Christian Literature and the Ancient Historian: A Broader Perspective on Late Antiquity

Since the appearance of Peter Brown's essay *The World of Late Antiquity,*[1] the field of ancient studies experienced a dramatic realignment both in its chronological scope and in the number of specialized studies devoted to this pivotal era. Much of this work was sparked by a renewed interest in the transformation of the classical world during this period, a change largely brought about by the success of Christianity in vanquishing its spiritual competitors within the Mediterranean basin. Christianity and its representatives would eventually impact on every aspect of late Roman society through its persistence in transforming the traditional Hellenistic culture of the classical world into one based on Christian principles. The rise of Christianity is the single most important cultural event in European civilization of the past two thousand years and is also the central event which scholars take as the watershed between the classical Roman and the medieval Byzantine worlds.[2] The period of gestation for this transformation, the Late Antique, is now recognized as the cardinal era in the transition of European culture from the ancient to the modern world. The arrival of Late Antiquity as an established subfield of academic inquiry can be evidenced by the fact that the new edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History* will cover material up through the reign of Heraclius (608-641 C.E.), whereas the long-standing first edition stopped at Constantine's consolidation of sole power in 324 C.E.[3] The new interest in cultural transformation has naturally brought about a concomitant renewal of interest in the role of religion. Given the impact of Christianity on the culture of the Late Antique world, historians have now turned to the rich body of patristic literature generated during this era in order to trace this process, an approach especially germane to the study of Christianity. More so than its pagan antecedents, Christianity is a religion of the word, relying not only on the exegesis of canonical texts as the ultimate source for doctrinal authority but also upon the rhetorical skills of its practitioners for its dissemination. As Cameron noted, "Christianity was not just ritual. It placed an extraordinary premium on verbal formulation; speech constituted one of its basic metaphors, and it framed itself around written texts."[4]

Traditionally, outside of the works of a few canonical authors, such as St. Augustine,

[1]Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity AD 150-750*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1971.

[2]Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1987, 143.

[3]S.A. Cook, F.E. Adcock, M.P. Charlesworth and N.H. Baynes, edits., *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume XII The Imperial Crisis and Recovery A.D. 193-324*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1939; Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey, edits., *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume XIII The Late Empire, A.D. 337-425*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998; Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward Perkins and Michael Whitby, edits., *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume XIV Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, AD 425-600*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001.

[4]Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991, 19.

most of these writings have been ignored by previous historians who tended to regard this material as the province of either church historians or theologians. This attitude was unfortunate for the wealth of information that can be gleaned from this literature, which survives in greater quantities than the writings generated by secular authors, allows for a greater variety of studies not possible with other periods of ancient literature. In addition, the emergence of the Christian era brought new forms of expression to the traditional Greco-Roman culture of the Mediterranean world, including the appearance of new genres of literature designed to appeal to a growing Christian readership.

Yet earlier generations of scholars working on the late Roman period preferred to ignore the vast body of Christian literature generated during the 4th through 6th centuries, perceiving the appearance of this material as a regrettable development and a manifestation of the general decline in classical culture which characterized the Late Antique period. This attitude,in turn, contributed to the position of Late Antique studies as a marginal field within the realm of Classics and ancient history. The coming of the Christian era represented to them the intrusion of alien religious ideas into imperial society, a development which found fertile soil in the crisis of the third century, which, in turn, promoted a general sense of insecurity and engendered a concomitant rise in fear of the demonic and anxiety in the face of the supernatural.[5] The late Roman world, seen as a declination from the glorious intellectual heights of the Antonine monarchy, was an era dominated by "irrationality," "superstition," and a "failure of nerve."[6]

Perhaps the blame for this gloomy vision can be traced back to Gibbon whose motivation for authoring his massive coverage of the late Roman and Byzantine empires was partly to demonstrate the negative impact Christian culture had on the Mediterranean world.[7] Although Gibbon did utilize the work of such Christian historians as Lactantius and Eusebius in his narrative of the fourth and fifth centuries (presumably to compensate for the lack of secular sources for many events), he chose not to avail himself of the many treatises, tracts, epistles and sermons generated by Christian authors. Even more recent treatments of this time period, for instance, those by Bury, Ferdinand Lot or Stein, have elected to confine themselves to secular or ecclesiastical historians.[8] The deliberate neglect of Christian writing almost exactly mirrors the placement accorded to this literature by Classical scholars who often halt their chronological treatment of Greek or Latin literature at the third century. Any given handbook on Latin literature usually ignores Christian authors. Two of the most recent surveys either totally omit

[5]An interpretation most notably advanced by E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1965.

[6]M.I. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 2nd ed., Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1957, vol. 1, 523-541.

[7]Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, edited by J.B. Bury, Methuen & Co., London, 1896.

[8]J.B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian*, 2 vols., Macmillan, London, 1923; Ferdinand Lot, *La fin du Monde Antique et le début du Moyen Age*, Renaissance du livre, Paris, 1927 (English trans. Philip and Mariette Leon, New York, 1931); Ernst Stein, *Geschichte des spätromischen Reiches*, L. W. Seidel & Sohn, Wien, 1928 (French trans. Jean-Remy Palanque, Paris, 1959).

any mention of Christian writings or give only minimal coverage.[9] This approach is a reflection of the philological tradition in Latin literature which places Christian literature outside the realm of writings deemed worthy of literary analysis. Most surviving Christian writings tend to be stridently partisan and didactic in purpose, two characteristics which, in the minds of many researchers, seriously compromise their value as historical documents.

Regardless of one's personal attitude towards Christianity or individual judgement of the literary merit of these works, an historian cannot afford to ignore this massive output of source material, especially as it represents another resource capable of amplifying our knowledge of the ancient world. The men and women who generated these works were as well-versed in the rhetorical and philosophical conventions of the classical world as their pagan counterparts; despite this, these individuals were able to make the emotional and spiritual transition to a new faith. Christianity had deep roots in the long-standing religious traditions of the ancient world and represented the culmination of a process of spiritual and theological development which had been going on for centuries. The changes which came about in the late Roman era represented a change not in the intensity of religious activity but in the location of the divine.[10] The personal sagas of these holy men and women illuminate the path by which the sons and daughters of the western spiritual tradition were led to discover a new face for an old conception of the god head.

Christian literature, by introducing a wider set of literary genres, broke out of the literary confines imposed by the cultural guardians of the classical canon in providing a new venue for more popular forms of literature. Since the written word was part and parcel of the overall goal of reaching a wider pool of potential converts, a growing body of narratives of the lives of the saints began to appear, a literary form unique to Christianity which also provides tantalizing details of everyday social and religious life. These stories recount the spiritual journeys of individuals who set out on a quest for the truth; eventually they come under the light of the Christian message with its promise of eternal life and communion with the divine. By devoting themselves wholeheartedly to the precepts of their new-found faith, the saints victoriously surmount both physical torments and the temptations of their souls to finally attain a true state of sanctity, which often included the investiture of miraculous powers and an eventual encounter with the beatific vision. Exemplary tales of individuals who triumphed over adversity came to serve as role models for their co-religionists to emulate, thus bringing an entirely new class of hero to the Mediterranean world. Unlike Hercules or Achilles, legendary figures of superhuman dimensions from a far-distant time, the martyr or the aesthete was an historic personage who blazed a path to glory accessible to the average person. The essential purpose of hagiography was to celebrate the memory of the saints and inspire the faithful by proving the superiority of the Christian revelation. The miracles attributed to the saints in these accounts demonstrated the active agency of God in the everyday lives of the Christian people. Since hagiographic literature

[9]E. J. Kenney and W.V. Clausen, edits., *Cambridge History of Classical Literature: Volume 2 Latin Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982; Gian Biagio Conte *Letterature latina*, Le Monnier, Firenze, 1987 (English trans. Joseph B. Solodow, Baltimore, 1994).

[10]Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1978, 8-11; J. Vogt, *The Decline of Rome* (English trans. Janet Sondheimer), Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1967, 11-86, 282-309.

quickly became the most popular form of reading among the literate, many of these tales incorporated traditional folkloric motifs to suit the tastes of this new body of readers. The conventions of hagiography also led to standardization in the types of individuals selected as topics worthy of treatment. Far and away the most familiar form of saint was the ascetic holy man or woman, a "spiritual athlete" who spurned the everyday world in favor of a life of self-abnegation. This form of spiritual practice gained favor during the fourth century, a time of peace between the church and the Roman government when the possibility of dying as a martyr was remote; asceticism offered an alternative to the truly devoted. However, relatively few Christians were willing to undergo such a rigorous style of life and so the body of hagiographic types was expanded to include individuals from all walks of life, eventually establishing itself as a genre of literature written about and for the every man.

Hagiography has also become fertile ground for scholars working in the area of gender studies since many saints' lives deal with individual women and highlight the greater public role women were able to assume during the Christian era. Real women, not mythological figures from the remote past, become the chief protagonist in many saints' lives. One particular account which has generated a lot of attention is the passion of St. Perpetua, fascinating not only because this woman takes on many of the roles reserved for men in traditional Greco-Roman society but is also partly based on the diary of Perpetua herself.[11] With the coming of Christianity we have a literature in which women speak with their own voice and not through a male intermediary.

Historians working in the Principate era of Roman history are still slow to embrace much of Christian writing except when they take up the topic of Christianity as a phenomenon within the early Roman empire. However, scholars working in the Late Antique period have made this material central to their work. Compared to earlier and later periods, the period from Diocletian to Phocas (roughly 284 to 610 C.E.) is well documented. Scholars working in Late Antiquity are in a position totally different from those studying other areas of ancient history. Whereas researchers working in more traditional areas of ancient history are often forced to troll the same well-traversed texts over and over again either to tease out new kernels of information or uncover new insights overlooked by their predecessors, the later Roman empire is fortunate not only in terms of the amount of literature generated by Latin and Greek authors working within the confines of the traditional genres of classical literature but also in the types of sources and greater variety of languages available. Any proper examination of these works not only requires the traditional tools of philology but also specialists working in the fields of Semitic, Coptic, Iranian, and early Byzantine studies. One of the most significant scholars of the late Roman period was A.H.M. Jones who, in his monumental work *The Later Roman Empire*,[12] drew upon a wide variety of sources, both secular and Christian, for his sweeping description of the institutions and society of the Late Antique period. So vast an undertaking was this that Jones

[11]Original text may be found in Herbert A. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972, 106-131. The most recent study is by Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, Routledge, London and New York, 1997.

[12]A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602*, 3 vols., Oxford, Blackwell, 1964.

himself acknowledged in his preface[13] that a lifetime was not enough to totally examine and absorb this material. At the time of this writing more than thirty years since Jones' work was published, and despite the efforts of a new generation of scholars totally devoting themselves to this period, most of the corpus of Christian authors still lies largely undigested by historians. Late Antiquity is a field more akin to later periods of European history where the amount of source material is too overwhelming for an individual scholar to be able to master it all within one career. As such, there are numerous opportunities for new studies, new avenues of investigation, and new answers to old questions which will continually unfold as more research is done.

The new focus on Christian literature has revolutionized our understanding of the early history of Christianity and its impact as a social and cultural phenomenon within the Greco-Roman world. Earlier studies, such as Chadwick,[14] have tended to paint a picture of a unified Christian movement growing up under the auspices of what would later become the official church and its hierarchy with only an occasional nod given to the various non-orthodox strains which flourished outside the institutional church. Christian history was traditionally seen as the history of the church in which the various doctrinal disputes were regarded merely as a sublimation for a more earnest struggle among various bishops and regional constituencies for control of the official organs of the church. Scholars, especially since the work of Walter Bauer,[15] have increasingly seen the Christian movement as a conglomeration of numerous sects with various theological tendencies and doctrinal outlooks. Out of this, one particular group of Christians, by aligning themselves with the Roman government, came to dominate the rest and took on the role of arbiter as to what would be considered orthodox and what would be heretical. Consequently, research has been more inclusive in its attention to Christian literature. Now historians of early Christianity include the whole body of non-canonical or heretical writings within their ken. What has emerged is a greater understanding of the variety of Christianities which grew up alongside one another and puts greater perspective on the doctrinal disputes of the fourth and fifth centuries which rent the Christian and Roman world asunder. Scholars have also come to appreciate the imprecision of our modern day definitions of "Christian" and "pagan" when they are applied to the Late Antique religious world. Many adherents of the Christian church had differing ideas as to what membership in the new faith entailed and often kept one foot in both the Christian and pagan camp.

In addition to the writings generated for liturgical and authoritative reasons, many other genres of Christian literature exist which have proved invaluable for historians working in this period.[16] It is no longer possible to study the political history of the era without referring to

[13]Jones, *op. cit.*, vi.

[14]Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Pelican Books, Harmondsworth, 1967; revised ed., 1993.

[15]Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, 2nd ed., Mohr, Tübingen, 1964 (English trans. Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, Mifflintown, PA, 1971); For a summary of much of this recent work see Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of the First Century* (English trans. O.C. Dean, Jr.), Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999.

[16]In turn spawning new studies of individual authors, some of which include: Timothy D. Barnes, *Tertullian: a historical and literary study*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971; Michael B. Simmons, *Arnobius of Sicca*,

(continued...)

the writings of Christian historians, which in many instances provide our only coherent narrative account of various historical events given the absence of corresponding writings by secular authors. A recognition of the value of the church historians has led to a recent series of studies and commentaries on the historical methods of these authors.[17] One of the most significant of these writers is Eusebius of Caesarea who not only gives us the most complete description we have of the Great Persecution under Diocletian but was also important in establishing new standards for historical writing. Eusebius filled out his account with citations from various documents to which he had access and was consciously imitated in this by later writers such as Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Rufinus. Eusebius is also significant because he was writing at a time when the Christian church was establishing a new relationship with the Roman government and had to reconcile the church's new situation with an old enemy. In addition, Eusebius drew a portrait of how a Christian Roman emperor should behave in his *Life of Constantine* and established a new hagiographic type.[18] Eusebius' writings on Constantine have attracted the attention of numerous prominent scholars[19] with every year seeing one or two new monographs on some aspects of this emperor's career. This is not surprising considering the crucial role Constantine played in the transition of the empire from paganism to Christianity. Earlier scholars, judging Constantine by the standards of modern day Christianity, had emphasized the inconsistencies between his actions and his avowed faith and declared him a cynical opportunist using the church for his political needs.[20] More recent scholarship, especially Barnes[21], seeing him in the eyes of a fourth century churchman, appreciate his process of conversion as a gradually unfolding one, his understanding of the faith growing over time and not atypical of most converts from paganism.

Christian literature remains the single, most important body of source material for

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Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995; Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius and Rome*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2000.

[17]Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980; Philip R. Amidon, SJ, *The 'Church History' of Rufinus of Aquilea*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997; Glenn F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories*, Mercer University Press, Macon, GA, 1986; Françoise Thélamon, *Païens et chrétiens au ivème siècle: L'apport de l'"Histoire ecclésiastique" de Rufin d'Aquilée*, Études augustiniennes, Paris, 1981; Theresa Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople: historian of church and state*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI, 1997; Martin Wallraff, *Der Kirchenhistoriker Sokrates*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1997.

[18]Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1999, 27-39.

[19]Ramsay MacMullen, *Constantine*, Dial Press, New York, 1969; A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe*, English Universities Press, London, 1964; H.A. Drake, "In Praise of Constantine," *Classical Studies*, v. 15, University of California Press, 1976; *idem.*, *Constantine and the Bishops*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2000; Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1981; and many more.

[20]Jacob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great* (English trans. Moses Hadas), Pantheon Books, New York, 1949, 292-306; Henri Grégoire, "La Conversion de Constantin," *Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles*, 36 (1930), 231-272; Jean-Jacques Hart, "La Vision de Constantin au sanctuaire de Grand et l'origine celtique du labarum ,"*Latomus*, 9 (1950), 427-36.

[21]Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 74-76; 275.

understanding the inevitable conflict between paganism and Christianity in the fourth century, a major area of concern for any researcher working in the late Roman period. Scholars, such as Ramsay MacMullen, have culled Christian sources to obtain a view from the ground of the process of Christianization.[22] Tales of Christian holy men effecting mass conversions through spectacular feats of wonder-working probably misrepresent the true situation but are valuable for the picture they present of the confrontational approach to paganism adopted by militant Christianity. Christian saints challenge the power of the Olympians directly either by confronting their pagan counterpart in a showdown of thaumaturgical power or by leading attacks against pagan shrines and temples. The power of these clerics is directly related to their connection with the relics of a particular saint.[23] In this instance we become conscious of the realignment of Christian cosmology to coincide with the Roman political order. In the story of the monk Cosmas, a vision is presented of the heavenly court as a mirror image of its earthly counterpart, an association previously made by Eusebius. In the story of St. Andrew the Fool the emperor is given a crucial role in the coming apocalypse.[24] The late Roman world was a society of ranks and hierarchy, ascending and attenuating until culminating in the office of the emperor, the *cosmocrator*. The Christian heavenly court replicated the secular. Just as the imperial nobility was ranked according to its proximity and access to the imperial presence, so too did the church hierarchy rank its bishops according to their respective saint's place within the celestial order. Christian bishops take on the role of interceder for their constituents and even prosecutor when combating enemies of the faith. Demons are exorcised in a process not dissimilar to a judicial inquisition conducted by a Roman magistrate.[25] In this situation the distinction between secular and religious roles often becomes blurred.

The phenomenon of Christian clerics directly attacking pagan deities and institutions attests to the presence of a new moral and political force arriving on the scene-the Christian holy man. Christian ascetics and bishops took the initiative in asserting themselves as a new form of religious authority. So diverse and comprehensive were the roles taken on by Christian bishops that in many cases their authority and influence superceded that of the local government officials and often reached to the very highest levels of imperial society. The numerous letters and polemical tracts stemming from the pens of the patristic authors, who often had direct access to the leadership of the later empire, not only open a window onto the relations between the social and political elite but also place the doctrinal and religious conflicts of the period in sharper perspective. Church fathers, such as Ambrose, found themselves in a unique position to influence policy and even control events due to their privileged access to the pinnacles of power. The letters and sermons surviving from these men detail the process of reconciling the pagan past with the new Christian outlook, forms of persuasion which, ironically, reflect the

[22]Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1984.

[23]Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981, 106-127.

[24]*Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, ed. H. Delehaye, *Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris*, Brussels, 1902, 107 ff; *Patrologia Cursus Completus: Series Graeca*, J.-P.Migne, ed., Garnier, Paris, 1912, vol. 111:627-888; Eusebius, *VC* 3.15.

[25]Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Aniquity*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI, 1992, 4, 77-78, 89-100; *idem.*, *Cult of the Saints*, 106-127.

influence of the classical tradition by their style and rhetorical strategies. More often, the sharing of a common cultural heritage and education allowed for accommodation rather than conflict among pagan and Christian elites. Those aspects of the pagan past which could serve the moral and didactic purposes of the faith would be retained. However, those practices which were seen as irreconcilable with the Christian mission were to be combated and rooted out. Authors such as John Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine elaborated to their congregations and correspondents what the church now required of them. Popular forms of singing and dancing would not be translated from the pagan cult to the Christian church; landlords and masters were to overturn their rural altars and get on with the work of bringing their tenants and clients into the fold;[26] emperors were no longer counseled to be magnanimous in religious affairs but were expected to be partisan and even activist in promoting the faith. As Ambrose reminded the emperor Valentinian, "Just as all men under Roman rule serve you as emperor and lord of the world, so you too are a servant of the omnipotent God and his holy faith."[27] Christian bishops and holy men now set the agenda and the tone of the debate. The recognition of the authority of these men is seen in the continuing new series of studies devoted to the religious leaders of this time.[28] Once again, Peter Brown has led the way with his highly praised biography of St. Augustine.[29]

The writings of the church fathers have also proved valuable not only in what they tell us about the evolution of the Christian faith of their time, but also in what they tell us about traditional and contemporary paganism. Detailed information about the practices and rituals of pagan cults usually come from the pens of Christian authors seeking to debunk these beliefs. Historians of Roman religion will find many useful details of cult practices which do not survive in pagan authors. More importantly, historians can also gain insight into the views of pagan intellectuals when confronted with the Christian challenge. Scholars, such as Chadwick and Wilken, have culled the views of pagan critics of Christianity from the very tracts written by Christian polemicists in rebuttal of their objections. Hoffmann has even gathered enough fragments of one of these works to reconstruct almost an entire treatise.[30] Although the Christian writers were selective in their use of pagan material, enough has survived to enable the historian of pagan religion to fathom their belief system and to better understand their opposition to Christianity. Once again, what has emerged is a view that diverges from traditional accounts of late paganism. Instead of viewing Roman religion as a hollow system of empty rituals and meaningless prayers, scholars have come to appreciate paganism as an active belief system which was able to provide comfort and even moral guidance to its adherents. As

[26]MacMullen, *Christianizing*, 64-5.

[27]*Epis.* 17.1 (trans. Brian Croke & Jill Harries).

[28] Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993; Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994; James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1985; R.A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his world*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

[29]Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967.

[30]Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1953; Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1984; R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Celsus: On the True Doctrine*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987.

MacMullen noted, the war against paganism did not end with the fourth century but would continue to be actively waged by eastern emperors even in the sixth and seventh centuries.[31] Rather than falling overnight with the Serapeum in Alexandria, paganism would die a long, lingering death.

The continuing attention given to the Christian literature of the fourth through eighth centuries reflects an appreciation on the part of Late Antique historians of the cultural and political impact Christianity had on the late classical world. As Peter Brown noted, the appearance of the church as a privileged institution within the Roman world brought a new type of authority and new terms of political discourse to the public life of ancient elites who previously were guided by a common *paideia*.[32] Christian concerns became the concerns of the political and social leadership of the Late Antique world and provided the motivation for many of the policies and actions taken by late Roman emperors. The Christian perspective on life, morality, cosmology and purpose became the outlook of the intellectual elite of the age. Christian literature provided "...plots according to which the majority of the inhabitants of the empire, and after that of Byzantium and the medieval West, lived out their lives."[33] Many have noted that with the rise of Christianity a major shift had taken place in the intellectual alignment of the classical world. The greatest intellectuals now not only tended to be Christians, but they also tended to be monks. Roman times had become Christian times. Emperors ranked their spiritual role as surpassing that of their secular function. The moral, spiritual and cosmological parameters of the Late Antique elite were now defined by Christian contours. The literature of the period reflects the yearnings of the thinking classes, both pagan and Christian, for a release from the mundane cares of the physical world and, instead, to embrace a more intense spirituality. More so than any other period in ancient studies, Late Antiquity has evolved as a field devoted to the study of *mentalité*. A heightened awareness of the changes in the inner life of the mind brought about by the Christian cultural revolution has forced scholars to knock down the artificial barrier which separated religious from secular history and enabled researchers to gain a greater appreciation of the spiritual outlook of the Late Antique world.

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[31]Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity & Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997, 1-31.

[32]Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 35-46; 117-122.

[33]Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 13.