

On 'Paganus'  
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We have been exposed to a great deal of 19th and 20th century literature which has assumed that because the Christian religion was slow to reach the countryside, the word for 'peasant' had taken on, at a time when the cities were completely Christianized, the more modern meaning of 'pagan.' But from the mid-4th century onwards, Late Antiquity was marked by a resistance to Christianity that originated among the nobility and the world of the academies. It seems therefore most unlikely that even the most optimistic Christian of the day would have actually thought of paganism as a religion exclusively of the countryfolk.

Many classical authors, including Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal and Tertullian, use 'paganus' in the sense of 'civilian' as opposed to 'military.' According to Christine Mohrmann's seminal work ("Encore une fois: Paganus", *Études sur le latin des chrétiens* 3 (Rome, 1961-65), 277-89), the 'pagani' being referred to by these writers were the private individuals who, under the Empire, would have been inferior to the privileged members of the military and the functionaries of government. In *Pagans and Christians* (London: Penguin, 1986), Robin Lane Fox tells us that the 'pagani' were those who had not enlisted as soldiers of Christ against the powers of Satan. This popular use of the word, apparently, evolved among Christian writers in the early centuries to distinguish the 'pagani' from members of the 'militia Christi', but according to Mohrmann this usage tends to disappear by the 4th century. By this time, 'paganus' is said simply to mean someone who is not (yet) baptized and, in several usages which she cites, the word has no trace of any element of polemic or contempt, but appears as a thoroughly objective term.

The word 'paganus', therefore, may be seen to have had a history of colloquial usage which, by the time it settled down in the early 5th century as the term by which Christians designated those who were not members of their own religion, had taken on the relatively non-pejorative meaning of 'alieni a civitate dei'. In fact, many of the modern writers referred to in this thesis, particularly Markus (*The End of Ancient Christianity*, Cambridge UP, 1990), Flint (*The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, Princeton UP, 1991) and Klingshirn (*Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul*, Cambridge UP, 1994), assume this usage as a matter of course. According to Markus, the trichotomy which had prevailed in Christian writing before the end of the 4th century: of Christian (sacred), secular (neutral, civic) and pagan (profane), was replaced from that point onward by the more simple dichotomy of sacred (Christian) and non-

sacred (pagan). To me, this would seem a more likely meaning for the word in Late Antique sources than the assumption made by earlier authors such as McKenna (*Paganism and Pagan Survivals in Spain up to the Fall of the Visigoths*, Paulist Press, 1938) -- and those more recent writers like Salisbury (*Iberian Popular Religion*, Edwin Mellen, 1985), who appear to be writing for special interests in the academic community -- that 'pagani' refers exclusively to members of a rural underclass.

It is more than a little interesting to note that the Greek word for an ordinary private person, one who does not belong to a defined group, is *'idiotes'*. In my opinion, this example is invaluable in demonstrating the ease with which an ancient word like *paganus* that is neutral, or very nearly so, may take on a specifically pejorative meaning over the centuries that completely masks its original usage and may lead the incautious into error.

Used in the fashion assumed above, 'paganism' would encompass both the magical folk practices of the indigenous populations (Gothic or Celtic) as well as the traditional religious activities of the Roman aristocracy, without necessarily implying that they need be connected to each other. Salisbury takes a tentative step in this direction when she criticizes McKenna for failing to place rustic magical practices in a cultural context, but rather for seeing them "as the irrelevant survivals of a previous era."

The nature and location of the physical evidence makes it difficult for us to determine with any degree of confidence what the religious beliefs and practices of the original inhabitants of Gaul and northern Iberia might have been. Syncretism, especially as it effects the images and names of deities, also makes separating the Roman from the Celtic very problematic. Furthermore, the written evidence at hand does less to reveal the details of indigenous religion than has previously been assumed. As we have seen demonstrated above, neither *paganus* or *rusticus* necessarily imply that the people or practices being referred to are rural in nature. In the context of the texts we are examining, *paganus* refers to non-Christian beliefs and practices, and *rusticus* means uncultured, unsophisticated or just uneducated, and as such is similar to Augustine's *rudes*. The fact that Martin uses the terms *rustici* and *pagani* to refer to those who celebrate Roman holidays and use the names of Roman gods for the days of the week makes it unlikely that he is referring exclusively to the practices of a non-Roman rural underclass.