Stephen Mitchell

A History of the Later Roman Empire

AD 284–641

Second Edition

WILEY Blackwell

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Second Edition

Stephen Mitchell

WILEY Blackwell

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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Diagrams

Abbreviations

REFERENCE WORKS AND JOURNALS

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

ANCIENT AUTHORS, WORKS, AND DOCUMENTS
(DETAILS OF TRANSLATIONS CAN BE FOUND IN THE BIBLIOGRAPHY)

HE = Historia Ecclesiastica (Ecclesiastical History)

AÉ	*L'Année épigraphique*, published in *Revue Archéologique* and separately. 1888–

Anon. Val.	*Anonymus Valesianus*
Anth. Pal.	*Anthologia Palatina*
Aur. Victor, *Caes.*	Aurelius Victor, *de Caesaribus* (*On the Emperors*)
Cassiodorus, *Var.*	Cassiodorus, *Variae*
Chron. Gall.	*Chronica Gallica* (*Chronicles of Gaul*)
Chron. Min.	*Chronica Minora* (*Monumenta Germanicae Historiae*)
Chron. Pasch.	*Chronicon Paschale* (*Easter Chronicle*)
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. 1863–
CJust.	*Codex Iustinianus* (*Code of Justinian*)
Claudian, *de bello Gothico*	*On the Gothic War*
Claudian, *In Eutrop.*	Claudian, *In Eutropium* (*Against Eutropius*)
Constantine Porphyrogennitos, *De Caer.*	Constantine Porphyrogennitos, *De Caerimoniis* (*On Ceremonies*)
CTh.	*Codex Theodosianus* (*Code of Theodosius II*)
De Caer.	Constantine Porphyrogennitos, *De Caerimoniis* (*On Ceremonies*)
Epiphanius, *Pan.*	Epiphanius, *Panarion* (*Medicine Chest Against Heresies*)
Eusebius, *VC*	Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* (*Life of Constantine*)
Eutropius, *Brev.*	Eutropius, *Breviarium* (*Abbreviated History of Rome*)
Festus, *Brev.*	Festus, *Breviarium* (*Abbreviated History of Rome*)
FHG	C. Müller. *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*. 1841–70
Greg. Tur., *Hist.*	Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* (*History of the Franks*)
Hieron. *Chron.*	Hieronymus (Jerome), *Chronica*
ILS	H. Dessau. *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*. Berlin. 1892–1916
John Lydus, *de mag.*	John Lydus, *de magistratibus* (*On Magistrates*)
Jordanes, *Get.*	Jordanes, *Getica* (*Getic* [Gothic] *History*)
Julian, *Caes.*	Julian, *Caesares* (*The Emperors*)
Justinian, *Nov.*	Justinian, *Novellae* (*New Laws*)
Lactantius, *DMP*	*de mortibus persecutorum* (*On the Deaths of the Persecutors*)
Libanius, *Or.*	Libanius, *Oratio*
MAMA	Monumenta Asia Minoris Antiqua
Marcellinus, *Chron.*	Marcellinus, *Chronicle*
Optatus, app.	Optatus, *Against the Donatists, appendix of documentary evidence*
Pan. Lat.	*Panegyrici Latini* (*Latin Panegyrics*)

Photius, *Bibl. cod.*	Photius, *Bibliotheke codicum* (*Library of Manuscript Books*)
Procopius, *Bell. Goth.* (*Pers., Vand.*)	Procopius, *Bella Gothica, Persica, Vandalica* (*Gothic [Persian, Vandal] Wars*)
Ps-Joshua, *Chron.*	Pseudo-Joshua, *Chronicle* (The *Chronicle* of Ps-Joshua the Stylite)
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*
SHA [Carus]	Scriptores Historiae Augustae (*Vita Cari* [*Life of Carus*])
Sidonius, *Carm.*	Sidonius Apollinarius, *Carmina* (poems)
Sulpicius Severus, *Martin*	Sulpicius Severus, *Life of Martin*
Symmachus *Rel.*	Symmachus, *Relationes*
Theophanes, *Chron.*	Theophanes, *Chronographia*

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 of detailed information about dates and geography, to fix those events in time and place. There is a greater emphasis on a historical narrative than has been the case with most recent studies of the

period. I have been sparing in developing lengthy and complex explanations of cultural developments and have preferred, as a fourth principle, to let the primary evidence and contemporary witnesses speak for themselves. The numerous quotations from the primary source material, principally from contemporary observers, are included precisely for this purpose. My greatest debt in this respect has been to the small army of scholars, in particular in recent years, who have produced scholarly translations of the literature of late antiquity. These translations, particularly in the series of Liverpool Translated Texts and those from Oxford University Press, contain much of the finest scholarly work on the period, and have made it immeasurably easier to write works of history such as this one. At the same time as trying to do justice to the primary source material, I have aimed to absorb as much as possible of the secondary literature. Much superb work in ancient history has been written about the later Roman period. I have drawn on this bibliography for ideas and information with grateful enthusiasm, and incorporated as much as I could into my notes and bibliographies.

There are specific debts to acknowledge. I am grateful to the University of Exeter, which granted me a year of study leave in 2003/4 during which most of the book was written. Several of the illustrations have been provided by courtesy of the German Archaeological Institute's branches in Berlin, Istanbul, and Rome, with the particular assistance of Dr Richard Posamentir (Istanbul) and Dr Michael Wörrle, as well as my own colleague Professor Barbara Borg. Fergus Millar has encouraged me by advice and example, and channeled a stream of insights emerging from his own work on the Roman Empire of the fifth century. I have benefited from many observations from Wolf Liebeschuetz. Mark Whittow provided invaluable guidance on recent archaeological literature, and Geoffrey Greatrex was an inspirational tutor on Procopius. Al Bertrand commissioned the volume for the Blackwell series in May 2002. I should also like to thank the team that has turned my manuscript into a finished book: Angela Cohen and Louise Spencely (editorial), and Bill MacKeith (index). As I was working on the final chapter I came across a passage from the great Persian *Book of Kings* by the epic poet Ferdowsi, which seemed curiously apt to the relationship of editor and author.

> At Shushtar there was a river so wide that even the fish could not traverse it, and the Sassanian king said to the Roman emperor Valerian, "If you are an engineer, you will build me a bridge as continuous as a cable, such a one as will remain everlastingly in position as a pattern to the wise when we have turned to dust. The length of this bridge, reckoned in cubits, shall be one thousand; you may demand from my treasury all that is required. In this land and region apply all the science of the philosophers of Rum, and when the bridge is completed, you may depart to your home or else remain my guest as long as you live." In gallant fashion the emperor undertook the task and brought the bridge to completion in three years. (Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*, abbreviated translation by R. Levy, London 1967, 143)

Three years later, having completed a survey of the history of *Rum*, not a thousand cubits but 357 years long from the accession of Diocletian to the death of Heraclius, I shall be glad, like Valerian, to accept the offered respite from a task that has been as satisfying as it has been demanding.

Stephen Mitchell
Exeter, April 2006

Preface to the Second Edition

The main incentive to prepare an enlarged new edition of this book has come from the abundance of new research and major publications on later Roman and early medieval history since 2005 which have directly or indirectly thrown light on the history of the later Roman Empire. Much of this work, in particular that of Chris Wickham, has been crucially important for restating questions about the decline of the empire and the historical transition to a post-Roman world in Europe and in the Middle East. Within the limits available to me I have tried to address these questions, especially in the new chapter, 13, which deals with questions of tax and the state economy, Rome's declining military capability, and the evidence for demographic collapse after the mid-sixth century resulting from repeated outbreaks of bubonic plague. In other sections of the book I have substantially modified the sections dealing with Constantine (chapters 3 and 8) and the Roman state (chapter 5), and enlarged the treatments of Asia Minor and Egypt in chapter 10. Many smaller corrections and additions have been made elsewhere. The bibliography has been updated and the publishers have allowed me to add several new illustrations to the selection provided in the first edition.

Many sections of this book deal with the Near East in late antiquity. Most of the work on the revised second edition was done against a horrifying backdrop of anarchy, violence, and civil war unfolding across the entire Arab Middle East, from Libya and Egypt to Syria and Iraq. It is impossible to contemplate the conflicts that engulfed this region in late antiquity without also calling to mind the bloodshed, political turmoil, and human misery of the present day.

In preparing this edition I owe thanks to many people. Six anonymous users of the first edition provided reports to the publishers and made many valuable suggestions for improvements. Wiley's own team, steered by commissioning editor Haze Humbert, has been as efficient and supportive as the Blackwell group that brought the first edition into print: Ben Thatcher and his successor

Allison Kostka (project editors), Ashley McPhee (cover), and Morgan Dale (translation rights). Emma Brown (picture research and permissions) and Giles Flitney (project manager) have put in many hours of detailed work on the illustrations and the text respectively, and I hope that readers will be as grateful for their skill and commitment as I am. For obtaining new illustrations and permissions to use them I am personally grateful to Professor Kay Ehling and Nicolai Kästner (Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich), Dr Julian Baker (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), and Nihat Erdoğan (Mardin Museum) for their prompt and unbureaucratic assistance. My former student Professor Turhan Kaçar (Pamukkale University) has suggested many detailed corrections while preparing a Turkish translation of the revised version, and has been a constant source of support and encouragement.

Stephen Mitchell
Sheffield, October 2013

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An Introduction to Late Roman History

250	300	350	400	450	500	550	600	650

The evolution of the classical world in late antiquity
The later Roman Empire or late antiquity?
Change and development in late antiquity
Summary of this book

This book is concerned with the final three and a half centuries of classical antiquity. This lengthy period in the history of the ancient world was characterized by profound transformations in its character, and led to the emergence in the west of medieval European civilization, and, in the east, of a world dominated by a new religion, Islam.

The ancient classical world was formed from the interlocked civilizations of the Greeks and the Romans. Greek culture was based on a closely integrated community of city-states, which first took shape in the Aegean region around 1000 BC. These city-states, called *poleis*, evolved a style of self-government that was designed to preserve and promote their collective and community interests, which we still designate by the word politics. Over a period of some 1,500 years, these small- and medium-scale communities explored and developed amid myriad variations a pattern of social organization and collective action which

has inspired all western democracies today. Although Greek city-states were a highly localized form of political organization, each making its own political decisions, they were bound together by strong cultural and social ties. Except to a very limited degree, the homogeneity and unity of the Greeks was not based on ethnicity, however that be defined, but on a shared language and a common religious outlook. While individual city-states aspired to run their own business and restricted membership to their own citizens, there were virtually no limits to the spread of Greek culture, which proved overwhelmingly attractive to the other peoples of the Mediterranean and the Near East. The outcome was a process which we call Hellenism. Innumerable communities beyond the core region of the Aegean adopted the language, religious notions, and political ideas of the Greeks. They thus created the foundations of a common culture whose features could be identified among peoples extending from Spain to Afghanistan.

As this culture spread more widely, especially in the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, it adapted to other forms of political organization, in particular the creation of large territorial kingdoms and empires. The emergence of such large scale territorial political units had been an eastern development, exemplified by the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and, especially during the seventh to fourth centuries BC, which were a critical period for the history of the Greek city-states, of Persia. This model of the large hegemonic empire was fused with the Greek city-state system after the fall of the Persian Empire to Alexander the Great between 334 and 323 BC. During the following three hundred years most of the east Mediterranean and the Near East was controlled by the Graeco-Macedonian kingdoms that succeeded Alexander. Increasing numbers of the inhabitants of these regions began to use the Greek language, modified their religious beliefs and institutions in conformity with Greek models, and adopted the city-state as the basis for local community politics. The whole era is consequently known as the Hellenistic period.

From the third century BC the Romans exercised a fundamental and dramatic influence on the Hellenistic world. Rome itself was in origin a city-state, which broadly resembled the Greek political pattern. However, like the other city-states of central Italy it belonged to a different cultural tradition, with its own language and religious system. During the fourth and third centuries BC Rome succeeded in conquering much of Italy. The growth of Roman power led in the third century BC to a hegemonic clash with Carthage, the other major power of the western Mediterranean, which resulted in Roman dominion extending beyond the Italian peninsula to Spain, north Africa, and Sicily. After the defeat of Hannibal, the Carthaginian leader, Rome became embroiled in the affairs of the east Mediterranean. Two further centuries of expansion and conquest extended the limits of the Roman Empire to the river Euphrates during the first century AD.

Along this eastern frontier the Romans confronted Persian power in a new guise: the successive empires of the Parthians and Sassanians, based in Lower Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau, which had regained control over the

eastern parts of the Hellenistic world. Throughout the remaining centuries of antiquity the Roman and Persian empires faced each other across a line which extended from the east end of the Black Sea to the Persian Gulf. Territory on either side of this frontier was disputed between the opposed great powers, and regularly became a theater for war and campaigning.

The Romans thus incorporated within their empire almost the entire Hellenized world. They made no efforts to suppress or replace the system of city-states, or Greek culture as a whole, but rather incorporated both of these into their empire. The Romans were successful from the outset as conquerors, but more important than this was their ability to evolve a style of imperial rule which was sustained for almost a thousand years. One of the crucial strengths of the Roman Empire was its capacity to incorporate newcomers and outsiders. Thus, so far from being defined by ethnic or even broader cultural boundaries, the Roman state was continually replenished and revitalized by new blood drawn from its subject provinces. As early as 200 BC the granting of Roman citizenship to outsiders was a recognized source of political resilience, and the strategy of inclusivity was particularly critical when a succession of imperial dynasties, which began with Augustus, took over from the earlier republican system of government. Although the privileges of citizenship became less significant in the late empire, the habit of absorbing new human resources from marginal areas was ingrained, and was exemplified throughout late antiquity in the relationships between the Roman Empire and its barbarian neighbors. Moreover regional differentiation within and between provinces was overridden by the emergence of hierarchies throughout the empire that conformed to one another and to a Roman archetype. Provincial societies, both in the eastern and in the western empire, were highly stratified, with a massive and growing gulf between the rich and the poor. The richest property owners, who controlled most of the empire's resources, were those most closely aligned with the ideals and objectives of the Roman state.

Equally important for the longevity of the Roman Empire was an evolving mastery of the arts of hegemonic rule. In the initial phases of conquest there was a greater emphasis on outright military power. This was achieved not simply by the courage and commitment of citizen soldiers and by ambitious and talented military leaders, but by a much higher degree of military organization than was achieved by other ancient states. After the creation of the monarchic system by Augustus this experience and talent for organization was transferred to the mechanisms which were devised for ruling provinces, assessing and collecting taxation, and developing a universal legal system. The empire combined Greek political ideas, including theories about just rulership, with a practical attention, based on experience, to the crafts of administration.

The emperors also adapted techniques, which had been honed in the eastern monarchies, for projecting an ideal image of the rulers, which embodied their imperial might. These conveyed a fundamental message that the earthly empire was sustained as part of an overall structure of cosmic order, and that harmony and stability was guaranteed by a religious compact between the rulers of men

and the divine world. As the Roman polity developed into a worldwide empire increasing emphasis was placed on the state religion. It was an article of faith that Rome's success was due to the support of the gods. Roman emperors were seen as controlling all religious activity in their territories, and were regarded as custodians of a pact with the gods, the *pax deorum*. This central feature of the ideology of Roman rule was projected in all the available media of imperial propaganda: panegyric speeches, the designs of buildings and sculptures, commemorative inscriptions, the legends and designs used on Roman coinage.

These structural features are clearly identifiable in the history of late antiquity. Rome's empire and the opposing eastern empire of the Sassanians in Persia continued to be the dominant powers, and they set the framework within which large scale interstate activity took place. Rome continued to control her subjects by deploying organized military power, by employing the sophisticated machinery of government and administration, and above all by maintaining an ideology of empire that was rarely called into question. During late antiquity, when the Roman world, and especially the Roman state, became Christian, the substance and form of this ideology inevitably changed, but the significance of religion in maintaining the Roman Empire increased. The city-states of the earlier classical periods were still the most important settlements and communities of most of the ancient world, especially in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire, but they too underwent radical changes. They lost most of their political independence and the right to self-determination. But they remained for most people the most important fora of social, economic, and religious activity and retained their overall importance within the wider scheme of ancient civilization.

Historical circumstances brought about a major geo-political split between the western and eastern parts of the Roman Empire. Between the fourth and the seventh centuries, German-speaking tribes such as the Alemanni, Franks, Vandals, and Goths, the Huns, Alans, and Avars, who had moved west from central Asia, and the Slavs and Turks, broke through the old frontiers of the Rhine and Danube rivers. As the northern boundary of the empire collapsed, much of the Balkan region slipped from Roman control, and regular overland communications between east and west were seriously threatened. While the former eastern provinces of Asia Minor, the Near East, and Egypt remained relatively unscathed, the western empire proved unable to defend itself militarily from the barbarian newcomers. Accordingly, Rome devised new strategies of accommodation, by which the barbarian peoples were integrated into the western classical world. The major Germanic tribes divided up large parts of Roman territory into kingdoms, although they continued in most cases to acknowledge the sovereignty of the emperors. Roman military and political weakness in the west thus led to the abandonment of the former Roman provinces in Britain, Gaul, Spain, and the Danubian region. Even Italy itself was relinquished after the fall of the last western emperor in 476. But the idea of a unified empire, including these territories, was never abandoned, and during the sixth century the emperor Justinian made a partially successful

attempt to reunite eastern and western territories under a revived system of direct imperial rule.

The Roman state during this period was anything but weak and degenerate. The empire was resilient and highly effective. Emperors, whatever their individual qualities, generally had long reigns. Internal conflict and civil war between rival contenders for power extended through the third and fourth centuries, but the imperial system as such was not called into question. Remarkably, the same situation can be observed both in Sassanian Persia, Rome's eastern counterpart, and in the major Germanic kingdoms which were established in north Africa and western Europe. Their rulers too evolved ideological and administrative systems which provided long periods of stability.

The Later Roman Empire, Late Antiquity, and the Contemporary World

Historical approaches to the final centuries of classical antiquity have been very varied. The differences between them are implicit in the various names that have been applied to the period in modern scholarship: the later Roman Empire; the early Byzantine Age, late antiquity. These variations reveal divergent perspectives. Historians who have identified their subject as the later Roman Empire have generally focused their attention on the history of the Roman state and its institutions, usually from an empire-wide perspective. Studies of Byzantium or the Byzantine Age, whatever chronological limits are adopted, necessarily deal with the eastern part of the empire, which was ruled from Constantinople. Histories of the west naturally have a very different emphasis, on the rise of the Germanic kingdoms and the origins of medieval western Europe.

Late antiquity is at first sight a less slanted term, embracing the entire geographical range of the Roman and post-Roman world. However, in practice, the study of late antiquity has acquired much more specific connotations. It has mostly been concerned with the eastern Mediterranean region and the Near East, concentrating on social, cultural, and religious themes, at the expense of political or institutional history. Histories of late antiquity have looked beyond the Roman state or the Roman Empire and drawn attention to other underlying conditions which gave unity to the period. Inevitably they place most stress on religious history, above all on the change from the polymorphous paganism of the ancient classical world to the predominantly monotheistic systems of early medieval Europe and the Near East: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

This change of focus also tends to involve displacing the chronological boundaries of the period. While most studies of the later Roman Empire cover the period from c.300–600, limits which are explicable principally in terms of political developments, writing on late antiquity usually favors a longer span from around 200 to 800, sometimes referred to as the "long late antiquity." This period covered two great religious transformations and their social consequences: the conversion of the Roman world to Christianity and the emergence

and rapid spread of Islam in the Near East in the seventh and eighth centuries. The educated classes of the Greek-speaking East and their less numerous western counterparts also preserved large elements of the classical culture of the Greco-Roman world. Students of late antiquity are as much concerned with the survival of this culture as they are with the impact of Christian and Islamic monotheism.

There are, therefore, radically different ways of approaching the last centuries of antiquity. The greatest historian of the period, Gibbon, pre-empted the choice for most of his successors by writing his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. The famous title not only placed the Roman state in the foreground of his study, but also set a historical agenda which has dominated the thinking of most historians since his time. The challenge is to analyze and explain Rome's decline. The Roman Empire remains the central point of focus for most major studies of the period written since Gibbon. This is explicitly acknowledged in the titles of J. B. Bury, *The Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian (395–565)* (1923), E. Stein, *Geschichte des spätrömischen Reiches I (284–476)* (1928) and *Histoire du Bas-Empire II. De la disparition de l'empire de l'ocident à la mort de Justinien (476–565)* (1949), and A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602. A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (1964). These major studies, together with A. Demandt, *Die Spätantike. Römische Geschichte von Diocletian bis Justinian 284–565 n. Chr.* (1989), still today offer the most ambitious and comprehensive surveys of later Roman history.

The inspiration for the alternative approach can be attributed to the influence of a single scholar, Peter Brown. His short book, *The World of Late Antiquity*, which was loosely defined chronologically as covering the period from Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad, effectively tore up the late Roman agenda and redefined the period as an object of study. Brown's own large output, and that of a generation of scholars inspired by him, has explored areas and aspects of the history of late antiquity which were hardly noticed in the mainstream tradition of later Roman history. From the prodigious abundance of early Christian literature Brown and his followers have teased out and expounded an extraordinarily variegated picture of society and culture in all its regional diversity. Underlying this project is a pervading concern to explore the effects of religious change on individual and collective mentalities.[1]

The impact of this new approach to late antiquity has been enormous but uneven. Without question it has brought new impetus and vitality to the study of the period, especially in the English-speaking world. It has shifted attention away from the traditional objects of historical attention – emperors, generals, empires, states and armies – to religious figures, above all Christian writers, to communities united by faith, and to the role of common men and women living in uncommon or remarkable times. It is, of course, far harder to elicit generalized patterns of meaning from studies of this sort. Individual episodes and individual lives stand out from the crowded texture of events, sometimes with dazzling immediacy and vividness, but it is not easy to locate them within

a larger context, and harder still to transform these contexts into an accurate representation of a social and cultural *zeitgeist*. Classical and medieval historians alike have been captivated by these studies, but not always convinced by them.[2]

No one studying late antiquity today can fail to be influenced by the work of Peter Brown and his school, and much contemporary scholarship on the period, at least by English-speaking historians, tends to be eclectic. Thus the *Cambridge Ancient History* volumes XIII and XIV, which between them cover the period from 337 to c.600, combine a core of narrative history, emphasizing political, military, and broad institutional themes, with discussions of family and social life, religious phenomena, and approaches to the *mentalité* of the period. Brown himself has contributed important sections to both volumes. The titles of Averil Cameron's two books written in the early 1990s illustrate the same dichotomy of approach. *The Later Roman Empire AD 284– 430* (1993) is a largely traditional history of the late Roman state, while *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity* (1993, extensively revised second edition 2011), written for another series, abandons the chronological framework and detailed discussion of the institutions of the empire, in favor of a looser thematic survey, with a greater emphasis on social, economic, and religious issues. David Potter's detailed and challenging survey of Roman history from 180 to 395, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, is an ambitious attempt to represent many facets of social, intellectual, and religious history within the grand sweep of political events.

The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen significant new developments and approaches with regard to the later Roman period, especially relating to the transition to the early middle ages. The most important contributions have come not from classical historians but from medievalists. Chris Wickham's magnum opus, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (2005), is the most important landmark in the study of this period since A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*. This is an exhaustive "bottom-up" survey and analysis of changing social and economic conditions across the entire area occupied by the Roman Empire, with the exception of the Balkan regions, but including Britain and southern Scandinavia. Wickham's emphasis, in the Marxist tradition, is on the control, ownership, and exploitation of the land, on relations between peasants and aristocrats, and on modes of production, rents, and taxation. He argues that one of the key distinctions between the post-Roman polities and states and the unified empire that preceded them, was the inability of any of the powers after Rome to levy universal forms of taxation from their subjects, and the need for landowners, and political power-holders, to rely on land rents to sustain their political and military and institutions. A process of evolution, including long periods when the peasantry enjoyed relative autonomy from aristocratic control, led in due course to various forms of feudalism, in which power depended not on the imposition of centralized taxation, but on services and rents delivered to powerful landowners. Wickham has also written another large-scale history of the period, *The Inheritance of Rome*.

A history of Europe from 400 to 1000 (2009). This too ranges beyond the boundaries of modern Europe and includes a major section on the empires of the East from 550 to 1000, integrating the socio-economic analysis that underpins *The Framing of the Early Middle Ages* into a cultural and political history which culminates in the contrast between Carolingian Europe and the Islamic world of the Abbasids. Both books emphasize the economic relationships relating to land tenure which transcended the division of the Roman Empire between East and West, and suggest that similar transformational patterns in social and economic conditions can be observed across the entire region, albeit at different periods. This approach, relying heavily on archaeology and the evidence of early medieval charters, tends to play down, although it certainly does not overlook, the impact of warfare on post-Roman society, in marked contrast to other recent approaches to the late Roman West, which have emphasized the devastation, dislocation, and economic collapse caused by the barbarian invasions of former Roman territory.[3] Another important synthesis by Peter Sarris, *Empires of Faith. The fall of Rome to the rise of Islam, 500–700* (2011), has the same geographical scope but an earlier chronological terminus than Wickham, placing more emphasis on political and religious factors than Wickham's materialist analysis.

New attention has also been given to the question of economic relationships between the Near East and the western Mediterranean environment, the subject of Henri Pirenne's classic study, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (1937). Pirenne's hypothesis, that up to c.700 East and West were tied together by economic links based on long-distance trade, until these were broken by the early Arab conquests, and that links were not resumed again until the eleventh century, has been questioned and revised in the light of archaeological evidence, as well as on the basis of a more rigorous appraisal of the structures of the ancient and medieval economy, in which local and regional production not the long-distance transport of goods was paramount.[4] Indeed the approach developed in P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea* (2000) seeks to establish that the Mediterranean should not be approached as a historical unity, but as an interlocking system of sub-regions, strongly emphasizing the significance of local environments and shorter links at the expense of all-encompassing interpretations of the region's historical geography and the social systems that it generated. Meanwhile a new standard work evaluates the evidence for maritime connections across the Mediterranean during later antiquity, M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and commerce AD 300–900* (2001).

These important studies of the transition from the late Roman to the post-Roman period in Europe and the Near East have made it desirable to add a new chapter to the second edition of this book surveying the overall pattern of historical evolution from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages (Chapter 13). However, this book conforms to the older pattern of late Roman history. There are several reasons for this. One is quite simply that it is easier to organize the