore, hoped that this article may contribute, in its narrow field, to the solution of the problem posed in the recent book of Dr. André Chastagnol, by his reconstruction of the manner in which the Christian policy of the emperors impinged on the political life of the leading Roman families; 13 that is, that, of the many problems of later Roman History, the greatest is that created by the conversion of Constantine and illustrated by the fate of paganism in Rome—the interaction of public authority and private belief in an age of dramatic political and religious change.

Before we study the conversion of the Roman families in terms of the Histoire des Moeurs, we must consider a view which offers a simple way to the understanding of this change in terms of a conflict of authority. It has been suggested that the struggle between Christianity and paganism can be understood in terms of the continuation of a pre-existing tension—that is, as a struggle, on various levels, between the pagan Roman Senate and the

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11 Prudentius, Contra Symm. 11, 608 ff.
12 An exception, of course, is Sir Samuel Dill, Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire, 1898, esp. Book 1, chapter 1, 'The pagan aristocracy and the confusion of parties.'
13 Chastagnol, o.c. (n. 8) part iii, 'Les Préfets,' 1–457.
Christian Roman Emperor. Such a view, which invokes the impressive continuity of Roman history, has much to recommend it. The disestablishment of paganism by Gratian, in 382, was, unambiguously, a unilateral act on the part of a Christian emperor, enforced to the detriment of the Senate, which Symmachus claimed to represent. The defeat and suicide of Flavianus, in the civil war waged against Theodosius, in 394, is a similar, dramatic, turning-point; it has earned for this last pagan leader a comparison with Cato of Utica.14

The hope of understanding the position and aims of the pagan senators in these terms has led to great ingenuity. Above all, we have tried to isolate a specifically ‘senatorial’ attitude to the Christian Emperors; and we have only been able to find it in some of the least obvious sources—such as in the Scriptores Historiae Augustae 16 or in the ‘ideological’ content of tokens such as the contorniati.17 Such interpretations, with similar efforts to explain the pagan resistance in terms of a defence of their threatened social position,18 have been treated with a certain amount of scepticism. They do, however, open up a royal road to explaining why the paganism of these men did not continue. In asserting their religion, the senators of Rome were led to flout the authority of their emperor; and, in failing, they revealed not so much the weakness of their religion, as of their political position. In the words of André Piganiol:

Seulement ils se trompaient, car ce n’est point Accius et Virgile, Auguste ou même Antonin, qu’il fallait prendre pour modèle, mais bien Scipion et Marius. C’est en abandonnant le commandement des armées que cette aristocratie s’est condamnée, et ainsi s’explique le caractère archaïsant et désuet de son impuissante propagande.18

Inevitably, such an emphasis has concentrated attention on the public crises in the relations between Roman paganism and the Christian court. The end of paganism is seen, in concrete terms, as a tragedy of distinct acts: it includes the removal of the Altar of Victory and the disendowment of the Roman cults by Gratian in 382, the abortive appeal of Symmachus in 384, the peripateia of the elevation of Eugenius in 392, and the tragic dénouement of the defeat and suicide of Flavianus at the battle of the Frigidus, in 394. The remaining evidence for acute tension between Christians and pagans has been grouped, almost instinctively, around these ‘turning-points’. Thus the most detailed and least squeamish of the anti-pagan lampoons—the ‘contra paganos’ (Cod. Paris. 8084)—is usually taken to refer to the reaction of 392–4 and has, so, been called ‘Adversus Flavianum’.19

The principal difficulty of this interpretation is that it provides no sufficient explanation of the aftermath of the religious struggle between Senate and Emperor. After the débacle of the battle of the Frigidus, the prestige of the ‘Romans of Rome’ continued unaffected by the outcome of the civil war, throughout the fifth century. The most striking evidence of this is the letter of the Emperor Valentinian III to the Roman Senate, in 431; it is inscribed on the base of an honorary statue erected to Flavianus, of all people. Here the Emperor shows an ability to forget the tensions of the immediate past which would be incredible in any other age. The paganism of Flavianus, and his rôle in the usurpation of Eugenius, are passed over in silence; instead, the eclipse of so great a name is ascribed to ‘blind misrepresentation’. Valentinian, a pious Christian, is prepared to greet the sons of this pagan rebel, and the Senate, as politely as his grandfather Theodosius had always done; Flavianus, as a learned historian and dutiful servant was to receive a statue worthy of the ‘more wealthy commonwealth’ in which he had shone.20

This paradoxical rehabilitation was by no means exceptional. In the events of the

19 On the authority of Mommsen, Hermes, 1879, 359–363. This has been challenged, in my opinion successfully, by G. Mangano, ‘La reazione pagana a Roma nel 408–9 d.c. e il poemetto anonimo “contra paganos”’, Giorn. it. filol., anno xiii, no. 3, 1960, 210–224.
20 CIL vi, 1783. See esp. Solari, Philologus 91, 1936, 357 sq.
appeal for the Altar of Victory, in 384, the same pattern of respect for the 'Romans of Rome' appears. The opportunist court at that time, anxious to maintain an 'Italian front' against two zealous new men—Maximus in Gaul, and Theodosius in the East—had no hesitation in employing eminent pagans and keeping them in office for a long time after the resounding snub to their paganism engineered by S. Ambrose in his letters 17 and 18, to the boy-Emperor, Valentinian II. When Praetextatus died, only an extremist like Jerome could indulge in indecent glee (Jerome, Ep. 23, 2, 1); the court behaved handsomely. The Senate's petition for honorary statues was immediately granted. Symmachus was sufficiently moved by this public demonstration of respect. He rounded on the extremists of his own party, who had intended, in defiance of religious protocol, to allow the Vestal Virgins to erect a statue of their own to Praetextatus; 21 in his view, the court, whatever their religious beliefs, had both done what was expected of them and all that needed to be done: 'inlustrior enim laus est de caelesti profecta iudicio' (Symm. Rel. 12, 4).

These incidents show an interrelation between court and senatorial aristocracy which cannot be explained in terms of a sharp dichotomy terminated with the failure of Flavianus. The 'Romans of Rome' remained indispensable. Carefully managed under Stilicho, they were still able, in the political chaos caused by the arrival of Alaric and the usurpation of Attalus—in 408—9—to express their views and to adopt their own religious measures for the safety of their City. 22 In the next century, the surface of their secular traditions remained intact. Aëtius could pose for them as the 'Restorer of Liberty'; 23 and even when there is no emperor left to woo them, the barbarian adventurers continue this tradition of respect. In the reigns of Odoacer and Theodoric, the senatorial mint resumed its activities, with a series of coins which showed Romulus and Remus, with the Wolf on the reverse and 'Roma Invicta' on the obverse. 24 Behind these courtesies lay the fact, emphasized in the early studies of Sundwall and Stein, of the unchecked preponderance of these Italians over a bankrupt and hamstrung court. 25 It was no less difficult than before to separate this tradition of perennial respectability from its pagan roots. It is hardly surprising that the Lupercalia should have continued to be celebrated, under the patronage of senators, until the end of the fifth century.

Yet this façade of continuity only masks an important change. When Pope Gelasius turned his attention to the Lupercalia, he could condemn them as a superfluous relic. 26 His opponent, Andromachus, was a Christian (§ 7); the Pope's answer had been provoked by a notoriously Christian criticism—an anti-clerical attack on the morals of one of his clergy (§ 2). In his argument he can appeal, conclusively, to the past; he points out that the ancestors of Andromachus had already decided to break with the traditions of Roman paganism (§ 28). It is, therefore, plain that the Pope is writing in a city whose upper-class had, at some time in the past, conformed to the tempora christiana; although it is hardly surprising that, as the Senate of Roma Invicta, they should have conformed on their own terms.

This, broadly speaking, poses the problem which needs to be answered. At some time—or, more precisely, over a certain period—the secular traditions of the senatorial class, traditions which one might have assumed to be intimately bound up with the fate of their pagan beliefs, came to be continued by a Christian aristocracy. To understand this 'sea change', it is necessary to consider the 'Romans of Rome' in themselves, apart from the public crises which they had weathered so effectively; and to see whether the Christianization of their class was not part of a long-term development, as elusive but, ultimately, as decisive as any change of taste.

The greatest difficulty in sketching this evolution lies in the highly-specialized nature of the literary evidence. It is hardly surprising that this evidence is exclusively Christian;
but it is important, also, to remember that it reflects the preoccupations of a peculiar current in Christianity. As revealed in the correspondence, above all of Jerome and, to a lesser extent, in the works of Paulinus, Augustine, Pelagius and Palladius, the history of the conversion of the Roman families is part of the history of the impact of an extreme 'oriental' form of asceticism on the religious life of Rome. This ascetic movement represented a radical departure from the previous Christian traditions of Rome; its leaders were not Romans themselves; its ideals involved a rejection of the social life of the City and, almost inevitably, the abandonment of Rome for the centres of the new devotion—the Holy Places and Egypt.27

Thus, the correspondence of Jerome throws a vivid, but exceedingly erratic, light on the Roman scene.28 Since 385, he had had no first-hand acquaintance of the events which he describes; his most instructive letters, indeed, are cast in the \textit{ex post facto} form of encomiums of the dead.29 His intervention against Jovinian in 393 is typical of his eccentric position; written from a safe distance, his defence of virginity was so violent that his Roman friend, Pammachius, thought it best to suppress it.30 His lively pictures of the Roman families among whom he found support are deeply flawed with theological rancour: thus, Melania the Elder, one of the founders of the ascetic movement to the Holy Land, was condemned out of hand for her loyalty to Rufinus, as the woman: 'cuius nomen nigredinis testatur perfidiae tenebrae';31 although a leading devoted, and a near relation-by-marriage of a branch of the Caeionian family which Jerome describes in great detail, she is passed over in silence.32

The general effect on our evidence of this narrow sympathy is most apparent, less in its occasional unreliability, than in the implicit delimitation of the range of our knowledge. It is limited in time to little more than a generation.33 It is equally drastically limited in extent: Jerome, for instance, is content to describe the circle around Pammachius in terms of the four philosophical virtues or the four-horsed chariot by which the prophet Elijah ascended into Heaven!34

There might be a way out of this dilemma posed by the literary sources. The recent epigraphic evidence for the Roman nobility has greatly increased our knowledge of their paganism; it might add to our understanding of their Christianization. This has certainly been true of the family of the Anicii—a family which had stood aloof, throughout the fourth century, from the ascetic movement: the funeral inscription of the head of the family and the doyen of Roman society, Sextus Petronius Probus, shows a very different type of aristocratic piety;35 and, among the most surprising discoveries in recent years, has been that of the inscription, known hitherto from a literary tradition, written by a representative of the other branch of that family—Anicius Bassus—for Monica, the mother of S. Augustine who had died, in 387, in Ostia.36 In many cases, however, this 'indirect' evidence has outstripped our knowledge from the literary sources to an embarrassing extent. An interesting example of this is shown in attempts to identify a leading Christian lady: Italica. The Italica to whom Augustine wrote in 409 seems to have played an important part in Roman religious life; Augustine can canvass her views in a theological debate.37 The Italica to whom John Chrysostom wrote, in 406, may be the same; she is in a position to intervene with the Pope, and, perhaps, also with the

27 For a full analysis of the ideals and chronology of this movement as it affected Rome: D. Gordini, 'Origine e sviluppo del monachesimo a Roma,' \textit{Gregoriano} 37, 1956, 220-260.
28 See F. de Cavallera, \textit{S. Jerôme, sa vie et son œuvre}, Louvain, 1922, esp. 1, 1, 84-120.
29 \textit{e.g. Ep.} 108 to Eustochium on the death of Paula (404); \textit{Ep.} 127 to Principia on the death of Marcella (413).
30 Jerome, \textit{Ep.} 49, 12, \textit{CSEL} 54, 367-9, with a characteristic complaint: 'Delicata doctrina est pugnantis iuctus dictare de muro et, cum ipse unguentis delibatus sis, cruentum militem accusare formidinis.'
31 Jerome, \textit{Ep.} 133, 3, \textit{CSEL} 56, 246. For these significant omissions see F. X. Murphy, 'Melania the Elder: a biographical note,' \textit{Traditio} v, 1947, 59-77 at p. 59-60.
32 In Jerome, \textit{Ep.} 107 'ad Laetam'.
33 An excellent guide to the chronological distribution of Jerome's letters is in Cavallera, o.c. (n. 28), 1, 2, 153-165, \textit{Regesta Hieronymiana}.
35 \textit{CIL} vi, 1756.
36 See Meiggs, o.c. (note 6), p. 400.
37 Augustine, \textit{Ep.} 92 and 99, \textit{CSEL} 34, 436-444; 533-5, where she is a widow, with sons, interested in the property of the 'clarissimus et egregious iuvenis' Julianus, adjacent to the church in Hippo. He may be the Julianus who died without issue mentioned in \textit{Sermo} 355, 4. For his house in Hippo, Marec, \textit{Libya}, 1, 1953, 95-108.
Emperor, on behalf of Chrysostom at a crucial moment of his career.\textsuperscript{38} Symmachus, also, refers politely to 'his sister' Italica.\textsuperscript{39} The recent epigraphic evidence, however, has made it unwise to see in these Italicas the same person. There is now the Anicia Italica of an Ostian drainpipe, who is presumably the wife of a hitherto unknown man, Valerius Faltonius Adelphius; \textsuperscript{40} and the Italica of an altar-support in the Lateran, presumably, again, the wife of an unnamed man.\textsuperscript{41} Until we know more of either the new Valerius Faltonius Adelphius or the mysterious 'Prefect of the City, Patrician and Consul Ordinary', we can only assume that there may be more than one Italica, and that to create a single person out of the welter of Late Roman family names is to attempt to draw the net too tight. It is a sobering reminder of the fact that the homogeneity of the Roman 'patrician' families of this time is a pious hope—expressing a laudable intention of belonging to the traditionally recognized core of the \textit{pars melior generis humani}; \textsuperscript{42} it cannot be assumed by the prosopographer.

We are, therefore, left with the 'tone' of the religious transformation, as shown in the literary evidence and the few inscriptions, rather than with any independent, statistical, solution of the problem.

There is one obvious feature in the \textit{histoire des moeurs} of the fourth century as it affected religion; that is, mixed marriages. Christian opinion seems to have changed considerably on this issue; Augustine could say that a mixed marriage, regarded by S. Cyprian as a sin, was now no longer avoided as such.\textsuperscript{43} The most striking example, from a family of which we know more than usual, is the position of the Caeionii at the end of the century.\textsuperscript{44} Of the four sons born of pagan parents around the middle of the century, two are known to have married Christian wives. Both men remained notable pagans: Caeionius Rufius Albinus was an intimate contemporary of Symmachus; \textsuperscript{45} Publius Caeionius Caecina Albinus was known to Jerome as a Pontifex.\textsuperscript{46} The results of their choice of wives are well known; the daughters of both—Albina and Laeta respectively, were devout Christians; their granddaughters, Melania the Younger and Paula, were the objects of solicitous attention from Christian contemporaries. In his letter to Laeta, Jerome could paint an idyllic picture of the gradual evolution of this mixed family; the old pagan pontiff seemed doomed by the solidarity of his Christian kinsfolk:

\begin{quote}
\textit{candidatus est fidei, quem filiorum et nepotum credens turba circumdat. Ego puto etiam ipsum Iovem, si habuisset talem cognationem, potuisse in Christum credere.}\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

In fact, such a picture—borne out in a more fragmentary manner for the other families—poses many problems. A mixed marriage might often be a \textit{mariage de convenance} between unequal partners; thus, the Christian heiress, Proiecta, of the Esquiline casket in the British Museum, may have married, at the age of 16, an elderly pagan of over 60.\textsuperscript{48} What is remarkable, then, is either the tolerance of the husband or—what one might suspect but cannot show—the strength of the Christian families in ensuring that the religion of the bride was respected. Only Praetextatus seems to have taken in hand the religious education of his wife; \textsuperscript{49} the rest seem to have ignored the advice of Plutarch, that husbands should make their wives conform to their choice of gods as of friends. Indeed, the formidable circle of patrician ladies gathered around Jerome still needs to be explained in general terms of the position of women in the aristocracy of the late Roman

\textsuperscript{38} John Chrys. \textit{Ep.} 170: \textit{PG} 52, 709 sq. This letter is significantly placed between letters to two known members of the Anicii, Proba and Iuliana, at a time when their close relative, Anicius Probus, was consul.

\textsuperscript{39} Symm. \textit{Ep.} IX, 40.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Valeri Faltoni Adelfi et in et Aniciae Italicae.} N.S. 1953, p. 170 n. 32. See Meiggs, o.c. (n. 6.), 212–3.


\textsuperscript{42} See the attempt of the Emperor Alexander Severus to trace his descent from the Metelli, \textit{SHA Vita Alex. Sev.} c. 44: cf. the caustic comments of Jerome, \textit{Ep.} 130, 5, \textit{CSEL} 56, p. 177 'ut ramorum sterilitatem radix fecunda compenset, quod in fructu non teneas, miretis in trunco'.

\textsuperscript{43} Aug. \textit{De Fide et Operibus} 21, 37, \textit{CSEL} 41, p. 80.

\textsuperscript{44} See the excellent study of A. Chastagnol, \textit{Le sénateur Volusien}, \textit{Rev. Ét. Anc.} 58, 1956, 241–253, with a revised stemma on p. 249.

\textsuperscript{45} Macrobius, \textit{Saturnalia} III, 4, 12 ; VI, 1, 1.

\textsuperscript{46} Jerome, \textit{Ep.} 107, 1 : \textit{CSEL} 55, p. 291.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{49} See \textit{CIL} VI, 1779.
Empire.\textsuperscript{50} In this respect, the contrast with Antioch is suggestive; in this city, intermarriage, Christianity in the women's quarters and the ascetic propaganda of John Chrysostom, were equally prominent features of fourth-century society without producing such high-spirited ladies.\textsuperscript{51}

It is the wives, themselves, that are often an insoluble problem. We do not know when they became Christian. With the doubtful exception of a Vestal Virgin,\textsuperscript{52} there are no spectacular conversions among them; the 'conversions' of a Melania the Elder or of the heroines of Jerome are from the 'world' not from paganism. They do, in fact, add a new dimension of time to the problem. The cases of Marcella and Melania suggest that the heiresses of important families were already Christian in the age of Constantine and Constantius II.\textsuperscript{53} We would like to know to what extent these influential Christians could be defined as belonging to 'provincial' or 'new' families, from the more Christianized parts of the Empire—Melania the elder, we know, was a Spaniard;\textsuperscript{54} at the moment, however, we do not know enough of the recruitment of the later Roman aristocracy to answer the question in these terms.\textsuperscript{55}

Despite Jerome's optimism, mere intermarriage remained an inconclusive means of Christianization. To emphasize this aspect unduly would mean ignoring the immense esprit de corps of a Roman gens, with its pagan roots. In the case of the Ceionii the most striking feature is not the factors contributing to the religious disintegration of the family—by mixed marriages or asceticism; it is the solidarity of the male members in an ancestral paganism. The son of Rufius Albinus, Rufius Antonius Agrypnus Volusianus remained a pagan up to his deathbed in 437; the son of Caecina Albinus, Caecionius Contucius Gregorius, was regarded, more ambiguously, in 400, as a 'veteris sanctitatis exemplar'.\textsuperscript{56}

The paganism of Volusianus seems to have been taken for granted. He appears with his father in the ostensibly self-confident circle of pagans to which Rutilius Namatianus expressed his belief in the permanence of Rome—after the Gothic sack of 410.\textsuperscript{57} And yet, he belongs to a completely new generation: he was, perhaps, born in the early 380's—that is, after the official suppression of paganism. He is treated by Augustine, in 412, with great tact and esteem; on the surface, he belongs to a Christian family consisting of his mother, sister and niece; the exchange of letters contains only what the intermediary could regard as 'threadbare arguments';\textsuperscript{58}—arguments such as could be made from within Christianity itself; the correspondence is later referred to by Augustine as 'my letters on the virginity of Mary to the illustrious Volusianus, whom I mention with esteem and affection'.\textsuperscript{59} And yet, despite his caution, Volusianus seems to have remained loyal to a tradition which may have begun with his father. He had stuckled at the Incarnation, and the closely related problem of the Virgin Birth; but so, also, had his father before him.\textsuperscript{60} Thus we see two generations of Roman pagans provoking from the greatest Christian

\textsuperscript{50} See some acute remarks on the position of these clarissimae feminae in S. Mazzarino, La fine del mondo antico, Milan, 1959, 125–143. But it must be remembered that the most obvious feature of this emancipation, the relaxation of the divorce-laws, shocked Christian sentiment: see Ps. Aug. Quaestiones, cxxv, 12 and 16, CSEL 50, 324 and 333.


\textsuperscript{52} Prudentius, Peristephanon II, 524 ff. CSEL 61, 315: 'O Maruechi, 'La vestale cristiana,' Nuovo boll. di arch. crist. 1890, 207.

\textsuperscript{53} See Theodoret, Hist. Eccl. II, 16, on the negotiations between Constantius II and Liberius, in which Liberius is accused of having snubbed the Emperor 'to please the Senate'.

\textsuperscript{54} See Murphy, art. cit. (note 31), p. 60 and sterna p. 63.

\textsuperscript{55} For Italian connections equally distributed between pagans and Christians at the end of the fourth century, see the list of 'Patroni ex origine' of Italian towns in Harmand, o.c. (n. 8), 204–5.

\textsuperscript{56} CIL vi, 1706.

\textsuperscript{57} Rut. Namat, De Reditu suo I, 415 ff.

\textsuperscript{58} Marcellinus to Augustine, Ep. 136, 1: CSEL 44, p. 94. But Volusianus was hardly in a position to push his objections to Christianity to extremes at that time; his criticism of the political relevance of Christian morality is notably subdued, see Ep. 136, 2, CSEL xlv, 95.

\textsuperscript{59} Augustine, Enchiridion 34, 10.

\textsuperscript{60} Photius, cod. 230 ed. Becker p. 271, B. 29. This has been taken by Seeck, o.c. (n. 9), p. CLXXXI to imply that Rufius Albinus was a Christian. E. Liénard, 'Un courtisan de Théodose,' Rev. belge de philol. 13, 1934, 73 ff. has built upon this assumption the ingenious theory of a politic conversion, in 389, as a sequel to the defeat of Maximus by Theodosius.
thinkers of their time—Ambrose and Augustine, respectively—impeccable statements of the central doctrine of the new religion.61

Yet if we are to believe the *Vita Melaniae Junioris*, Volusianus was eventually converted on his deathbed by his niece, Melania the Younger, when on an official mission to Constantinople in 437.62 He died, murmuring benignly to his niece, that 'If Rome had had three such priests as the patriarch Proclus, the word “pagan” would have vanished from the city'.63 It is a touching family reunion. It may, however, have been no more than that: the *Vita* implies that Volusianus had been more afraid of being forcibly baptized by the Emperor Theodosius II; 64 and Melania, despite the close relation with her uncle on his deathbed, had arrived in Constantinople, in the first instance, not to convert her relative but to help him in the negotiations for a political marriage.65

Indeed, with the reasonable hope before them that the pagan tradition of the family would be continued in their sons, the heads of such families could well afford to be indiscriminating. The elder sister of Volusianus, for instance,—Albina—was married to a Christian member of a largely Christian family—Valerius Publicola. Publicola was a moderate: educated in Rome while his mother Melania the Elder was in the Holy Land, he had grown up as a Christian, but as a thorough aristocrat. He cuts a tragic figure; caught in the spiritual currents of his age, he only became reconciled on his deathbed to the asceticism of his 21-year-old daughter, Melania, whose personal austerities, encouraged by her mother and grandmother, had, despite his anxious attentions, already led to a stillbirth and whose charitable intentions threatened to dissolve the enormous wealth of both families.66

It should be realized, however, that the generation of Volusianus was, in many ways, exceptional. It saw both the height of the ascetic movement and the disaster of the sack of Rome. The headstrong behaviour of Melania and her husband, Pinianus, in selling out the family property for charity, had involved both moderate Christians and pagans in a scandal, where domestic tensions were swept into a wider current of violence. The turbulent intervention of Serena, the wife of Stilicho, on the side of the young couple, at a time of mounting tension, threatened to turn the affair into a political issue.67 The incident ended with the execution for high treason of Serena, a punishment which, though carried out at the instance of the Christian Gallia Placidia, was regarded by the pagans as a punishment for her sacrilege;68 and with the lynching of a pagan Prefect of the City in the act of confiscating what remained of the property of the Christian couple.69 Following close on this, the Gothic siege, the pagan reaction of Attalus in 409 and the sack of the City, ensured that the internal divisions between pagan and Christian were crystallized as seldom previously. To a Christian, such as Pelagius, the horrors of the siege were a timely reminder of the Last Judgement.70 It is hardly surprising, after such an experience, that the Anician family, as refugees in Africa, should have, at last, countenanced the new devotion by consecrating Demetrias, the grand-niece of Petronius Probus, as a nun: ‘invenisse eam,
quod praestaret generi, quod Romanae urbis cineres mitigaret. 71 We can only guess at the effect of the same events on a young man such as Volusianus; they, at least, stirred up sufficient resentment to provoke Augustine’s ‘City of God’. 72

Many less fully-documented cases, before these years of crisis, however, show the strength of the movement towards a respectable, aristocratic Christianity. By far the most important of these is the conversion of the Anician family, and, especially, the late baptism of the doyen of Roman society, Petronius Probus, celebrated in a grandiose epitaph, and acclaimed by Christian writers as the ‘first’ conversion among the Roman aristocracy. 73 Despite the courtesy of these Christian admirers, this spectacular ‘conversion’ had been long-prepared. There is no evidence that Probus had ever been a pagan; early in his official career, he was known as the patron of S. Ambrose; 74 Proba, the grandmother of his wife, had already written a Vergilian canto on the ‘Creation and the Life of Christ’. 75 Indeed, the baptism of Probus only marks the culmination of a long career dedicated to the aggrandisement of his family and to the founding of a tradition of self-interested loyalty to the powers-that-be; 76 as the inscription implies, he had now exchanged the intimacy of the Emperor for that of Christ. Typically, the ivory diptych, presented by his son to the Emperor Honorius, in 406, is the best-produced example of a specifically Christian ideology of the empire; the Emperor holds in his left-hand an orb surmounted by the traditional winged Victory, but in his right he carries the standard of Constantine—the Labarum—with ‘in nomine Xpi vincas semper’. 77

In the case of the Anicii, also, it is possible to appreciate a change which cannot be shown on a family-tree. For Christians and pagans to live together, and, eventually, to accept whole-heartedly the tempora Christiana, a common ground had to be found in the classical culture of the age. The Vergilian canto of Proba is a symptom of this profound change. 78 It is a type of ‘salonfähig’ Christian literature which brought out the most waspish in Jerome; 79 yet, in the eyes of Isidore of Seville, it gave Proba a place as the only woman ecclesiastical writer. 80 The final address to her husband Adelphius, strikes an impeccably classical note of self-confidence which the subsequent history of the family did nothing to belie:

i decus, i, nostrum, tantarum gloria rerum,  
et nos et tua dexter adi pede sacra secundo  
anua, quae differre nefas. celebrate faventes  
hunc, socii, morem sacrorum: hunc ipse teneto,  
o dulcis coniunx, et si pietate meremur,  
hac casti maneant in religione nepotes. 81

This impression of an unexplored border-line between the pagan and Christian culture of Rome is increased by the rare examples of a frank syncretism: for instance, by the frescoes discovered in 1956, in a catacomb on the Via Latina where scenes from the Bible and from pagan mythology are juxtaposed. 82

It is this drift into a respectable Christianity—a drift which may have begun as early as the reign of Constantius II—which explains how a Christianized Roman aristocracy was able to maintain, in Italy, up to the end of the sixth century, the secular traditions of the City of Rome. These traditions had survived effectively into the fifth century; they

71 Jerome, Ep. 130, 6, CSEL, 56, p. 181.
72 See Courcelle, ‘Propos antichretiens rapportes par S. Augustin.’ Rech. augustinennes 1, 1958, 149-195. Only later was Gelasius, i.e. (n. 26), 31, able to place the pagan argument on its head by saying that the decay of Rome was due to the survival of pagan practices.
73 CIL vi, 1756; Prudentius, Contra Symm. 1, 552 ff.
74 Paulinus, Vita Ambrosii, cc. 5 and 8 (see c. 25 for evidence of the inordinate respect of the author for the potentia Probi).
75 Edited Schenkl, CSEL 16, 1888, 569-609.
76 See Amm. Marc. xxvii, 11 and esp. xxx, 5, 4. ‘non ut prosapia suae claritudo monebat, plus adulationi quam veneratione dedit’; and A. Momigliano, ‘Gli Anicii e la storiografia del vi’ secolo d.C., Atti Accad. Lincei, Rendiconti, cl. mor. stor. e filol., ser. 8, 11, 1956, 279-282, for the same pattern of intimacy with semi-barbarian politicians such as Aetius.
77 E. Delbrueck, Die Consulardiptychen, Berlin, 1929, n. 1, 84–7, where he calls himself the ‘famulus’ of the Emperor.
78 F. Ermini, Il cenotone di Proba e la poesia cen-tonaria latina, 1909.
80 Isidore of Seville, De vir. illust., c. 18, PL 83, 1093: ‘cuius quidem non miramur studium, sed laudamus ingenuum’.
81 Il. 689-694.
had not been seriously damaged either by the defeat of the pagan leaders who had rallied to the cult of Rome, nor by the flood-tide of the ascetic movement. That this was so is due, in part, to the slow transformation of whole families, such as the Anicii, the Valerii and, eventually, even of the Caeionii; a transformation which continued beneath the surface of the spectacular crises. It led to a blurring of the sharp division between a pagan past and a Christian present which is noticeable in the poems even of so austere a critic as Paulinus; faced by a whole clan of Roman senatorial Christians—the Valerii—he can even go as far as to raise and accept a problem which Augustine had raised only to reject—the problem of pagan virtue:

miramur opera conditoris ardui
et praeparatos a vetustis saeculis
successionum mysticarum lineis
pios stupemus inpiorum filios;
tamen in tenebris inpiarum mentium
lucis videmus emicasse semina
mens et voluntas lege naturae fuit.83

This survival of secular tradition was aided by the Imperial government, which, in the fifth century, insisted on accepting the 'Romans of Rome' on their own valuation—even to the extent of being buried in Rome, their 'capital', as their colleagues had been buried in Constantinople in the past century 84—and, paradoxically, by Pope Leo. From the very beginning of his pontificate, Leo ensured that the 'Romans of Rome' should have a say in the religious life of the City: acting together, the Senate and the Pope had cleansed the City of Manichaeans.85

This gesture, in fact, is symptomatic of a significant change. At the end of the fourth century, it would be possible to write of the Christianization of the Roman aristocracy with only a passing mention of the Roman church itself. Pammachius stands almost alone in having stayed at Rome, and dedicated himself to the normal religious life of the City.86 By the time of Leo, however, the Roman dévots of the age of Jerome, Augustine and Pelagius, had returned to the public life of Rome. Demetrias, for instance, had been advised, by Pelagius, in 413, to live a life of complete self-effacement, avoiding even charitable works; 87 at the persuasion of Leo, however, she founded a church on her estate in the Via Latina dedicated to S. Stephen—a memory of her retirement in Africa, almost a generation before, when the newly found relics of the saint had first made their appearance.88 In the inscription, the advice of Pelagius is forgotten; she retains the illustrious name of her family.89 It is probable, also, that the family-church founded in his palace by Pammachius received, at last, its due recognition.90

The success of the work of integration begun immediately by Leo shows clearly the importance of this 'sea-change' in the religion of Rome for the later development of medieval Christendom. Both traditions—the Christian and the secular—contributed to the position of Rome in the early middle ages. Contemporary opinions on the career of Aëtius illustrate this fusion: to the Senate he could remain the 'restorer of Liberty'; to Gallic writers he was campaigning under the aegis of S. Peter.91 It is not impossible that the sermons of Leo, carefully-prepared, monumental statements as they are of the claims of S. Peter and the privileged position of his Roman congregation, were regarded as

85 Leo, Epp. vii and viii (Constitutio Valentiniani 111), PL 54, 620–624. See Chastagnol, o.c. (n. 8), 177–8 on the previous reduction of the religious jurisdiction of the Prefect of the City in favour of the Pope.
86 See esp. Paulinus, Ep. 13, 15, CSEL 29, 96: which emphasizes his isolation 'Poteras, Roma, illas intentas in apocalypsi minas non timere, si talia semper ederent munera senatores tui'.
87 Pelagius, Ep. ad Demetriadem, c. 22, PL 30, 38.
89 Liber Pont. 1, p. 531: 'Demetrias Ammia virgo'.
a final reassurance of the direct descendants of the anxious pagan leaders of the fourth century. Symmachus had invoked the figure of Rome to defend the altar of Victory and had made this his constant concern to ensure that Roman religion should continue to be celebrated in Rome; his descendants could be made to feel that their own, considerably more precarious, world still depended upon a similar religious hegemony, admirably upheld by Leo in the name of Peter and Paul:

Isti sunt qui te ad hanc gloriam provexerunt, ut gens sancta, populus electus, civitas sacerdotalis et regia, per sacram beati Petri sedem caput orbis effecta, latius praesideres religione divina quam dominatone terrena.92

In such a study the defects of the evidence combine with the nature of the subject to give weight to Harnack's warning, that religious history runs on narrow lines. The picture which emerges, however, is significantly different from that of Ambrose and Prudentius, who attributed an overwhelming importance to the intervention of the Christian successors of Constantine. Due emphasis must, also, be placed on those commonplace links of culture and marriage which expressed the formidable solidarity of the 'Romans of Rome' in the face of the religious tensions of the age. The spectacular interventions of the emperors in the interests of Christianity, under Gratian and, to a lesser extent, under Theodosius and Honorius, not only solved nothing; they might even be said to have prejudiced the spread of their own religion by more peaceful means. When religion became involved with political issues affecting the authority of the emperors, whether this happened directly, as in 382, or indirectly, in the relations of Serena with the younger Melania and in the crushing moral defeat of the sack of Rome, the process of adaptation to the new official religion was brutally halted; parties became crystallized around leaders, and men such as Symmachus, Flavianus and Volusianus were forced to bring their religious grievances into the open.

Such a disastrous situation had been avoided, on the whole, before 382. The results of such tactful handling can be seen in the position enjoyed by Christian heiresses, such as Marcella and Melania the Elder, as early as the reign of Constantius II, and in the politic conformity of a great figure such as Petronius Probus under Valentinian I. Despite the complaint of Symmachus—'nunc aris deesse Romanos genus est ambiendi' (Ep. 1, 51)—the Roman aristocracy had already found a modus vivendi with those who adhered to the religion of the court; Publicola, the son of Melania, was brought up, evidently as a Christian, under the care of the Prefect of the City. The process of accommodation started in that early generation was less spectacular, and so less documented, than the blatant renunciations later encouraged by Jerome; but in the long run, it would prove decisive.

After 410, the Imperial court could no longer offer any provocation: its effective control of Italy had been weakened by the barbarian invasions, and its control of the religious life of Rome had been abandoned to the popes. This state of affairs is reflected in the religious evolution of the later Caeionii. After 410, the ancestral paganism of a Volusianus seems to lack not so much conviction as an issue on which to fight. It is hardly surprising, then, that men who came from families in which Christianity had been, for generations, acceptable to their wives and relatives, should have, at last, adopted this official religion of an Empire which had no power left to hurt, but which, with themselves, continued to guarantee that a minimum of Roman civilization would survive in a dangerous world.

92 Leo, Sermo 82, 1, PL 54, 422–3.