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Stephen Mitchell

# A History of the Later Roman Empire

AD 284–641

Second Edition

WILEY Blackwell

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## **Praise for *A History of the Later Roman Empire, AD 284-641, Second Edition***

“A provocative and highly readable synthesis of the most important period of transition and transformation in the history of the western world.” *Ralph W. Mathisen, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

“Stephen Mitchell provides an exceptionally clear and detailed account both of the march of events and of the structures of the Empire. His discussions of major problems are both balanced and forceful, not shrinking from indicating what his preferred solutions are. The book is a model exposition of a complex subject.” *Fergus Millar, Oxford*

“Mitchell deploys his comprehensive knowledge of the sources to construct a veritable fortress of erudition. This updated second edition stands up to all contenders as the most solid introduction to the later Roman Empire.” *Noel Lenski, University of Colorado at Boulder*

“S. Mitchell's second edition provides a lucid and informed reading of the period. The inclusion of recent advances in archaeology is most necessary for understanding the changes that took place over these centuries, and the new final chapter is a welcome overview of the perennial debate over the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. It serves as a wonderful introduction to the complexities of this period.” *Michele Renee Salzman, University of California, Riverside*

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Cover image: Detail from the Barberini Diptych, ivory tablet with four relief  
decorated plaques, Byzantine, first half of 6th century. De Agostini Picture  
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For Lawrence, Daniel, and Samuel Mitchell, and Polat  
Aydal, students of science, law, history, and business,  
shapers of an uncertain future

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# Abbreviations

## Reference Works and Journals

<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>Ant. Tard.</i>	<i>Antiquité Tardive</i>
<i>Byz. Zeitschr.</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CAH</i>	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>PBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
<i>PBSR</i>	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>
<i>PCPS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society</i>
<i>REA</i>	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

**Ancient Authors, Works, and Documents (Details of Translations Can Be Found in the Bibliography)**

*HE = Historia Ecclesiastica (Ecclesiastical History)*

<i>AÉ</i>	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i> , published in <i>Revue Archéologique</i> and separately. 1888-
<i>Anon. Val.</i>	<i>Anonymus Valesianus</i>
<i>Anth. Pal.</i>	<i>Anthologia Palatina</i>
<i>Aur. Victor, Caes.</i>	<i>Aurelius Victor, de Caesaribus (On the Emperors)</i>
<i>Cassiodorus, Var.</i>	<i>Cassiodorus, Variarum</i>
<i>Chron. Gall.</i>	<i>Chronica Gallica (Chronicles of Gaul)</i>
<i>Chron. Min.</i>	<i>Chronica Minora (Monumenta Germanicae Historiae)</i>
<i>Chron. Pasch.</i>	<i>Chronicon Paschale (Easter Chronicle)</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> . 1863-
<i>CJust.</i>	<i>Codex Iustinianus (Code of Justinian)</i>
<i>Claudian, de bello Gothico</i>	<i>On the Gothic War</i>
<i>Claudian, In Eutrop.</i>	<i>Claudian, In Eutropium (Against Eutropius)</i>
<i>Constantine Porphyrogennitos, De Caer.</i>	<i>Constantine Porphyrogennitos, De Caerimoniis (On Ceremonies)</i>
<i>CTh.</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus (Code of Theodosius II)</i>
<i>De Caer.</i>	<i>Constantine Porphyrogennitos, De Caerimoniis (On Ceremonies)</i>
<i>Epiphanius, Pan.</i>	<i>Epiphanius, Panarion (Medicine Chest Against Heresies)</i>

Eusebius, <i>VC</i>	Eusebius, <i>Vita Constantini (Life of Constantine)</i>
Eutropius, <i>Brev.</i>	Eutropius, <i>Breviarium (Abbreviated History of Rome)</i>
Festus, <i>Brev.</i>	Festus, <i>Breviarium (Abbreviated History of Rome)</i>
<i>FHG</i>	C. Müller. <i>Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum</i> . 1841-70
Greg. Tur., <i>Hist.</i>	Gregory of Tours, <i>Historiae (History of the Franks)</i>
Hieron. <i>Chron.</i>	Hieronymus (Jerome), <i>Chronica</i>
<i>ILS</i>	H. Dessau. <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i> . Berlin. 1892-1916
John Lydus, <i>de mag.</i>	John Lydus, <i>de magistratibus (On Magistrates)</i>
Jordanes, <i>Get.</i>	Jordanes, <i>Getica (Getic [Gothic] History)</i>
Julian, <i>Caes.</i>	Julian, <i>Caesares (The Emperors)</i>
Justinian, <i>Nov.</i>	Justinian, <i>Novellae (New Laws)</i>
Lactantius, <i>DMP</i>	<i>de mortibus persecutorum (On the Deaths of the Persecutors)</i>
Libanius, <i>Or.</i>	Libanius, <i>Oratio</i>
MAMA	Monumenta Asia Minoris Antiqua
Marcellinus, <i>Chron.</i>	Marcellinus, <i>Chronicle</i>
Optatus, <i>app.</i>	Optatus, <i>Against the Donatists, appendix of documentary evidence</i>
<i>Pan. Lat.</i>	<i>Panegyrici Latini (Latin Panegyrics)</i>
Photius, <i>Bibl. cod.</i>	Photius, <i>Bibliothèque codicum (Library of Manuscript Books)</i>
Procopius, <i>Bell.</i>	Procopius, <i>Bella Gothica, Persica,</i>



<i>Goth.</i>	<i>Vandalica</i>
( <i>Pers., Vand.</i> )	( <i>Gothic [Persian, Vandal] Wars</i> )
Ps-Joshua, <i>Chron.</i>	Pseudo-Joshua, <i>Chronicle</i> (The <i>Chronicle</i> of Ps-Joshua the Stylite)
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
SHA [Carus]	Scriptores Historiae Augustae ( <i>Vita Cari [Life of Carus]</i> )
Sidonius, <i>Carm.</i>	Sidonius Apollinarius, <i>Carmina</i> (poems)
Sulpicius Severus, <i>Martin</i>	Sulpicius Severus, <i>Life of Martin</i>
Symmachus <i>Rel.</i>	Symmachus, <i>Relationes</i>
Theophanes, <i>Chron.</i>	Theophanes, <i>Chronographia</i>

## Preface to the First Edition

There have been many historical accounts of the later Roman Empire. Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* has stimulated rather than deterred a host of followers, although none has matched the scale and eloquence of that masterpiece. My attempt to find a way through the immense complexities and sheer bulk of the evidence has been guided by four principles. Firstly, my aim throughout has been to focus on the evolution of the Roman Empire from the late third to the early seventh centuries. This book is therefore written, for the most part, from a top-down perspective. In this respect it is much closer to the tradition of scholarship that extends from Gibbon to A. H. M. Jones than to the revolutionary approach to the study of late antiquity, which has been created, with captivating effect, by Peter Brown and his many followers, especially since the publication of Jones' *The Later Roman Empire* in 1964. However, this work on late antiquity has changed our perceptions of the later Roman Empire ineradicably, and to a large extent supplanted the paradigm of decline and fall, established by Gibbon, that had set a conscious or unconscious framework of interpretation for historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries studying this period. Approaching the period from a background of study in the Hellenistic world and the early Roman Empire, I have attempted, as my second principle, to explain historical developments as transformations in response to circumstances, rather than to interpret them for signs of decadence and collapse.

The third of my primary aims in writing this book has been to create as precise a picture as I could of major events and historical processes. This has meant including a good deal