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PAGANISM IN LATE ROMAN HISPANIA IN MARTIN OF BRAGA'S *DE CORRECTIONE RUSTICORUM*

EL PAGANISMO EN LA HISPANIA TARDORROMANA EN LA OBRA *DE CORRECTIONE RUSTICORUM* DE MARTÍN DE BRAGA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the persistence of pagan practices in sixth-century Hispania through an analysis of Martin of Braga's *De correctione rusticorum* and related historical sources. The study investigates how Christianity, despite its significant expansion from the fourth century onward, coexisted with traditional religious practices well into the sixth century. Through a detailed examination of ecclesiastical sources, particularly the works of Martin of Braga and Caesarius of Arles, this research demonstrates that the Christianization process was more complex and gradual than previously assumed. The paper begins by exploring the historical context of Late Antique Hispania, examining the transition from Roman to Germanic rule and the early establishment of Christianity in the region. Special attention is given to the Council of Elvira (early fourth century) as a crucial point in the institutionalization of Christianity in Iberia. The core analysis focuses on *De correctione rusticorum*, written between 572 and 574 AD, revealing how rural populations maintained pre-Christian customs despite formal Christianization. By comparing Martin's pastoral approach with that of Caesarius of Arles, the study illustrates broader patterns of religious synthesis across different regions of the post-Roman world. The findings suggest that rather than a straightforward replacement of pagan practices, the Christianization process involved complex interaction between ecclesiastical authorities and local traditions, particularly in rural areas.

Keywords: Paganism; *De correctione rusticorum*, Late Antiquity, Martin of Braga, Christianity, Council.

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina la persistencia de las prácticas paganas en la Hispania del siglo VI a través de un análisis del *De correctione rusticorum* de Martín de Braga y otras fuentes históricas relacionadas. El estudio investiga cómo el cristianismo, a pesar de su significativa expansión desde el siglo IV en adelante, coexistió con las prácticas religiosas tradicionales hasta bien

entrado el siglo VI. A través de un examen detallado de fuentes eclesiásticas, particularmente las obras de Martín de Braga y Cesáreo de Arlés, esta investigación demuestra que el proceso de cristianización fue más complejo y gradual de lo que se suponía anteriormente. El artículo comienza explorando el contexto histórico de la Hispania tardoantigua, examinando la transición del dominio romano al germánico y el establecimiento temprano del cristianismo en la región. Se presta especial atención al Concilio de Elvira (principios del siglo IV) como punto crucial en la institucionalización del cristianismo en Iberia. El análisis central se enfoca en el *De correctione rusticorum*, escrito entre los años 572 y 574 d.C., revelando cómo las poblaciones rurales mantuvieron costumbres precristianas a pesar de la cristianización formal. Mediante la comparación del enfoque pastoral de Martín con el de Cesáreo de Arlés, el estudio ilustra patrones más amplios de síntesis religiosa en diferentes regiones del mundo post-romano. Los hallazgos sugieren que, en lugar de una simple sustitución de las prácticas paganas, el proceso de cristianización involucró una compleja interacción entre las autoridades eclesiásticas y las tradiciones locales, particularmente en las áreas rurales.

Palabras clave: Paganismo, *De correctione rusticorum*, Antigüedad Tardía, Martín de Braga, Cristianismo, Concilio.

SUMARIO

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1. INTRODUCTION

Martin of Braga originated from the region of Pannonia, situated in present-day Hungary. His spiritual journey commenced with a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where he undertook monastic vows. Afterwards, he moved to Spain. Upon arrival in the Iberian Peninsula, he established the monastery of Dumium, an institution that would later attain episcopal status (Ott 1910). His ecclesiastical significance extends notably to his role in the religious conversion of the Suevi¹. This tribe had previously migrated to Galicia and embraced Arian Christianity. Martin's religious authority expanded when he assumed the position of Bishop of Braga, in what is now Portuguese territory². During his episcopate, he participated in two significant church councils, held in 561 and 572 (Farmer 2011). The First Council of Braga in 561 AD

brought together eight bishops, including Martin. This synod primarily addressed concerns surrounding Priscillianism³. A subsequent Council convened in Braga in 572 AD, with Martin presiding over an expanded assembly of twelve bishops. This gathering concentrated on matters of church governance and the infiltration of non-Christian and pagan practices into Christian religious life (Goncalves Diniz 2017, 103-104).

His work, *De correctione rusticorum*, presents an important insight into the survival of pagan practices in the sixth century, allowing us to understand how paganism did not disappear suddenly, but survived long after the Christianisation of the Roman empire began in the fourth century (Mendes 2023, 61-80). In this paper, I will analyze *De correctione rusticorum* to understand the survival of pagan practices in sixth-century Hispania. Through a close reading of the text, I will examine how Martin of Braga describes and confronts various non-Christian customs that persisted in rural communities. The

1 Key bibliography for the Late Roman Spain includes: Brassous 2020, 39-55; Brassous 2006, 317-319; Kulikowski 2011.

2 An important work on the figure of St. Martin of Braga in the territory of Galicia is Branco 1999, 63-98.

3 See: Masana 1998, 177-185; Escribano 2005, 121-149; Gazzotti 2012, 71-84; Gazzotti 2013, 67-80.

analysis will focus on specific passages where St. Martin details these practices, from nature worship to traditional festivities. By examining these accounts, we can better understand how pre-Christian beliefs continued to thrive even as Christianity became the dominant religion. Martin's text reveals that rural communities maintained many traditional practices, showing that Christianization was a gradual process rather than an immediate transformation. This investigation will show that *De correctione rusticorum* offers valuable insights into both the resilience of local traditions and the church's efforts to establish Christian orthodoxy in rural areas. The text shows that church authorities had to actively engage with and respond to deeply rooted pagan practices that survived well into the sixth century. To conclude, this study situates *De correctione rusticorum* within the broader context of Late Antique Iberian society, emphasizing its dual significance as both a pastoral guide and a historical document. By exploring Martin of Braga's responses to entrenched pagan customs, the analysis will highlight the dynamic interplay between religious authority and local traditions during a period of profound transformation. This investigation will show how *De correctione rusticorum* serves as a critical source for understanding the complexity of religious identity in the sixth century, where Christian orthodoxy coexisted with lingering pre-Christian practices. Furthermore, it will underscore the role of ecclesiastical leaders like St. Martin in shaping the contours of religious life, revealing a nuanced process of negotiation and adaptation rather than a simplistic narrative of Christian triumph. By examining the persistence of these practices, this paper aims to shed light on the broader dynamics of cultural change and continuity in Late Antique Hispania, contributing to our understanding of the gradual and multifaceted nature of Christianization across the post-Roman world.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The decline of Roman authority in Spain unfolded progressively throughout the fifth century AD, as various Germanic peoples, established their dominion over the region. The initial wave of these migrations brought the Vandals, Alans, and Suevi, who established control over the southern, western, and northern territories, respectively⁴. Their arrival precipitated significant upheaval among the Hispano-Roman population, who demonstrated minimal capacity for military resistance. The latter part of the century witnessed the arrival of the Visigoths, the most formidable of these Germanic groups, who established settlements in Old Castile (Beltrán Torreira 1986, 53-58; Díaz 1993, 317-325; Kolendo 1995, 81-99; Ripoll 1998, 153-187; Collins 2003, 358-359). While the Visigoths gradually extended their hegemony over the other Germanic peoples and eliminated remaining Roman strongholds, the complete consolidation of their administrative authority across the Iberian Peninsula would not materialize until the seventh century (O'Callaghan 1975, 37; Kulikowski 2015, 131-145).

The exact timeline of Christianity's introduction to Hispania remains uncertain, mirroring the historical ambiguity found in other Roman provinces (Fernández Ubiña 2007, 427-458). Historical evidence of early Christian presence in Iberia is limited but notable, with one of the earliest documented references appearing in Irenaeus of Lyon's second-century work *Adversus Haereses*, which mentions the existence of Christian churches in the region⁵. Another significant

4 An important work on Late Antiquity, although not specific to Hispania is: Van Dam 1992, 59-69.

5 Irenaeus, *Adversus haerensis* I, 10,2: "Ut iam supra dixi, Ecclesia, hanc praedicationem et hanc fidem accepta, etsi per universum orbem terrarum dispersa sit, tamen quasi in una domo degens, diligenter eam custodit. Eadem etiam credit, quasi unam animam et unum cor habens, et concorditer ea praedicat, docet, et tradit, quasi uno ore loqueretur. Nam licet linguae in mundo diversae sint, tamen virtus traditionis una eademque manet. Neque enim

historical reference comes from Tertullian's early third-century work *Adversus Iudaeos*, which describes Christian communities existing throughout Hispania's territories⁶.

Evidence of a structured Christian Church first becomes clearly visible in the fourth century AD, suggesting that its organizational foundations were established during the previous century (Colomina Torner 1988, 9-43). This development is best documented through the Council of Elvira, which

Ecclesiae quae in Germania plantatae sunt, aliquid aliud credunt aut tradunt, nec quae in Hispania, nec quae in Gallia, nec quae in Oriente, nec quae in Aegypto, nec quae in Libya, nec quae in mediis regionibus orbis institutae sunt."

6 Tertullian, *Liber Adversus Iudaeos*, 7:1-5: "Igitur in isto gradum conseramus, an qui venturus Christus adnuntiabatur iam venerit an venturus adhuc speretur. Quod ipsum ut probari possit, etiam tempora sunt nobis requirenda quando venturum Christum prophetae nuntiaverint, ut, si intra ista tempora recognoverimus venisse eum, sine dubio ipsum esse credamus quem prophetae venturum canebant, in quem nos, gentes scilicet, credituri adnuntiabamur, et cum constiterit venisse indubitate etiam legem novam ab ipso datam esse credamus et testamentum novum in ipso et per ipsum nobis dispositum non diffiteamur. Venturum enim Christum et Iudaeos non refutare scimus, utpote qui in adventum eius spem suam porrigant. Nec de isto pluribus quaerendum, cum retro omnes prophetae de eo praedicaverunt, ut Esaias: Sic dicit dominus deus Christo meo domino: cuius tenui dexteram, ut exaudiant illum gentes; fortitudines regum dirumpam, aperiā ante illum portas, et civitates non cludentur illi. Quod ipsum adimpletum iam videmus. Cui etenim tenet dexteram pater deus nisi Christo filio suo, quem et exaudierunt omnes gentes, id est cui omnes gentes crediderunt, cuius et praedicatores apostoli in psalmis David ostenduntur: In universam, inquit, terram exivit sonus eorum et ad terminos terrae verba eorum? In quem enim alium universae gentes crediderunt nisi in Christum qui iam venit? Cui etenim crediderunt gentes, Parthi et Medi et Elamitae et qui habitant Mesopotamiam Armeniam Phrygiam Cappadociam, incolentes Pontum et Asiam Pamphylia, immorantes Aegypto et regiones Africae quae est trans Cyrenen inhabitantes, Romani et incolae, tunc et in Hierusalem Iudaei et ceterae gentes, ut iam Gaetulorum varietates et Maurorum multi fines, Hispaniarum omnes termini et Galliarum diversae nationes et Britannorum inaccessa Romanis loca Christo vero subdita et Sarmatarum et Dacorum et Germanorum et Scytharum et abditarum multarum gentium et provinciarum et insularum multarum nobis ignotarum et quae enumerare minus possumus? In quibus omnibus locis Christi nomen qui iam venit regnat, utpote ante quem omnium civitatum portae sunt apertae et cui nullae sunt clausae, abante quem ferreae serae sunt comminutae et valvae aerae sunt apertae."

convened between 306 and 314 AD (Gwynn 2018, 533). This gathering brought together nineteen bishops from Diocletian's five Iberian provinces, accompanied by twenty-four priests. While clergy attended from various regions, there was a notable concentration of religious representatives from the southern provinces, likely due to the council's location near modern-day Granada (Stocking 2018, 533). The council's records reveal ongoing tensions between Christianity and traditional Roman religious practices. Of its 81 religious canons, more than twenty specifically addressed pagan customs. The first four canons dealt specifically with baptized Christians who continued participating in pagan sacrificial rituals. A particularly interesting case involved *flamines* (Roman priests) who had converted to Christianity but still needed to perform their civic duties in the still-pagan Empire. Given that Roman political and religious responsibilities were deeply intertwined, the council dedicated three separate canons to address whether these officials could maintain their civil positions while practicing Christianity. The council also addressed other traditional religious behaviors, including the use of malicious enchantments and idol worship, demonstrating the persistent influence of pre-Christian practices in Iberian society. A pioneering work worth remembering is that of Stephen McKenna. His work on the pagan cults in Galicia extends beyond merely identifying traces of surviving superstitions. His analytical approach represents a significant methodological advancement in understanding the religious landscape of early medieval Galicia, as he examines the text as a window into the actual practices of local populations. By shifting focus from purely theological concerns to anthropological insights, McKenna's work illuminates how rural communities maintained and adapted their traditional customs despite ecclesiastical opposition. His methodology is particularly valuable for understanding the complex interplay between official Church doctrine

and lived religion in sixth-century Iberia (McKenna 1938, 53-57).

Despite the formal establishment of Christianity and its institutional structures during the fourth and fifth centuries, pagan practices remained deeply rooted in Hispania, particularly in rural areas. The persistence of these traditional beliefs posed an ongoing challenge to Christian authorities, extending well into the sixth century. This religious dualism was especially pronounced in the kingdom of the Suevi in northwestern Hispania, where Martin of Braga emerged as a significant figure in addressing the coexistence of Christian and pagan practices.

3. COUNCIL OF ELVIRA. BETWEEN PAGANISM AND CHRISTIANITY

The bishops who convened at Elvira in the early fourth century represented various regions of southern Spain, bringing with them the challenges faced in their respective communities. The choice of Elvira as the council's location may have been strategic, given the limited evidence of pre-Christian devotion in the city and its potential as a stronghold of Christian presence. The council's canons collectively indicate the existence of a substantial Christian community that nonetheless felt vulnerable to the persistent influences of the non-Christian past. They reflect the bishops' attempts to establish guidelines for Christian conduct within a predominantly non-Christian society, addressing issues ranging from personal behavior to communal practices.

These canons also provide insights into the social and religious landscape of fourth-century Spain. They suggest a Christian community striving to define its identity and practices while coexisting with, and sometimes accommodating, the prevailing classical culture. The need to moderate certain Christian observances, such as fasting during harvest time, demonstrates the practical

challenges of integrating Christian practices into the broader societal context.

This evidence paints a picture of a Christian community in Spain that was growing in influence but still navigating its place within a largely non-Christian environment. The canons of Elvira thus serve as a valuable source for understanding the complexities of religious and social dynamics in fourth-century Hispania⁷. The integration of fourth-century Christianity into a partially Christianized environment is further evidenced by the sermons of Bishop Pacianus of Barcelona (McAuliffe 1945, 51-61; Domínguez del Val 1962, 53-85; Anglada Anfruns 1967, 137-161; Adkin 1994, 73-76). His admonitions reveal the persistence of non-Christian practices among self-identified Christians within his congregation. Pacianus not only reiterates the prohibitions established at the Council of Elvira against post-baptismal sacrifices, likely associated with imperial cult, but also references a intriguing pagan festival in Barcelona. Two canons from the Council of Elvira pertain to the behavior of Christians at cemeteries. The bishops prohibited women from spending the night in vigil at cemeteries, citing that under the guise of prayer, they secretly committed crimes⁸. Additionally, the council forbade the use of lighted candles during the day at the tombs of the deceased, reasoning that "the spirits of the saints are not to be disturbed". Out of the eighty-one canons enacted at Elvira, more than twenty addressed issues related to paganism. The Council of Elvira also addressed three issues specifically affecting the wealthy members of the Church¹⁰. During Roman times, it was

7 Key bibliography for the Council of Elvira includes: Ubiña 1992, 545-571; Sotomayor Muro 1996, 251-266; *Ibid.* 2000, 189-199; Lazaro 2008, 517-546.

8 Canon 35 : "*Placuit prohiberi ne foeminae in coemeterio pervigilent, eo quod saepe sub obtentu orationis latenter scelera committunt*".

9 Canon 34: "*Cereos per diem placuit in coemeterio non incendi, inquietandi enim sanctorum spiritus non sunt. Qui haec non observaverint, arceantur ab ecclesiae communione*".

10 Canon 57: "*Matronae vel earum mariti vestimenta sua ad ornandam saeculariter pompam non dent; et si*

common for those organizing heathen games and processions borrowed ornaments and attire from acquaintances for use as stage properties or decorations. The council ruled that any Christian who allowed their clothes and ornaments to be used in pagan celebrations or games would be excommunicated from the Church for three years.

4. DE CORRECTIONE RUSTICORUM

Martin of Braga, who served as Bishop of Braga (Bracara Augusta) in Spain during the sixth century, originated from Pannonia, a Roman province. After a brief period as a monk in the Holy Land, he traveled westward, reaching Gallaecia around 550. There, he emerged as the region's prominent religious leader. His significant achievement was facilitating the permanent religious transformation of the Suebic people, who previously adhered to Homeoan Christianity (often termed Arianism) and followed Priscillian's teachings. Martin cultivated strong relationships with Suebic rulers from 550 to 579 (Mülke 2020, 337-344). His distinguished career featured notable participation in the Councils of Braga in 561 and 572. During the 572 council, he presented the *Capitula Martini*, a compilation of Eastern church council canons. According to Isidore of Seville's biographical account, Martin authored various works and correspondence, though many have been lost to time. His surviving work, *Formula Vitae Honestae*¹¹, dedicated to King Miro and loosely inspired by a lost Senecan text on cardinal virtues, remained influential through the Renaissance period. His sermon challenging paganism, *De correctione rusticorum*, found application in Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Iceland. Additionally, his translations from Greek to Latin of the *Sayings of the Egyptian Fathers* and *Questions and Answers of the Greek Fathers*, completed with Paschasius of Dumium's assistance, significantly shaped

monastic practices in Galicia (Ferreiro 2018, 973).

Martin of Braga, who served as Bishop of Dumio before becoming Archbishop of Braga, composed *De correctione rusticorum* between 572 and 574, shortly after the Second Council of Braga. This concise treatise, comprising 19 paragraphs, continues to serve as a valuable historical source for diverse scholarly inquiries and demonstrates the author's distinctive role in sixth-century Iberian culture (Merinhos 2006, 396). *De correctione rusticorum* reflects Martin's pastoral philosophy and activities in a peripheral region of the Roman world, where he confronted diverse forms of Latin folk religious practices that were already declining before fully establishing themselves in the area (Colonna 1991, 121-148). Though historical documentation from sixth-century Gallaecia is limited, this period holds particular significance as it represents a crucial phase in the establishment of Christianity. The text offers unique insights into this transformative process, presenting the perspective of an educated religious leader attempting to demonstrate to his audience the flaws in their traditional beliefs. Martin specifically addresses the "rustics" using what he terms "rustic discourse," employing accessible language and engaging narratives to reach his intended audience. The text's enduring influence is evidenced by its preservation in eleven medieval manuscripts and various modern editions, culminating in Claude Barlow's critical edition (Barlow 1950, 183-203)¹². Recent scholarly developments in Martinian studies have been marked by two significant critical editions that reexamine Barlow's textual interpretation. These editions, produced by Mario Naldini¹³ and Aires

fecerint, triennio abstineantur".

¹¹ See: Ranero Riestra 2018.

¹² An electronic version of the Latin text in Barlow's critical edition can be found on the web pages: https://www.intratext.com/IXT/LAT0434/_INDEX.HTM#RUST. II (Access 15-01-2025); <https://germanicmythology.com/works/De%20Correctione%20Rusticorum.html> (Access 15-01-2025); <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/martinbraga/rusticus.shtml> (Access 15-01-2025)

¹³ Preceding these works is the review of

Augusto Nascimento¹⁴, present comprehensive manuscript analyses and variant readings that substantially revise Barlow's earlier work. Both publications, which include translations and extensive scholarly commentary, demonstrate meticulous research methodology and represent a new phase in the scholarly examination of Martin's works. Their rigorous analytical approach and detailed textual analysis have established new foundations for contemporary Martinian scholarship. This scholarly attention underscores the work's continuing relevance for understanding early medieval religious transformation.

De correctione rusticorum effectively combines two distinct literary genres: the epistle and the sermon (Merinhos 2006, 399; Jiménez Sánchez 2017, 172). The work opens with a dedicatory letter in which Martin of Braga addresses and responds to Polemius, Bishop of Astorga, who had personally requested guidance on how to correct

the beliefs of the rural population¹⁵ (*pro castigatione rusticorum*¹⁶). The request from the Bishop of Astorga highlights a significant fact. While Christianity spread widely, pagan cults continued to be practiced, likely even more so in rural areas. From paragraphs three to six, St Martin writes about the creation of the heavens and the earth¹⁷, the fall of Satan¹⁸, the creation of man and woman¹⁹, and the flood²⁰. When the earth was repopulated,

15 *De correctione rusticorum*, 1: "Epistolam tuae sanctae caritatis accepi, in qua scribis ad me ut pro castigatione rusticorum, qui adhuc pristina paganorum superstitione detenti cultum venerationis plus daemoniis quam deo persolvunt, aliqua de origine idolorum et sceleribus ipsorum vel pauca de multis ad te scripta dirigerem. Sed quia oportet ab initio mundi vel modicam illis rationis notitiam quasi pro gustu porrigere, necesse me fuit ingentem praeteritorum temporum gestorunquae silvam breviato tenuis compendii sermone contingere et cibum rusticis rustico sermone condire. Ita ergo, opitulante tibi deo, erit tuae praedicationis exordium."

16 As reported by Sagaspe (2019, 130): "In the time of Martin of Braga, the term "rustic" (from the Latin *rusticus*, meaning 'of the countryside or rural environment') was used to refer to peasants or villagers, in contrast to urban dwellers ('of the city'). The urban inhabitant was considered educated and well-mannered, whereas the rustic was presumed to be uncultured and unrefined."

17 *De correctione rusticorum*, 3: "Cum fecisset in principio deus caelum et terram, in illa caelesti habitatione fecit spirituales creaturas, id est angelos, qui in conspectu ipsius adstantes laudarent illum."

18 *De correctione rusticorum*, 3: "Ex quibus unus, qui primus omnium archangelus fuerat factus, videns se in tanta gloria prae fulgentem, non dedit honorem deo creatori suo, sed similem se illi dixit; et pro hac superbia cum aliis plurimis angelis qui illi consenserunt de illa caelesti sede in aere isto qui est sub caelo deiectus est; et ille, qui fuerat prius archangelus, perdita luce gloriae suae, factus est tenebrosus et horribilis diabolus."

19 *De correctione rusticorum*, 4: "Post istam ruinam angelicam placuit deo de limo terrae hominem plasmare, quem posuit in paradiso; et dixit ei ut, si praeceptum domini servasset, in loco illo caelesti sine morte succederet, unde angeli illi refugae ceciderunt, si autem praeterisset dei praeceptum, morte moreretur."

20 *De correctione rusticorum*, 5: "Fuit autem primus homo dictus Adam, et mulier eius quam de ipsius carne deus creavit dicta est Eva. Ex istis duobus hominibus omne genus hominum propagatum est. Qui, obliiti creatorem suum deum multa scelera facientes, iritaverunt deum ad iracundiam. Pro qua re inmisit deus diluvium et perdidit omnes, excepto uno iusto, nomine Noe, quem cum suis filiis pro reparando humano genere reservavit. A primo ergo homine Adam usque ad diluvium transierunt anni duo milia ducenti

Madoz 1945, 335-354. Naldini's work addresses three fundamental aspects in its commentary. First, it provides a philological and linguistic analysis of the terminology employed, emphasizing vulgarisms, the evolution of Latin, and distinctive features of Christian Latin. Second, it offers an explanation and contextualization of the doctrinal content, with particular attention to theological and ecclesiological aspects. Third, it identifies doctrinal sources and provides ethno-historical explanations of the superstitions, divinations, spells, curses, and enchantments noted by Martin. The volume concludes with three indices: biblical passages, principal themes and topics, and a comprehensive index of names and words appearing in the text. Cf. Nadoln 1991, 79-123.

14 This critical edition of the Latin text, accompanied by an annotated translation, is founded on a fresh examination of the manuscripts. The work opens with an introduction that analyzes Martin's specific context and his writings, contextualizing them within sixth-century Galician culture. Before examining the manuscript tradition, the text addresses its intentionally simplified language, which was specifically directed at the "rustici" (rural population). The commentary notes accompanying the translation, with their focus on Martin's literary sources, particularly illuminate the linguistic-literary, historical, and ethnological aspects of the censured practices. This interpretation explains the traditional paraphrasing of the title (*De correctione rusticorum*) by emphasizing the text's pastoral nature in addressing superstitions. cf. Nascimento 1997, 1-168.

man forgot God again and began to worship creatures instead of the creator²¹. In paragraph 7, St. Martin points out how demons fell from the sky, began to manifest themselves to men in various forms and speak to them, with the aim of being worshipped as gods and offered sacrifices:

Tunc diabolus vel ministri ipsius, daemones, qui de caelo deiecti sunt, videntes ignaros homines dimisso Deo creatore suo, per creaturas errare, coeperunt se illis in diversas formas ostendere et loqui cum eis et expetere ab eis, ut in excelsis montibus et in silvis frondosis sacrificia sibi offerrent et ipsos colerent pro deo, imponentes sibi vocabula sceleratorum hominum, qui in omnibus criminibus et sceleribus suam egerant vitam, ut alius Iovem se esse diceret, qui fuerat magus et in tantis adulteriis incestus ut sororem suam haberet uxorem, quae dicta est Iuno, Minervam et Venerem filias suas corruperit, neptes quoque et omnem parentelam suam turpiter incestaverit. Alius autem daemon Martem se nominavit, qui fuit litigiorum et discordiae commissor. Alius deinde daemon Mercurium se appellare voluit, qui fuit omnis furti et fraudis dolosus inventor; cui homines cupidi quasi deo lucri, in quadriviis transeuntis, iactatis lapidibus acervos petrarum pro sacrificio reddunt. Alius quoque daemon Saturni sibi nomen adscripsit, qui, in omni crudelitate vivens, etiam nascentes suos filios devorabat. Alius etiam daemon Venerem se esse confinxit, quae fuit

mulier meretrix. Non solum cum innumerabilibus adulteris, sed etiam cum patre suo Iove et cum fratre suo Marte meretricata est (De correctione rusticorum, 7).

In analyzing the *De Correctione Rusticorum*, scholar De Miranda draws attention to paragraph VII, where St. Martin of Braga explores the pantheon of Olympic deities and their material manifestations through temples and idols. This section offers valuable insights into the Greco-Roman religious overlay that Martin was addressing in his pastoral work. Of particular significance is Martin's characterization of these divine figures, which De Miranda identifies as following the Euhemeristic tradition, a Hellenistic interpretive framework named for the philosopher Euhemerus of Messina (IV century BC). Within this analytical approach, the celebrated gods and heroes of Olympus are demythologized and presented as historical humans whose questionable moral conduct did not prevent their posthumous elevation to divine status²² (Miranda 2012, 12).

The text further highlights the persistence of pagan practices despite the advent of Christianity. Martin systematically catalogues Roman deities, Juno, Jupiter, Minerva, Venus, and others, characterizing them as fundamentally malevolent entities. Particular attention is given to Mars, who reportedly received stone offerings from travelers at crossroads. This stone-offering ritual finds historical corroboration in Strabo's accounts (*Geography*, VIII, 343). According to scholarly analysis by Gonçalves Diniz, Mercury, venerated as the progenitor of the Lares spirits that presided over crossroads, fulfilled the role of travelers' protector (Gonçalves Diniz 2017, 108). The paragraph in Martin's work specifies that stones were actively thrown rather than merely placed, suggesting a purificatory ritual

quadraginta duo."

21 *De correctione rusticorum*, 6: Post diluvium iterum recuperatum est genus humanum per tres filios Noe, reservatos cum uxoribus suis. Et cum coepisset multitudo subscrescens mundum implere, obliviscentes iterum homines creatorem mundi deum, coeperunt, dimisso creatore, colere creaturas. Alii adorabant solem, alii lunam vel stellas, alii ignem, alii aquam profundam vel fontes aquarum, credentes haec omnia non a deo esse facta ad usum hominum, sed ipsa ex se orta deos esse.

22 Meirinhos (2006, 406) observes that St. Martin, in this paragraph, reduces the Roman pantheon with its retinue of deities dispersed throughout nature to a collection of senseless and unjustified superstitions.

with fortune-seeking intentions. The scholarly interpretation of these lithic accumulations remains divided: some researchers connect them to Mercury's commercial patronage, while others associate them with his psychopompic function in guiding souls. The strategic positioning of these stone collections at intersections represents a recurrent motif across numerous ancient belief systems²³.

St. Martin goes on to point out how the demons continued their work of persuasion towards men, leading them to build temples, altars and statues. He also states that many demons were cast out and presided over, forests, seas, rivers and springs:

Ecce quales fuerunt illo tempore isti perditī homines, quos ignorantes rustici per adinventiones suas pessime honorabant, quorum vocabula ideo sibi daemones adposuerunt, ut ipsos quasi deos colerent et sacrificia illis offerrent et ipsorum facta imitarentur, quorum nomina invocabant. Suaserunt etiam illis daemones ut templa illis facerent et imagines vel statuas sceleratorum hominum ibi ponerent et aras illis constituerent, in quibus non solum animalium sed etiam hominum sanguinem illis funderent. Praeter haec autem multi daemones ex illis qui de caelo expulsi sunt aut in mare aut in fluminibus aut in fontibus aut in silvis praesident, quos similiter homines ignorantes deum quasi deos colunt et sacrificant illis. Et in mare quidem Neptunum appellant, in fluminibus Lamias, in fontibus Nymphas, in silvis Dianas, quae omnia maligni daemones et spiritus nequam sunt, qui homines infideles, qui signaculo crucis nesciunt se munire, nocent et vexant. Non tamen

sine permissione dei nocent, quia deum habent iratum et non ex toto corde in fide Christi credunt, sed sunt dubii in tantum ut nomina ipsa daemoniorum in singulos dies nominent, et appellent diem Martis et Mercurii et Iovis et Veneris et Saturni, qui nullum diem fecerunt, sed fuerunt homines pessimi et scelerati in gente Graecorum (De correctione rusticorum, 8).

In this section, St. Martin addresses the connection between demon worship and idolatrous practices. After establishing this fundamental link to emphasize the serious nature of idolatry, he turns his attention to specific superstitious customs. He particularly criticizes the common practice of naming weekdays after pagan deities such as Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn. Interestingly, Martin's interpretation of these deities is distinctly historical rather than mythological - he views them as actual Greek historical figures rather than supernatural beings.

St. Martin further explains that these demons conceal themselves in natural settings such as forests, springs, rivers, and the sea. People offer them sacrifices and worship them, unable to protect themselves with the sign of the cross. He also notes that Lamias are invoked in rivers, a cult of entities that appears to have spread from Classical and Nordic mythology to Iberian culture (Goncalves Diniz 2017, 109). In some traditions, Lamias are depicted as half-woman, half-snake, while in other versions, they are seductresses who lure travelers. The figure of the Lamia can be linked to the myth of the Xanas in Spain, and beliefs in forest spirits and nymphs persist in the Iberian Peninsula in various forms, including the 'Moura Encantada' and the plural Dianas (Goncalves Diniz 2017, 109).

In paragraph 9, St. Martin highlights the contradictory behavior of Christians who, being baptized on Sunday, worship the other days of the week:

23 Filotas (2005, 202) highlights the significance of crossroads and intersections as transitional spaces with profound symbolic meaning in various societies. These locations serve as liminal zones where the living may encounter the dead and other spirits, both benevolent and malevolent.

Deus autem omnipotens, quando caelum et terram fecit, ipse tunc creavit lucem, quae per distinctionem operum dei septies revoluta est. Nam primo deus lucem fecit, quae appellata est dies; secundo firmamentum caeli factum est; tertio terra a mare divisa est; quarto sol et luna et stellae factae sunt; quinto quadrupedia et volatilia et natatilia; sexto homo plasmatus est; septimo autem die, completo omni mundo et ornamento ipsius, requiem deus appellavit. Una ergo lux, quae prima in operibus dei facta est, per distinctionem operum dei septies revoluta, septimana est appellata. Qualis ergo amentia est ut homo baptizatus in fide Christi diem dominicum, in quo Christus resurrexit, non colat et dicat se diem Iovis colere et Mercurii et Veneris et Saturni, qui nullum diem habent, sed fuerunt adulteri et magi et iniqui et male mortui in provincia sua! Sed, sicut diximus, sub specie nominum istorum ab hominibus stultis veneratio et honor daemonibus exhibetur ((De correctione rusticorum, 8).

Martin of Braga's argument in this passage centers on a striking paradox he observes in Christian practice. Looking at the text, we can see how he builds a powerful case against the situation where Christians, baptized on Sunday in Christ's name, continue to honor days named after what he dismissively calls "adulterers, magicians, unjust and wicked" pagan figures. St. Martin opens with an exclamation phrase about "folly," and it is possible almost hear his frustration at this mixing of Christian and pagan practices. The way he builds his case is quite clever. He starts by reminding his audience about Sunday's sacred character, it's the day of Christ's resurrection and their own baptism. Then he pivots to a scathing takedown of the pagan figures behind the other day names. He painting them as deeply flawed, morally corrupt individuals who met inglorious ends "in their province". His closing point about demons is particularly interesting.

When Martin suggests that "foolish men" are unknowingly worshiping demons through these names, he's tapping into a deeper theological tradition that saw pagan deities not as mere inventions but as actual demons actively deceiving people. Probably, This wasn't just theological issue. For St. Martin, this was a real spiritual danger that needed addressing. Also linked to this is St. Martin's concern for the sanctification of the Lord's Day, Sunday:

Diem dominicum, qui propterea dominicus dicitur, quia filius dei, dominus noster Iesus Christus, in ipso resurrexit a mortuis, nolite contemnere, sed cum reverentia colite. Opus servile, id est agrum, pratum, vineam, vel si qua gravia sunt, non faciatis in die dominico, praeter tantum quod ad necessitatem reficiendi corpusculi pro exquoquendo pertinet cibo et necessitate longinqui itineris. Et in locis proximis licet viam die dominico facere, non tamen pro occasionibus malis, sed magis pro bonis, id est aut ad loca sancta ambulare, aut fratrem vel amicum visitare, vel infirmum consolare, aut tribulanti consilium vel adiutorium pro bona causa portare. Sic ergo decet Christianum hominem diem dominicum venerare. Nam satis iniquum et turpe est ut illi qui pagani sunt et ignorant fidem Christianum, idola daemonum colentes, diem Iovis aut cuiuslibet daemonis colant et ab opere se abstineant, cum certe nullum diem daemonia nec creassent nec habeant. Et nos, qui verum deum adoramus et credimus filium dei resurrexisse a mortuis, diem resurrectionis eius, id est dominicum, minime veneramus! Nolite ergo iniuriam facere resurrectioni dominicae, sed honorate et cum reverentia colite propter spem nostram quam habemus in illam. Nam sicut ille dominus noster Iesus Christus, filius dei, qui est caput nostrum, tertia die resurrexit a mortuis, ita et nos, qui sumus membra ipsius, resurrecturos nos

*in carne nostra in fine saeculi speramus, ut unusquisque sive requiem aeternam sive poenam aeternam, sicut in corpore suo in saeculo isto egit, ita recipiat (De correctione rusticorum, 18)*²⁴.

In Paragraph 9, the theme of baptism is also significant, an event during which people are reminded of the commitments they made on that day. According to Da Silva, by discussing presumably superstitious practices in the *De Correctione Rusticorum* and connecting them to broken commitments with God, the bishop configures these practices as elements from which one separates through the baptismal ceremony. He aims to frame baptism as an inclusive rite of passage, occurring through separation from a profane environment “personified” by “spirits” that one intends to exorcize, thus performing an initiation/aggregation that causes the convert to be reborn. In this sense, the baptismal rite would distance converts from idols, auguries, and perjuries, practices that, according to Martin of Braga, lead to demon worship and separate the baptized from the salvific benefits received through the ritual (Da Silva 2016, 4-5).

St. Martin was also very critical about the date of the beginning of the year, which was 25 April and not in January:

Similiter et ille error ignorantibus et rusticis subrepat, ut Kalendas Ianuarias putent anni esse initium, quod omnino falsissimum est. Nam, sicut scriptura sancta dicit, VIII Kal. Aprilis in ipso aequinoctio initium primi anni est factum. Nam sic legitur: et divisit deus inter lucem et tenebras. Omnis autem recta divisio aequalitatem habet, sicut et in VIII Kal. Aprilis tantum spatium horarum dies habet quantum et nox. Et ideo falsum est ut Ianuariae Kalendae

*initium anni sint (De correctione rusticorum, 10)*²⁵.

In his analysis, the belief that the year commenced with the January Kalends is characterized as a manifestation of rustic ignorance, fundamentally incompatible with scriptural truth. His argument draws particular strength from the Creation narrative in Genesis 1, specifically focusing on the divine act of separating light from darkness. The determination of the vernal equinox emerged as a crucial ecclesiastical concern from the fourth century AD onwards, primarily due to its fundamental role in establishing the annual date of Easter.

Paragraph 16 is very important, because a number of pagan practices are listed, although not all of them are clearly identifiable:

Ecce qualis cautio et confessio vestra apud deum tenetur! Et quomodo aliqui ex vobis, qui abrenuntiaverunt diabolo et angelis eius et culturis eius et operibus eius malis, modo iterum ad culturas diaboli revertuntur? Nam ad petras et ad arbores et ad fontes et per trivias cereolos incendere, quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli? Divinationes et auguria et dies idolorum observare, quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli? Vulcanalia et Kalendas observare, mensas ornare, et lauros ponere, et pedem observare, et fundere in foco super truncum frugem et vinum, et panem in fontem mittere, quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli? Mulieres in tela sua Minervam nominare et Veneris diem in nuptias observare et quo die in via exeat adtendere, quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli? Incantare herbas ad maleficia et invocare nomina daemonum incantando, quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli? Et alia multa quae longum est dicere. Ecce ista omnia

²⁴ De correctione rusticorum, 18; Kahlos (2023, 217): this recent study is of considerable scholarly significance, as it not only touches upon the cult of the days of the week described in paragraph 9 of the *De correctione rusticorum*, but also sheds light on how bishops in Late Antiquity regarded pagan practices and those who engaged in them.

²⁵ De correctione rusticorum, 10; Jiménez Sánchez (2017, 173): this study investigates the Christianization of the January Kalends in Late Antique Hispania by analyzing the testimonies of three key ecclesiastical figures: Pacian of Barcelona, Martin of Braga and Isidore of Seville.

post abrenuntiationem diaboli, post baptismum facitis et, ad culturam daemonum et ad mala idolorum opera redeuntis, fidem vestram transistis et pactum quod fecistis cum deo disruptistis. Dimisistis signum crucis, quod in baptismum accepistis, et alia diaboli signa per avicellos et sternutos et per alia multa adtenditis. Quare mihi aut cuilibet recto Christiano non nocet augurium? Quia, ubi signum crucis praecesserit, nihil est signum diaboli. Quare vobis nocet? Quia signum crucis contemnitis, et illud timetis quod vobis ipsi in signum configitis (De correctione rusticorum, 16).

In this paragraph, Martin of Braga enumerates various practices he considers unacceptable. He specifically condemns the practice of lighting candles near stones, trees, water sources, and at intersections, describing these acts as devil worship. Martin also criticizes several other customs: celebrating Vulcanalia festivals, observing the start of each month, preparing decorative tables, hanging laurel decorations, and a practice involving feet. He further denounces the practice of offering fruit and wine by placing them on fireplace logs, as well as the act of throwing bread into springs or fountains. St. Martin notes that female weavers commonly invoked Minerva during their work, and that people chose Venus's day (Friday) for their wedding ceremonies. He categorizes all these behaviors as forms of devil worship. The text continues by explaining how Martin associates both bird-based divination and the interpretation of sneezes with demonic influences. He reminds his congregation not to abandon the Christian cross symbol they accepted through baptism, implying that other symbolic practices represent diabolic influences. Finally, Martin strongly opposes what he terms "magical incantations created by sorcerers and wrongdoers". As an alternative, he advocates for the use of holy Christian prayers, specifically recommending the Creed

and the Lord's Prayer as appropriate spiritual formulas.

Scholar De Miranda, when commenting on paragraph 16 of *De correctione rusticorum* and cataloging all the rituals mentioned, connects many of them to Celtic substrata. Among these are libations of grain and wine poured into fire and water, divinations regarding unfortunate or favorable days for weddings or beginning journeys, the invocation to Minerva made by the weaver when placing her hands on the loom, and finally, tree worship and magical herbal practices performed through incantations (De Miranda 2012, 535).

Based on an analysis of *De correctione rusticorum*, as scholar Mendes observes, St. Martin seeks to demonstrate that his audience, despite considering themselves good Christians, remains attached to ancient pagan superstitions. He argues that at the root of these practices, which his audience, whether out of ignorance, forgetfulness, or naivety, fails to recognize as incompatible with their faith, lies demonic influence. In other words, conversion to Christianity, as understood by the new religion, was not merely the discovery of God and adherence to the new message but also the renunciation and repudiation of the old faith, an entire system of beliefs that had been professed and lived until then. It entailed a complete transformation of spiritual life and moral conduct. The reality, however, was that for these people, it was difficult to comprehend how their entire traditional belief system, transmitted from generation to generation and deeply embedded in the social framework to which they belonged, could be regarded as so harmful (Mendes 2023, 74-75).

The Church's concerns in sixth-century Galicia, as evidenced in Martin of Braga's *De correctione rusticorum*, reveal a complex religious landscape where Christian practices struggled to fully supersede pre-existing popular culture (Jove 1981, 1-80; Ferreiro 1983, 372-395). Paragraph 16 of the work reflects this tension, demonstrating how the Church had to contend daily with a nominally Christianized

population that continued to perpetuate pagan rituals and beliefs. Martin's pastoral approach is particularly noteworthy: rather than merely condemning these practices, he engages in systematic education, endeavoring to explain why these behaviors were incompatible with Christian faith.

His concern manifests primarily in his attempts to replace ancient rituals with equivalent Christian practices, as exemplified by his promotion of prayers to supplant traditional magical formulas. This approach reflects a broader ecclesiastical strategy of Christianization which, while doctrinally firm, implicitly acknowledged how deeply embedded these behaviors were in Galician society. The particular attention devoted to daily practices, from candle lighting to agricultural rituals, suggests that the Church recognized the necessity of intervening not only in theological matters but also, and perhaps more crucially, in the most concrete and ordinary aspects of popular religiosity. This pastoral strategy reveals a sophisticated understanding of the challenges involved in religious transformation, acknowledging that effective conversion required addressing both spiritual beliefs and everyday practices that constituted the fabric of rural religious life.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Martin of Braga's *De correctione rusticorum* stands as a crucial historical document that illuminates the complex religious landscape of sixth-century Hispania, particularly in the region of Gallaecia. Written between 572 and 574 AD, this pastoral work provides invaluable insights into the persistence of pagan practices within nominally Christian communities and the Church's ongoing struggles to establish orthodox Christian worship in rural areas. The text itself is structured as both an epistle and a sermon, responding to a request from Polemius, Bishop of Astorga, who sought guidance on correcting the religious beliefs and practices of the rural population. Martin's approach

is methodical, beginning with fundamental Christian teachings about creation and moving through to specific criticisms of contemporary pagan practices. His detailed descriptions of these practices reveal a society where Christian and pagan traditions existed in an uneasy synthesis, with rural populations particularly maintaining strong connections to pre-Christian customs. The historical and geographical context of *De correctione rusticorum* is particularly significant. The work emerged during a period of profound transformation in the Iberian Peninsula, specifically in the kingdom of the Suevi in northwestern Hispania. This region had experienced significant political and religious upheaval, with the decline of Roman authority and the establishment of Germanic rule. The Suevi themselves had only recently converted from Arianism to orthodox Christianity, adding another layer of religious complexity to an already diverse spiritual landscape. The text thus reflects not only the challenge of Christianizing rural populations but also the broader process of establishing religious orthodoxy in a post-Roman frontier region. Martin's detailed cataloging of pagan practices is particularly valuable for understanding the religious life of sixth-century Gallaecia. He describes various customs such as lighting candles near stones, trees, and water sources, observing the Kalends, practicing divination, and maintaining belief in nature spirits. His work reveals that these practices were not merely vestiges of paganism but remained actively integrated into daily life, even among those who had been baptized as Christians. Particularly noteworthy is his criticism of the naming of weekdays after pagan deities and the observance of the January Kalends as the start of the year, indicating how deeply pre-Christian temporal concepts remained embedded in society. The motivations behind Martin's composition of *De correctione rusticorum* appear to have been multifaceted. Primary among these was his pastoral concern for maintaining Christian orthodoxy in his

diocese. As Bishop of Braga and a key figure in the conversion of the Suevi, Martin would have been acutely aware of the challenges posed by persistent pagan practices to the establishment of authentic Christian worship. His specific attention to rural populations suggests a recognition that countryside areas were particularly resistant to complete Christianization, perhaps due to their relative isolation from urban centers of Christian authority and their stronger connection to traditional agricultural and seasonal rituals.

Moreover, Martin's writing appears motivated by a genuine concern about the spiritual welfare of his flock. His repeated emphasis on the demonic nature of pagan practices reflects not merely rhetorical strategy but a sincere belief in the spiritual danger posed by these customs. This concern is evidenced in his careful explanation of why these practices are incompatible with Christian faith and his provision of alternative Christian practices. The work's pedagogical approach, using what Martin terms "rustic discourse" to reach his intended audience, reveals another key motivation: the desire to effectively communicate complex theological concepts to a rural population with limited formal education. This strategic choice of accessible language and engaging narratives demonstrates Martin's understanding that successful Christianization required not just condemnation of pagan practices but also clear explanation of Christian alternatives. The enduring significance of *De correctione rusticorum* lies not only in its historical documentation of pagan practices but also in what it reveals about the process of Christianization itself. The text demonstrates that this process was not a simple matter of replacement between established local traditions and new religious orthodoxy. Martin's work thus provides crucial evidence for understanding how the Church approached the challenge of religious transformation in the post-Roman world, making it an invaluable source for studying both the religious history

of early medieval Iberia and the broader process of European Christianization.

The theological framework of Martin of Braga's *De correctione rusticorum* demonstrates significant connections with earlier ecclesiastical councils, particularly the First Council of Braga and the Council of Elvira. The work's theological concerns can be analyzed through several key aspects that reflect broader ecclesiastical preoccupations of the period. First and foremost, Martin's emphasis on proper baptismal commitment emerges as a central theological theme that echoes earlier conciliar decisions. His criticism of Christians who maintain pagan practices after baptism reflects a longstanding ecclesiastical concern first formally addressed at the Council of Elvira. This council had specifically dealt with the issue of baptized Christians participating in pagan sacrificial rituals, establishing clear penalties for such behavior. Martin's work extends this concern, particularly evident in paragraph 16 where he admonishes those who "having renounced the devil and his angels... return again to the worship of the devil". This theological position reflects a sophisticated understanding of baptism not merely as a ritual but as a fundamental covenant that demands complete rejection of pagan practices.

A second significant theological aspect concerns the proper observance of the Lord's Day (Sunday), which Martin addresses extensively. The text's treatment of demonology also reveals important theological developments. Martin's characterization of pagan deities as demons rather than mere fictional entities shows continuity with earlier patristic writings and conciliar decisions. This theological interpretation, which appears throughout *De correctione rusticorum* but particularly in paragraphs 7 and 8, provided a framework for understanding the spiritual danger of pagan practices while simultaneously acknowledging their real spiritual power - albeit as demonic rather than divine manifestations. A particularly noteworthy theological element concerns Martin's treatment of nature worship.

His criticism of those who worship natural elements (stones, trees, springs) rather than their Creator reflects a sophisticated theological argument that had been developed through various church councils.

The work's treatment of popular divination and augury practices also demonstrates important theological connections to earlier church councils. The First Council of Braga had specifically addressed these issues, and Martin's work provides pastoral application of these conciliar decisions. His theological argument against such practices centers not just on their pagan origins but on their fundamental incompatibility with Christian trust in divine providence. Furthermore, Martin's emphasis on correct doctrinal understanding, evidenced in his explanation of creation and salvation history, reflects broader ecclesiastical concerns about proper catechesis. His systematic presentation of Christian doctrine, while simplified for his rural audience, maintains theological precision in addressing key points of faith. Perhaps most significantly, *De correctione rusticorum* reflects the theological concern with what modern scholars might term "religious syncretism". Martin's work demonstrates how church authorities were grappling with the complex reality of Christian communities that maintained pre-Christian practices. His theological response, while firmly grounded in orthodox Christianity, shows awareness of the need to provide practical alternatives to deeply ingrained religious practices.

The work's connection to the Second Council of Braga, which Martin himself presided over, is particularly evident in its treatment of church governance and religious orthodoxy. The council's focus on proper religious practice and church organization finds practical application in *De correctione rusticorum*, suggesting that Martin saw this pastoral work as an implementation of broader ecclesiastical reforms. This theological analysis reveals that *De correctione rusticorum* was not merely a pastoral response to local conditions

but rather represented a sophisticated application of broader ecclesiastical principles developed through various church councils. Martin's work demonstrates how sixth-century church authorities were working to translate conciliar decisions into practical pastoral guidance while maintaining theological orthodoxy. In the words of Rodrigues da Silva and Agosthino Chavier:

In this context, Martin of Braga is a relevant figure due to his literary production, presenting himself as a representative of ecclesiastical interests. The orthodoxy he defended is therefore seen as a classificatory system that, far from being hermetically or pre-established enclosed within itself, presents itself as a set of guidelines that is constantly in the process of (re) formulation. Defended as a block of true and indisputable norms, orthodoxy evidences in its formulation the power relations of a society permeated by Christian symbols (da Silva, Xavier 2013, 125-126).

Concern for local communities was a fairly common sentiment among those tasked with growing the Christian community. Important figures such as St. Martin of Braga and Caesarius of Arles conceived their works with this intent as well. This approach reflects the dual nature of early Christian leadership, which balanced local pastoral care with broader ecclesiastical ambitions. Their objective was also that many of their works would be used as models beyond their own dioceses. Their writings served not only immediate pedagogical purposes within their communities but also established theological and practical frameworks that could be adapted across diverse cultural contexts. Such transmission of ideas contributed significantly to the standardization of Christian practice throughout late antiquity.

In this context, Medieval homilies represent an invaluable resource for understanding the

medieval perspective particularly from the Church's viewpoint. These sermons provide insights that extend beyond the personal opinions of their authors and preachers. They effectively capture the core values, goals, and issues of their time period. Homilies are especially significant research materials when available in substantial quantities because they typically address diverse audiences across gender, age, and social position. This broad appeal is exemplified in the extensive collection attributed to Bishop Caesarius of Arles, who crafted messages for both ordinary people and religious officials of various ranks, promoting reading to enhance literacy and spiritual knowledge. The surviving Caesarian sermon collection from the early medieval period constitutes a remarkably complete set of historical documents, especially when compared to the limited availability of similar sources from contemporary Visigothic Spain, where such texts existed but have largely been lost to time (Ferreiro 1996, 5-6). Some important context about the Caesarian homilies should be noted. The bishop of Arles did not compose all these sermons independently. In many instances, he utilized works from other religious figures, most notably St. Augustine, adapting them with his own introductory or concluding passages. His sermons, whether original compositions or modifications, fall into several categories, but many were designed as templates for use beyond his immediate diocese. Others addressed specific local concerns, though even these could serve as models for other preachers. Caesarius clearly intended widespread distribution of his homilies. According to *Vita Caesarii episcopi* (PL 67. 1021), he directed that his sermons be copied and shared throughout Francia, Germania, Italia and Hispania. Furthermore, in his second sermon, he explicitly encourages frequent reading of his works, careful instruction based on them, and their continued transmission through further reading and copying.

The concern to establish orthodoxy was a widespread sentiment, as is also shown by the Sermons of Caesarius of Arles²⁶, who often reprimanded his audience for their weak faith (Goncalves Diniz 2014, 393-400). Among the surviving body of sermons by Bishop Caesarius, which totals over 230 works, a small subset specifically addresses what he identified as non-Christian religious practices. Approximately 13 sermons focus entirely on these practices, while additional sermons mention them briefly. In his texts, the bishop employs various terms to describe these activities, characterizing them as dangerous superstitions, diabolical influences, regrettable behaviors, and sacrilegious pagan customs. The religious landscape of Arles, as depicted through Bishop Caesarius's writings, reveals a complex interplay between official Christianity and established local practices²⁷. His admonitions suggest that the Christian faith in his diocese exhibited distinctive characteristics, incorporating elements from pre-existing religious and cultural traditions. This religious configuration deviated from what ecclesiastical authorities considered orthodox practice. The socioeconomic context

26 See: Ferreiro 1987, 13-26; De Nie 1995, 170-19;. In these sermons, Caesarius addresses multiple topics, resulting in the repetition of admonishments across different sermons. The predominant concern relates to consultations with magicians and fortune-tellers, as well as the use of amulets and healing potions, which appears in 7 sermons (13, 14, 50, 51, 52, 54, and 184). Five sermons (13, 14, 19, 53, and 54) mention temple attendance, sacred trees and fountains, and idolatry. An equal number of sermons (13, 19, 52, 54, and 193) discuss the observance of specific weekdays, particularly Thursday. The practice of sacrifices and feasts appears in three sermons (13, 19, and 54), while references to abortion remedies occur in two (19 and 52). Superstitions regarding lunar eclipses are addressed in two sermons (13 and 52), and the same number covers the celebration of the January Calends (192 and 193). Single sermon references include: bathing in fountains during St. John's day celebrations (sermon 33), invoking saints and angels during toasts (sermon 43), dancing in front of churches (sermon 13), and observing bird flight for divination purposes (sermon 54).

27 General works outlining the social, political, and cultural context of the region include: Klingshirn (2004, 33-110); Buchberger (2017, 166-170).

provides crucial insight into this religious phenomenon. Agricultural laborers, operating at subsistence levels under quasi-servile conditions, maintained traditional practices alongside their Christian observances. These established customs served for addressing both environmental uncertainties and life's celebrations. This traditional cultural framework, deeply embedded in community life, presented a significant challenge to Caesarius's evangelization efforts. His attempts to establish orthodox Christian practice encountered resistance from these deeply rooted customs. The resulting religious environment in Arles exemplified a broader pattern of religious synthesis occurring throughout regions experiencing similar processes of Christianization, though manifesting with regional variations.

An examination of selected sermons by Caesarius of Arles reveals episcopal concerns regarding Christian communities in late antiquity and demonstrates significant thematic parallels with the pastoral writings of Martin of Braga. In Sermon 13 it is written:

*Ita in ipso implebitur quod legimus: "Est aliquis inter vos infirmus? Accedat presbyteri, et orent super eum, ungentes eum oleo. Et oratio fidei salvabit infirmum, et suscitabit eum Dominus, et si in peccatis sit, remittentur ei." Videte, fratres, quod homo festinet ad ecclesiam in infirmitate, et merebitur accipere tam corporalem sanitatem quam remissionem peccatorum suorum. Quoniam in ecclesia duplex bonum inveniri potest, cur miseri homines per incantatores, fontes, arbores, phylacteria diabolica, magos, vates, aut oracula, plura mala sibi inferunt?*²⁸

In this passage of the sermon, Caesarius of Arles refers to the sick, also citing James

5:14-15. He urges the faithful to turn to the Church in times of illness, emphasizing that seeking help from soothsayers, fountains, trees, or oracles only attire harm. Although the context of this sermon differs from that of *De correctione rusticorum*, it still includes references to pagan elements such as diviners, sorcerers, seers, oracles, trees, and fountains. However, an even stronger emphasis on these pagan practices can be found in Sermon 14:

Ideo vos etiam hortamur, ut omnia fana, quae inveneritis, destruat. Nolite vota facere arboribus aut fontibus orare. Incantatores tamquam diabolicum venenum devitate. Nolite in collo vestro aut in familiis vestris phylacteria diabolica, litteras magicas, succina vel herbas suspendere. Quicumque hoc fecerit, sacrilegium se commisisse non dubitet. Si quis scit prope domum suam aras aut templum aut arbores profanas esse, ubi vota religiosa redduntur, summo studio ea destruere per evulsionem aut sectionem debet. Quod si neglexerit, in die iudicii rationem reddet pro animabus omnium, quotquot illuc venerint et scelera nefanda perpetraverint. Attendite, fratres carissimi, quod coram Deo et angelis eius praedicamus: Nolite contemnere praeconem vestrum, si vultis fugere Iudicem vestrum. Consilium quod possumus vobis damus, et ipse Dominus potens dignetur cordibus vestris infundere, qui cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto vivit et regnat in saecula saeculorum. Amen. (Sermon 14. 4)

In this sermon, Caesarius strongly condemns the worship of trees, fountains, and ancient temples, which were common elements of pre-Christian religious practices in Gaul. His denunciation goes beyond a mere rejection of these customs; he explicitly calls for their destruction. This aligns with the Church's policies at the time, which promoted the elimination of pagan symbols to strengthen the dominance of Christianity.

28 Sermon 13.3, The Latin translation was made by the author, based on the published English version *The Fathers of the Church*. St. Caesarius 2004. Translated by Sister Mary Magdeleine Mueller, O.S.F., Eds. Ermigild Dressler, Vol.31. The Catholic University of America Press.

A key aspect of his message is the association of pagan practices with the devil. Caesarius does not simply dismiss them as harmless superstitions; rather, he defines them as acts of sacrilege that endanger the soul's salvation. The use of amulets (*phylacteries, magic letters, amber charms, herbs*), far from being a form of protection, is seen as a direct connection to evil. This perspective reflects the broader stance of the Church, which regarded magical practices as sources of alternative power and therefore a threat to the Christian order. Finally, the sermon strongly emphasizes both individual and communal responsibility: not only are those who engage in these rituals guilty, but so are those who allow them to continue. The final reference to be considered is Sermon 53:

Laetitia enim nobis est, carissimi, vos fideliter ad ecclesiam venientes videre, et pro hoc Deo gratias maximas agimus. Vere hoc convenit et proprium est Christianis, ut ut filii boni ad matrem ecclesiam cum maxima desiderio et vera pietate festinent. Sed, quamvis gaudeamus, carissimi, quod vos fideliter ad ecclesiam festinantes videre, tamen tristes et contristamur, quia scimus aliquos vestrum saepius ad veterem idolorum cultum transire, sicut pagani, qui Deum nec gratiam baptismi habent. Audivimus enim quosdam vestrum vota facere arboribus, orare fontibus, et diabolicam augurium exercere. (Sermon 53. 1)

The sermons of Caesarius of Arles strongly reflect the historical and religious context of late antique Gaul, a period marked by the spread of Christianity alongside the persistence of pagan beliefs and practices among rural populations. Caesarius of Arles and Martin of Braga were part of a tradition of missionary bishops who actively worked to convert the rural population, firmly opposing the remnants of paganism. Although they operated in different regions and cultural contexts, they shared a common concern for their communities.

According to scholars Antón Alvar Nuño and Clelia Martínez Maza, Martin of Braga's work *De correctione rusticorum* documents how rural inhabitants of seventh-century Galicia persisted in their worship of pre-Christian deities. Such evidence has led researchers to propose the concept of "an obstinately pagan rural West," where practitioners reportedly retreated to remote and rugged countryside areas to preserve their pre-Christian religious traditions (Alvar Nuño and Martínez Maza 2021, 335-336).

The diverse social, political, and religious context of the sixth century posed significant challenges to the widespread dissemination of Christianity across all regions of Spain. The growth of the Church in the Suevic Kingdom during the fifth and sixth centuries played a pivotal role in the Christianization of the region and in the subsequent rise of the Church's influence (Buide del Real 2012, 31-118). The Church solidified its structure and organization, addressing issues of discipline, morality, and internal divisions. These challenges were confronted through episcopal interventions, the convocation of councils, and consultations with ecclesiastical authorities beyond the region, particularly the bishops of Rome. The latter half of the sixth century marked a significant period of transformation, during which the Church of Gallaecia was reorganized into the Church of the Suevic Kingdom (Ubric 2015, 222). These changes are most evident in the appointment of bishops, the redrawing of diocesan boundaries, the establishment of new sees, and the strengthening of metropolitan authority. In the Suevic Kingdom, several religions, Catholicism, Priscillianism, Arianism, Greco-Roman paganism, and indigenous beliefs, existed alongside one another. While the Church hierarchy did not intervene in the religious practices of the Sueves or attempt to force their conversion, bishops held a different stance toward the Christian Hispano-Romans, who were expected to adhere to their authority and the principles of orthodoxy. Those who

failed to do so were labeled as heretics, excluded from both ecclesiastical and civil life, and subject to punishment. Among these, the so-called Priscillianists were particularly condemned, as they were seen by a stricter faction of the Church as a significant threat to unity. The involvement of Martin, a foreign churchman who became the metropolitan of Braga, was crucial in the reorganization of the Suevic Kingdom and its Church. Martin, with his charismatic leadership, identified and addressed the main issues facing the Church. He took steps to eliminate paganism and heterodoxy, providing the Church with clear guidelines that brought consistency to its doctrines, rites, and liturgy. Additionally, he founded a monastic community in Dume. Martin showed empathy toward those who held onto traditional superstitions and practices, attributing their errors to ignorance and the superficial introduction of Christianity. He believed that proper education was the best way to rid the rural population of paganism and superstition. To this end, he wrote a simple and compassionate homily, *De correctione rusticorum*, in which he clearly explained the core tenets of the Christian faith and the harmful origins and consequences of pagan practices and superstitions.

In this regard, to gain a broader understanding of the personality and conduct of bishops²⁹ in that period, it is necessary to cite the words of the scholar Ferreiro, which further help us to grasp the differences in their individual characteristics.

It is primarily on this homily alone that modern scholars, including myself, have argued a case for Martin's «reasoned» approach to deal with paganism. Similar moderate pacifist or reasonable attitudes are to be found in Caesarius of Aries, too, but as we shall see this was only one of several attitudes held by this particular bishop. Even though we have only a

single homily in Martin's case, there is room for a variety of attitudes to surface. Within the context of attitudes held by many of his contemporaries, Martin very likely would have not dissuaded the Suevic kings to use moderate repressive measures. Although pillaging of shrines would be heartily encouraged, for example, most of the missionaries resorted primarily to preaching. We have already demonstrated that secular rulers were expected to suppress unbelief in all of its forms. Martin undoubtedly would have concurred with them on this matter, yet at the same time he discouraged cruel physical punishment, especially death. Martin of Tours is an excellent example of one who heartily pillaged shrines, yet at once defended the heretic Priscillian from the machinations of Maximus. We should not equate pillaging of shrines with physical coercion of individuals; one could engage in the former without necessarily resorting to the latter (Ferreiro 1988, 233).

In conclusion, we can state that the concerns of bishops for their communities reflected the persistent presence of pagan cults in the region, rooted in a long-standing cultural and religious history shaped by the interaction between indigenous Celtic populations, Roman occupation, and the gradual spread of Christianity. Since the first millennium BC, the northwestern part of the Iberian Peninsula, particularly Galicia, Asturias, and Lusitania, was inhabited by populations of Celtic culture, whose religious systems revolved around nature worship, veneration of ancestors, and the use of magical-sacral rites associated with warfare and fertility. Roman influence did not entirely eradicate these practices but partially integrated them into its own pantheon, allowing them to survive in syncretic forms. With the decline of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity, these beliefs did not immediately disappear but continued to persist in rural areas, often transforming into

²⁹ For an important study on the influence of Bishops in Late Antiquity and the introduction of their cult, see: Ferreiro 2023, 27-64.

popular superstitions that the Church sought to eradicate. Martin of Braga, in his treatise *De correctione rusticorum*, provides direct testimony to the prevalence of these practices among Galician peasants in the sixth century, condemning the worship of sacred trees, springs, and stones, elements characteristic of Celtic religion, in which specific natural sites were believed to be the dwelling places of spirits and deities³⁰.

The literary works of Martin of Braga and Caesarius of Arles provide valuable insights into the religious landscape of Late Antiquity. While Christianity experienced significant expansion from the fourth century onward, their writings reveal a more nuanced reality: rather than a complete replacement of previous beliefs, there was an extended period of religious coexistence. Their testimonies demonstrate that despite Christianity's increasing institutional dominance, traditional religious practices maintained a persistent presence in daily life. This evidence challenges simplistic narratives of rapid Christianization, suggesting instead a complex process of religious transformation where older beliefs and practices continued to influence local communities long after Christianity's formal establishment.

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³⁰ Key bibliography for Celtic religion includes: Olivares Pedreño 2002; Bergholm and Ritari 2009; Ritari and Bergholm 2015.

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