

# BRIBE AND PUNISHMENT: TO THE QUESTION OF PERSISTENCE OF PAGAN CULTS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

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**ABSTRACT.** The article discusses the corruption of the state administration and clergy as one of the factors of persistence of paganism in Later Roman Empire. The spread of the practice of bribing state officials and clergymen by pagans, coming from different social strata of the Late Roman Society is demonstrated by various examples. It is suggested that this phenomenon was a result of the spread of suffragium.

**KEYWORDS:** Late Antiquity, bureaucracy, clergy, corruption, paganism, suffragium.

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The authorities of the late Roman Empire tried to regulate the public life of its citizens. This was reflected, among other, in legislative ban on the activities of dissident religious movements. Legislators have been particularly zealous confronting various pagan cults. The imperial authorities regularly updated and toughened anti-pagan legislation. At least twenty-one edicts were issued against paganism and pagans since the final ban on all forms of pagan cult under Emperor Theodosius I in 391 and up to the reign of Justinian I.<sup>1</sup>

The very fact of a constant repetition of edicts aimed at eradicating paganism testifies to the ineffectiveness of the religious policy of the empire: during the 4th–6th centuries pagan worship continued among the lower stratas of the roman soci-

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<sup>1</sup> CTh. XVI.10.10-25; Nov. Theod. III; CJ.LXI.7-10. On the subject of anti-pagan legislation of the Later Roman Empire, see Vedeshkin 2016.

ety as well as in the ranks of the members of the elite. In 438, Emperor Theodosius II confessed that the pagans could be corrected neither by “a thousand terrors” of the promulgated laws, nor by the threat of an exile (Nov. Theod. III.8).

Despite the overwhelming evidence of the survival of pagan cults, the sources, illustrating the life of the empire in of the end of the 4th – the beginning of the 6th centuries practically do not mention cases of judicial proceedings of facts of violation of religious legislation.<sup>2</sup> An eloquent example of the actual attitude of the government to paganism is the reaction of the emperor Arcadius (who was responsible for several harsh anti-pagan laws<sup>3</sup>) on the news of continued sacrifice

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<sup>2</sup> For the entire fifth century, only two evidences of anti-pagan processes remained. The first of these was organized against prefect Cyrus in 441 (Malalas, XIV.16, Theophanes, 5937). It is not entirely clear whether Cyrus was a practicing pagan or, as it was stated by Theophanes, only a “sympathizer” of the ancient cults (Theoph. 5937). Al. Cameron claimed that during his prefecture, Cyrus was already a Christian on the grounds that two late sources (the 7th and 11th centuries) mentioned that he had built a church in honor of the Virgin Mary (Cameron 1982, 239-241). This assumption seems insufficient to refute the claim of John Malalas. The mere fact of building a new church is not a testament to the prefect’s personal religious preferences – the erection of public (including religious) buildings in the capital, was his official duty. Thus the initiative to build a new church may have not come from Cyrus, but from Empress Pulcheria, known for her commitment to the cult of the Virgin Mary. See Holum 1982, 138-146. In any case, the true reason for Cyrus’s resignation was not his controversial religious views, but the power struggle at the court. In 441, the court intrigue against the patroness of Cyrus, the Empress Eudocia succeeded, she was disgraced and exiled to Jerusalem. The triumphant “party” of eunuch Chrysaphius, fearing the popularity of the empress’s protégé among the Constantinopolitan plebs (cf. Malal. XIV.16; John. Nik. LXXXIV. 50-51; Theoph. 5937) sought to destroy the political career of the possible rival. The second known “anti-pagan process” of the fifth century is the trial of quaestor Isocasius, in 467 (Malal. XIV. 38; Theoph., 5960; John. Nik. LXXXVIII. 10-11). Isocasius’ suspension from office took place against the backdrop of growing public discontent with government policy. According to the *Paschal Chronicle*, he was arrested during a riot that broke out in Constantinople in 467 (Chron. Pasch. 467). We can assume that the government of Leo I tried to use this riot as a pretext to increase political pressure on the opposition and transfer popular discontent to the pagan minority. Later on, the pagan doctor Jacobus, who was influential in the court, managed to arrange the public hearing of the case of Isocasius in Constantinople (Malal. XIV.38). During the trial, the former quaestor, managed to secure the support of the inhabitants of Constantinople with formal baptism, and thus obtained his justification (John Nik. LXXXVIII.10-11). In fact, both processes were provoked by the struggle of court “parties” and had a clear political character. In fact, the paganism of Cyrus and Isocasius was not the cause, but an excuse to bring proceedings against them.

<sup>3</sup> CTh. XVI.10.13; 14; 16; II. 8. 22.

in one of the cities of Palestine cited by Mark the Deacon: “I know that that city is prone to idolatry, but it is willing to pay its dues in public taxes, bringing in substantial amounts. Therefore, if we suddenly instill fear in them, they will take flight and we will lose this great amount of tax income”<sup>4</sup> (Marc. V. Porph. 41 trans. Head). While verbally lashing paganism out in the edicts, the government and provincial administration turned “blind eye” at the facts of preservation of ancient religious practices.

The reason for this discrepancy between legislation and legal practice is found in different circumstances. According to F. Trombley, the administrative apparatus of the empire was simply unable to implement the legislation that radically contradicted the established social practices.<sup>5</sup> For A. S. Kozlov and M. Maza the lack of real repressions against the pagans was caused by the authorities’ unwillingness to antagonize pagan aristocrats, who still were very numerous.<sup>6</sup> Both the military and bureaucratic administration were interested in maintaining contacts with the regional nobility, which forced them to put up with its religious predilections.

Finally, despite the repeated prohibition to accept the followers of the ancient cults for state service,<sup>7</sup> a significant part of high ranking civil and military personnel remained faithful to the religion of their ancestors during the 5th-6th centuries.<sup>8</sup> The numbers of crypto-pagans, who had formally accepted baptism but remained true to paganism in their hearts, was probably much larger.<sup>9</sup> Obviously,

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<sup>4</sup> Οἶδα ὅτι ἡ πόλις ἐκείνη κατείδωλός ἐστιν, ἀλλ’ εὐγνωμονεῖ περὶ τὴν εἰσφορὰν τῶν δημοσίων πολλὰ συντελοῦσα. Ἐὰν οὖν αἰφνιδιάσωμεν αὐτοὺς τῷ φόβῳ, φυγῆ χρήσονται καὶ ἀπόλλομεν τοσοῦτον κανόνα.

<sup>5</sup> Trombley (2001, vol. I, P. 89; 94-95).

<sup>6</sup> Kozlov 1979, 25; Kozlov 1982, 9; Maza 2014, 54.

<sup>7</sup> См. CTh. XVI.5.42 (however, this edict was soon canceled, as a result of the protest of some pagan military commanders). См. Zos. V. 46; XVI.10.21; Sirm. 6; CJ. I.4.5.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to Cyrus and Isocasius, among them were Severianus, who was the governor of one of the eastern provinces in the middle of the fifth century (Martindale 1980 (PLRE II), Severianus 3); Pamprepius – quaestor and patricius during the reign of Zeno the Isaurian (PLRE II Pamprepius) and Phocas – Praefectus Praetorio per Orientem under Justinian (PLRE II Phocas 5), etc. Among the pagan military commanders of the period were Fravitta – Magister Militum and Consul of 401 (PLRE I Fravitta); Magister Militum Generidus (PLRE II Generidus); Magister Militum Zeno (PLRE II Zenon 6); Magister Militum Lucius (PLRE II Lucius 2) and Marcellinus – Magister Militum and de facto ruler of Dalmatia, years 454–468 (PLRE II Marcellinus 6).

<sup>9</sup> For example, according to Zacharias of Mytilene, in the end of the 5th century the post of a Egyptian augustal was occupied by crypto pagan Entrechius (Zach., V. Sev. 25-26). John of Ephesus reported several crypto pagans in the senate of Constantinople during the reign of the Emperor of Maurice (John. Eph., III.5.15). Procopius Anthemius – one

these office-holding pagans and crypto-pagans weren't eager to implement legislation directed against their coreligionists.

Without denying the importance of the above-mentioned factors for the preservation of ancient cults, it should be noted that the reasons for the existence of paganism in the Christian empire were not confined to them. The purpose of this article is to highlight another feature of the socio-political life of Later Roman Empire, which contributed to the long-term preservation of traditional cults, namely, corruption of the state administration and the Christian clergy.

Literary sources of the 5th-6th centuries give several examples of the pagans purchasing the right to worship their gods in traditional manner.

The first of them, which occurred in Gaza, was described by Mark the Deacon in the *Vita Porphyrii*.<sup>10</sup> During the 4th century Gaza, along with such Palestinian cities as Raphia<sup>11</sup> and Scythopolis<sup>12</sup> remained a stronghold of paganism. At the turn of the century, the Christian community of this important city comprised of less than three hundred members (Marc. V. Porph. 19). Despite the fact that the laws of the emperors Theodosius and Arcadius provided severe punishments for any pagan religious activities (CTh. XVI.10-13), in the last years of the 4th century

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of the last emperors of the West Perhaps may have been a pagan or at least a crypto pagan. The question of the religious sympathies of Anthemius cannot be unambiguously resolved due to the scarcity of the evidence. Some authors, referring to the testimony of Damascus (in Photius's extracts, the Emperor Anthemius was called a "Hellene" and an idolater (Dam. V. Isid. 77A)) claim that the emperor was a pagan (see, for example, Shanzer 1986, 25-26). His personnel policy also speaks in favor of the emperor's paganism: Anthemius had made an open pagan Marcellinus patricius (Dam V. Isid, 69, Marc., A. 468), and the pagan Messius Phoebus Severus patricius, consul and prefect of Rome (Dam. V. Isid. 51; 77A). At the same time, none of the contemporary Western authors noted the emperor's adherence to ancient cults (See MacGeorge 2002, 53). One can agree with Chuvin's assumption that, even if Anthemius was a pagan, he kept it in a secret from his subjects (Chuvin 1990, 121).

<sup>10</sup> This work, written by an eyewitness and participant in the events, is the most complete of the surviving descriptions of the confrontation between the pagan elites and the Church in the cities of the eastern provinces. A number of researchers, following Peeters, proposed a much later date of the composition of the *Vita* (VI – VII cent.) (Peeters 1941, 65-216; MacMullen 1984, 86-89; Cameron, Long, Sherry 1993, 155). However, Trombly refuted Peeters's arguments and proved that the basis of the *Vita* is the original text of the first half of the fifth century, which was subjected to a later editorial revision (Trombly 2001, II, 246-282).

<sup>11</sup> CM. Soz. VII.15.

<sup>12</sup> Tsafirir 1998.

the pagans of Gaza continued to visit temples openly, make sacrifices and perform ceremonies in honor of their gods.

An attempt to alter this situation was made by Bishop Porphyry, who became the head of the Gazan Christian community around 395 AD. Despite some progress achieved by Porphyry in the Christianization of Gaza in the first years of his ministry, in general his preaching did not bring the expected results. Most of the city's population and all of the members of the local *curia* continued to hold to the ancestral customs. At the same time, even the most modest growth of the Christian community strengthened the anti-Christian attitudes of the pagans. Mark the Deacon stated that “the idol-maniacs did not cease to harry the blessed man and the other Christians. When they got hold of a pagan magistrate, they secretly persuaded him, either with bribes or with help of their godless cult, to oppress the Christians”<sup>13</sup> (Marc. V. Porph. 21 trans. Head).

Unable to solve the situation by his own means, Porphyry looked for support of the higher authorities. Around 398 AD<sup>14</sup> he sent an envoy to the Patriarch of Constantinople John Chrysostom,<sup>15</sup> pleading his help in a struggle against the pagans of Gaza. Thanks to the assistance of the omnipotent favorite Eutropius, John managed to get the emperor's order to close all the pagan sanctuaries of Gaza. The execution of this law was entrusted to some Hilarius – an administrator subordinate to *Magister officiorum*. He arrived in Gaza accompanied by a military escort and, threatening death to the curials, succeeded in closing the city's temples. However, after receiving a large bribe, he allowed the pagans to practice their rites and rituals in the temple of the head of the local pantheon – Zeus-Marnas (ibid. 27). This bribe delayed the end of the open pagan worship in Gaza by several years. Only the second embassy of Porphyry in Constantinople, orga-

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<sup>13</sup> Οἱ δὲ τῆς εἰδωλομανίας οὐκ ἐπαύοντο ἐνεδρεύοντες τῷ τε μακαρίῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς Χριστιανοῖς. Ὅτε γὰρ ἐδράσσαντο ἄρχοντος Ἑλληνος, ὑπεισήρχοντο αὐτῷ, εἴτε διὰ χρημάτων εἴτε διὰ τῆς ἀθέου αὐτῶν θρησκείας, κακῶσαι τοὺς Χριστιανούς...

<sup>14</sup> This occurred between the elections of John Chrysostom as a Patriarch of Constantinople at the end of 397 (Kelly 1998, 104) and the fall of the regime of Eutropius in the summer of 399.

<sup>15</sup> John Chrysostom was a fervent opponent of the pagan cults. The patriarch actively supported the monks who fought the pagans in Phoenicia (John Chrys., Ep. 40; 110; 112; 162; 221; Theod, HE, V.29). See Caseau 2004, 131. It can be assumed that it was he who was behind the publication of the law on the destruction of pagan temples in the countryside in 399 (CTh. XVI.10.16).

nized around 401, was able to obtain the emperor's sanction for the destruction of local temples.<sup>16</sup>

Two examples of the administration's taking bribes from pagans are known from the works of Egyptian hagiography: "Panegyric on Makarios of Tkōw"<sup>17</sup> and "The Life of Moses of Abydos". The first of the testimonies refers to the cult of the god Kothos worshiped in the vicinity of Panopolis in Thebaid. During the 4th-5th centuries Panopolis was one of the largest centers of "Hellenism" (both cultural<sup>18</sup> and religious<sup>19</sup>) in Upper Egypt.<sup>20</sup> Despite the bitter struggle waged by the monastic communities against local cults, paganism was still widespread in the territory of the Panopolitan chora.<sup>21</sup>

Kothos<sup>22</sup> was among the most venerated deities in the region. According to the Coptic "Panegyric on Makarios of Tkōw," attributed to Dioskoros of Alexandria, the locals continued to perform religious ceremonies and sacrifice in honor of their god up to the middle of the fifth century. From the name of the high priest (Homer) it can be assumed the priesthood of Kothos was composed of the members of local Hellenized aristocracy.<sup>23</sup> It is most likely that it was thanks to the in-

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<sup>16</sup> On the Christianization of Gaza see: Van Dam 1985; Trombley 2001, I, 188-246); Vedeshkin 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Despite the fact that this source, written (or subjected to substantial editorial revision) in the second half of the 6th century, frankly caricatures the religious practices of the panopolitan pagans (Johnson 1980, 10.), there is no doubt that the core of the «Panegyric's» narrative is based on real events of the 5th century. The same image of a religious situation in Thebaid in the 5th century is drawn by Shenoute, Besa and the author of «The Life of Moses of Abydos».

<sup>18</sup> Panopolis was an important center of pagan culture (See Cameron 1965, 472; López 2013, 21). Browne had even described it as «the focal point of pagan intellectual reaction against Christianity» (Browne 1977, 192).

<sup>19</sup> From the 4th century the term "Hellenes" was used to refer to pagans not only in Greek, but also in Syriac and Coptic (Alston 2001, 284). For Shenoute of Atripe and (as we might suggest) for his flock, "Hellenes" – i.e. the enemies of the "True Christians" were not only open pagans, but also all those who had a classical education or had maintained any connections to Hellenic culture. See Timbie 1986, 268; Cameron 2015, 160.

<sup>20</sup> Most of the known Panopolitan aristocrats were pagans.

<sup>21</sup> Cm. Bes. V. Sinuth. 83-84; V. Mos. P. 78-83 (Ed. by M. Moussa).

<sup>22</sup> Probably a local variation of Shai – the god of vine and destiny. See Frankfurter 2007.

<sup>23</sup> According to the information preserved in the archive of Ammon Scholasticus by the 4th century the traditional Egyptian priesthood of Panopolis was fully integrated in the local municipal aristocracy. It was relatively prosperous and had close ties with local



fluence and support of the local landholding aristocracy paganism persisted among some of the rural inhabitants of the region.

After being seized by the authorities during the ritual, the worshippers of Kothos were soon released and the sacrifices resumed. Author of the *Panegyric* stated that it was made possible because the “the authorities of this nome were greedy”<sup>24</sup> (Ps. Diosc. Pan. Mak. 10). In other words, as in the case with Hilarius in Gaza, the officials were simply bribed. The cult of Kothos was put to an end only after the monks of White Monastery took the initiative in their own hands. They have organized a “crusade” against the pagan village, slaughtered the priest and burnt the temple to the ground (ibid. 14).

The second evidence of pagans bribing the administration of Thebaid, was preserved in the “Life of Moses Abydos,” which described the religious situation in the city of Abydos. During the late antiquity, Abydos was one of the most important centers of worship of the god Bes, whose oracle was located in one of the temples of the city (Amm. XIX.12.3-4). The oracle was quite famous; prophecies of Bes were sought by the highest administration, local nobility and cultural elite of Late Roman Egypt (Ibid. XIX.12.9-12). In 359, the oracle was closed by order of the Emperor Constantius.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, it can be assumed that two years later Emperor Julian reopened the sanctuary.

According to the “Life of Moses of Abydos,” pagan cults persisted in the region up to the second half of the fifth century: local pagans and Christians were convinced that the Bes lived in their temple (V. Mos., p. 83, ed. Moussa), and on a hill next to the city stood a temple of Apollo, which continued to function as religious city, run by the numerous priesthood (ibid., p. 77-80). According to the *Life*, the pagans were “neither afraid of God nor ashamed before the piety of the righteous rulers. Since the governors who were holding office at that time were avaricious, they purposely overlooked [the pagans]” (ibid., p. 77, trans. Moussa). It appears that, like in the above discussed cases, the local pagans used bribes to protect their cults. The pagan cult came to a halt only in the last quarter of the 6th century, after the destruction of the Temple of Apollo and the killing of its priests by monks led by appa Moses (ibid., p. 80).

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administration and even the court officials. See Tacoma 2006, 117; Willis, Maresch 1997, 2; Kelly 2004, 202.

<sup>24</sup> The author probably had in mind the apparatus of a *pagarch* or a *defensor* of Panopolis. On the system of public administration in Panopolis in the 5th–6th centuries, see Geens 2014, 189-192.

<sup>25</sup> Investigations of the oracle case eventually led to the famous trials of Scythopolis. See Heyden 2010, 310-312.

Not all members of Christian clergy were as zealous as the hermits of the Upper Egypt. The clergy was often no less willing to deal with adherents of pagan cults than the secular administration. For example, at the Second Synod of Ephesus (Robber Council), Bishop Daniel of Carrhae-Harran was accused of accepting bribes from pagans, who committed “the sin of offering sacrifice,” “lets them off the offence, treating it as another opportunity for profit” (S. Chalc. X.73.17. Trans. Price, Gaddis). The degree of reliability of the charges brought against Daniel can’t be established. The case of Daniel was tried at a council controlled by the Alexandrian Patriarch Dioscorus in context of the investigation of the acts of his uncle Bishop Ibas of Edessa, who was an open opponent of Alexandrian Christology and therefore of an Alexandrian Pope.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the church “party” that prevailed at the council was interested in eliminating Ibas’ Harranian protégé. At the same time, the religious situation in Carrhae in the 4th-6th centuries AD suggests that the charges brought against Daniel were not completely groundless.

Carrhae-Harran was the largest center of pagan cults of Eastern Syria. The loyalty of the local population to traditional cults was already noted in the 4th century. During his Persian campaign Julian the Apostate, refused to stay in Edessa on the pretext of the Christian sympathies of the local population, but willingly stopped in nearby Carrhae to honor the city’s shrines (Amm. XXIII.3.1-2; Soz. VI.1; Theod. HE III.26). Egeria the Pilgrim, who had visited the city in the last quarter of the 4th century, noted that: “In that city I found scarcely a single Christian excepting a few clergy and holy monks – if any such dwell in the city; all are heathens”<sup>27</sup> (Egeria. Itin. 21). Fifty years later Theodoret named Harran “a barren spot full of the thorns of heathendom” (Theod. HE. IV.15).<sup>28</sup> The adherence of the Harranian population to local Semitic cults was also mentioned in the latter half of the 5th century by Jacob of Serugh and Isaac of Antioch.<sup>29</sup> Even in the 6th century, Procopius of Caesarea stated that most of the inhabitants of Carrhae were

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<sup>26</sup> Archbishop Peter (L’Huillier) 2005, 315-317.

<sup>27</sup> In ipsa autem ciuitatem extra paucos clericos et sanctos monachos, si qui tamen in ciuitate commorantur, penitus nullum Christianum inueni, sed totum gentes sunt.

<sup>28</sup> Later, in his «Historia religiosa», Theodoret mentioned that in the beginning of the fifth century, Christianity actively spreading in Carrhae thanks to the activities of bishop Abraham (Theod. HR. XVII.5). However, the data of Theodoret contradicts with the testimonies of his contemporaries and later authors. We can assume that Theodoret was either wishful thinking or deliberately misleading his readers.

<sup>29</sup> Green 1997, 58; Drijvers 1980, 38, 57, 158.



«not Christians, but of the old faith» (Procop., B.P. II.13.7). In general, Carrhae remained a pagan city even under the Arab rule.<sup>30</sup>

Only regular bribe of local pagans to bishops and civil administrators can explain ignoring of open pagan worship by the authorities of the Christian Empire up to the reign of Maurice.<sup>31</sup> Daniel probably wasn't the only bishop who accepted "gifts" from the pagans of Harran. For obvious reasons, the local pagans as well as the venal clerics sought to prevent the dissemination of information about the religious situation in Carrhae and only the vulnerable position of the Daniel at the Second Synod of Ephesus made it possible to reveal these inconvenient facts to the public.

Evidence of the clergymen taking bribes from the pagans of Menouthis was preserved in the work of Zacharias of Mytilene *Vita Severi*. The local temple of Isis was known as one of the largest Egyptian oracles already at the turn of the 2nd-3rd centuries.<sup>32</sup> The anti-pagan campaign unleashed by the patriarch Theophilus<sup>33</sup> at the end of the 4th century did not affect the shrine of Menouthis, and even contributed to the popularity of the local cult: the destruction of the temples of Alexandria and Canopus made Menouthis the only major pagan religious center in the Delta.

In the beginning of the 5th century the local orgiastic cult of Isis, perceived as a goddess of healing and female fertility flourished. The temple of Isis retained professional priesthood, and the oracle was known and popular not only among the pagans of Menouthis but also among their coreligionists in Alexandria. According to Cyril of Alexandria, the blessing Isis was sought even by some "Christians".<sup>34</sup> The temple itself was hidden from prying eyes – a certain devout wor-

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<sup>30</sup> The inhabitants of Carrhae continued to practice paganism even under the rule of the Caliphs, protecting themselves of the persecution the name of the «Sabians» – a small sect tolerated by the Sharia law. On «Pseudo-Sabians» of Harran and their religious practices see: Green 1997, 94-217; Pingree 2002.

<sup>31</sup> According to the anonymous Syrian chronicle, by order of Emperor Maurice, the local bishop, apparently with the support of the army, arranged the persecution of local pagans: «Many became Christians; and as for those, who refused, he would cut them in half with a sword and hang their sides along the streets of Harran» (Syr. Chron. 1234. 214. Trans. by Palmer).

<sup>32</sup> Frankfurter 2000, 163.

<sup>33</sup> On the anti-pagan activities of Theophilus of Alexandria, see: Ruf. HE. II.22-24; Soz. VII.15; Soc. V.16; Eunap. V. Soph. 473; Athanassiadi 1993, 14-16; Haas 1997, 160-169; Kaplow 2005, 9-11; Hahn 2008, 337-364.

<sup>34</sup> To oppose the popularity of the pagan Oracle among Christians, the Alexandrian patriarch established a cult of the martyrs-healers Cyrus and John, which functionally

shiper of the goddess, who sought to protect the sanctuary, covered it with sand, and thereby made its finding almost impossible for an uninitiated person (Zach., V. Sev. 20). In addition, the security of the temple and the priesthood was provided by regular bribes in gold, which the pagans gave to local clerics (Zach., V. Sev. 30-32). The fact that bribes were given in gold means that at least some of the followers of the cult of Menouthisian Isis belonged to the upper strata of late Roman society – most likely to the influential pagan intelligentsia of Alexandria.<sup>35</sup>

The destruction of the cult of Isis in Menouthis was made possible by the failed usurpation of Illus and Leontius. Thanks to the activities of the Illus' emissary Pamprepius, who promised that the victory of his patron would result in the restoration of pagan worship, some of the Alexandrian pagans supported the mutiny.<sup>36</sup> After the suppression of the rebellion, the pagan community of Alexandria, having compromised itself by its ties with the usurper, became vulnerable to increasing pressure from the Christian Church. Shortly after the defeat of Illus and Leontius, the Alexandrian bishop Peter Mongus organized a pagan pogrom, using the conflict of pagan students with the newly converted young men Paralius, who dared to ridicule publicly the Menouthis' cult, as a pretext (Zach., V. Sev. 25-26).<sup>37</sup> The culmination of the anti-pagan campaign was the march of a part of the Alexandrian Christians and monks living in the vicinity of the Egyptian capital on Menouthis. The sanctuary was destroyed, a significant part of the ritual objects were brought to Alexandria and publicly burned,<sup>38</sup> and the captured priest of Isis was forced to admit that he served the devil himself (Zach., V. Sev. 26-35).<sup>39</sup>

Another case of "buying" the right to worship was revealed in the last years of the 6th – beginning of the 7th century during the attempts of Pope Gregory the

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duplicated the cult of Isis in Menouthis (Cyr., Hom. XVIII.3). For historiography of the event, see Montserrat 1998, 259 n. 5.

<sup>35</sup> See the story of the Alexandrian philosopher Asclepiodotus, who claimed that his barren wife became pregnant precisely after a family pilgrimage to Menouthis (Zach., V. Sev. 18-19). For obvious reasons, the Christians denied any mystical help of Isis to the family of Aslepidiotus and claimed that the child was bought from one of the priestesses (Zach., V. Sev. 18-19). It is interesting to note that Damascius also noted the god-given nature of the child of Asklepiodotus (Dam. V. Isid. 95C).

<sup>36</sup> For Pamprepius' activities in Alexandria, see: Kosinski 2010, 147-166; Livrea 2014; Vedeshkin 2011.

<sup>37</sup> On the circumstances of the pagan pogrom in Alexandria, see Athanassiadi 1993, 19-21; Haas 1997, 325-329; Watts 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the silent witnesses of those events are the charred objects of a pagan cult, found in 1982 on via Canopica. See Haas 1997, 476.

<sup>39</sup> The chronological sequence of anti-pagan actions in Alexandria in the 480s is the subject of discussion. See Watts 2006, 220, n. 96.

Great to Christianize the island of Sardinia. By the end of the 6th century, the traditional cults were still widespread in many regions of the island, and even dominant among barbaricini – inhabitants of the mountainous Barbagia, located in the central part of Sardinia. The letters of the pontiff show that the religious situation in Sardinia attracted his close attention. Nine pastoral letters addressed to the local clergy and officials encouraged them to participate more actively in the Christianization of the Sardinian peasants and the barbaricini highlanders<sup>40</sup>. Eventually the campaign had some success: Gregory would mention the significant increase of the number of Sardinian Christians (Greg. Dial. Ep. XI.12). However, Christianity could not achieve complete victory on the island for several centuries.<sup>41</sup>

The preservation of Sardinian paganism was a consequence of the fact that the Church did not receive the expected support from the administration of the island, which almost openly sabotaged the policy of Christianization of the population. In a letter to Empress Constantina, Gregory noted indignantly that the Sardinian *praeses* was bribed by local pagans to allow them worshipping their gods (Greg Dial, Ep. V.38). We do not have data about who gave bribes to the *praeses*. It can be assumed that these were members of the local tribal aristocracy and priesthood, who did not want to lose their habitual leverage on their fellow tribesmen.

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The motives of the pagans who were giving bribes are clear. With money or gifts, they sought to preserve the traditional forms of worship and, at the same time, to avoid punishment for participating in prohibited rituals. The most common reason for taking bribes was the acute need for money of the lower ranks of late Roman bureaucracy. The large number of those wishing to get rid of the fiscal and

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<sup>40</sup> Greg. Dial. Ep. IV.23-27; 29; V.38; IX.205; XI.12. The Pope threatened to punish local bishops if pagans are found on the church lands (Greg. Dial., Ep. IV.29); demanded that the managers of the church estates increase the corvée of the pagan tenants to the point that idolaters were forced to choose between baptism and starvation (ibid., IV.26). In addition, Gregory urged local landowners to fight the paganism of their *coloni* (ibid., IV.23); force pagan slaves to accept baptism by means of torture, and free ones under threat of imprisonment (ibid. IX.204). No less strict was the pontiff with respect to the pagan-highlanders (barbaricini): their baptism was a condition for the cessation of punitive expeditions to their lands (ibid., IV.25); their leader Hospito (probably the only Christian in his tribe) had to lead his people to “true faith”, or at least to render all possible assistance to the preachers sent to the pope (ibid., IV.27).

<sup>41</sup> Jones, Pennick 1997, 78.

liturgical burden by occupying a position in the system of state administration contributed to the expansion of the practice of *suffragium* and, as a consequence, to the growth of the expenses of the candidates to the official posts.<sup>42</sup> It was a common practice to sell nearly all one's property to pay for a desired position.<sup>43</sup> Due to the frequent change of personnel typical for the system of state administration of the Roman Empire in the 5th-6th centuries, newly appointed officials had only a few years to improve their shaken financial position.<sup>44</sup> These circumstances forced the newly appointed bureaucrats to use any means, including illegal, in order to compensate promptly the costs of their office. As it was noted by Libanius of Antioch: "...one bought the post of governor, having paid the cost of his father's estate, returned the amount spent due to abuse of power"<sup>45</sup> (Lib. Or. XLVIII.11). This practice was so common that the governors even justified their bribery by the high cost of their offices. The correspondence of Gregory the Great preserved the answer of the above-mentioned Sardinian *praeses* to the papal emissary, who had accused him of accepting bribes from the pagans: "He replied that he promised to repay such a large *suffragium* that he could fulfill his obligations only by resorting to such measures"<sup>46</sup> (Greg Dial. Ep. V.38).

It can be assumed that bribe-taking clergy was moved by similar motives. The steady rise of Christianity, the strengthening of socio-economic position of the clergy and the increase of the Church's incomes contributed to the influx of people, driven exclusively by mercantile considerations, into the Church organization. Since joining the clergy gave immunities similar to those held by the state officials,<sup>47</sup> the desire of the representatives of provincial elites, burdened with fiscal and liturgical obligations, to become a bishop or at least a priest, commonly had the same motives as the desire of their colleagues to get a post in the civil administration.<sup>48</sup> A consequence of this was the spread of simony, the scale of which grew

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<sup>42</sup> On the practice of *suffragium* in Late Antiquity, see: Jones 1986, I, 391-396; Kelly 2004, 163ff.

<sup>43</sup> See Lib. Or. XXVIII.22; Or. XLVIII.11.

<sup>44</sup> See Serov 2000, 31-36.

<sup>45</sup> ...ἀρχὴν πριάμενον τῆς πατρῴας οἰκίας ἀγρὸν αὐτῆ προστεθεικότα συλλέγειν τὴν τιμὴν τοῖς ἐπὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς κακοῖς.

<sup>46</sup> tantum se suffragium promississe respondit, ut nisi de causis etiam talibus impleri non possit.

<sup>47</sup> On the tax immunities of the clerics in Late Antiquity, see Elliott 1978, 326-336; Testa 2001, 125-144.

<sup>48</sup> See Athan. Hist. Ar. 73; 78; Apol. Ad. Const. 28; Pallad. V. Chrys. XV. Examples of these safe-seeking place-hunters in the ranks of the clergy were bishops Pegasius of Troada and Heron of Thebaid – crypto pagans or even cynical religious nihilists who left

steadily throughout the 4th-6th centuries.<sup>49</sup> For example, at the synod organized by John Chrysostom, several bishops convicted of simony tried to justify themselves by the fact that they had considered the purchase of consecration a legal mean to free themselves from the curial burden (Pallad., V. Chrys. XV). Like the acquisition of a bureaucratic post, “buying of consecration” required substantial financial investments, which, however, could be compensated for by the Church’s income or various extortions. As it was stated by the bishops accused by the Constantinopolitan patriarch: “...we may receive back the money we have paid. For some of us have given furniture belonging of our wives”<sup>50</sup> (ibid. trans. M.V.).

Thus, corruption contributed to the impotence of the religious legislation of Later Roman Empire. Bribe giving was a common way to support the survival of traditional pagan cults. It was equally common among the pagans belonging both to the aristocracy and the lower strata of the population. Bribes from pagans were accepted by officials who served in the emperor’s court, the municipal as well as provincial administration and even the clergy. Pagan offerings to officials both secular and religious were one of the significant factors that secured the preservation of traditional cults in the Christian empire up to the sixth century and even later.<sup>51</sup>

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their posts immediately after the abolition of the immunities of the clergy by Emperor Julian the Apostate (Jul. Ep. 19; Philost. VII.13).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Kelly 2004, 164; Huebner 2009, 175-176.

<sup>50</sup> ...ἐπεὶ κἀν τὸ χρυσίον, ὃ δεδώκαμεν, ἵνα λάβωμεν τῶν γὰρ γυναικῶν ἡμῶν τινες δεδώκαμεν σκεύη.

<sup>51</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenitus mentioned that during the reign of his grandfather – Emperor Basil I the pagans still inhabited some areas of the Peloponnese (Constantinus Porph. De adm. Imp. 50. 71). Although it is unclear, whether these pagans were descendants of the original Hellenistic pagans or new Slavonic settlers.

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