Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate

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Edited by

Rita Lizzi Testa

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INTRODUCTION

RITA LIZZI TESTA*

1. Why Late Antiquity at the 22nd *ICHS* (Jinan, 23-29 August 2015)

When in 2011 I responded to the call for papers of the *Comité International des Sciences Historiques* (International Committee of Historical Sciences), which was starting to organize its 22nd International Congress in Jinan (China), I decided to offer a topic on Late Antiquity for three reasons in particular:

- As early as the 1st International Congress in Comparative History held in Paris in 1900,[1] even before the *Comité* was founded in 1926,[2] the *CISH* (*ICHS*) congresses have always aimed to give an idea of the most interesting issues in international research. This made it natural to think of Late Antiquity, as the last centuries of the Roman Empire have been one of the most significant areas of study in the second half of the twentieth century: the following *excursus* on the key moments in its development, which I have decided to offer in my Introduction, seems to me to show this. Furthermore study of this period continues to arouse intense interest

* Translated from the Italian by Richard Bates with the financial support of the Dipartimento di Lettere – Lingue, Letterature e civiltà antiche e moderne dell'Università degli Studi di Perugia.

[1] The history of the Congresses of the *CISH* (*ICHS*) is told in the work by Erdmann 1987, translated into English, updated and published by Kocka, Mommsen and Blänsdorf 2005.

[2] The *Comité International des Sciences Historiques* (*CISH*), or *International Committee of Historical Sciences (ICHS)*, was founded on 15 May 1926 in the *Palais de l'Athénée* of Geneva, with the institutional aim of coordinating international cooperation between historians of different countries, and organizing international conferences in historical sciences, which still take place every five years. The idea of creating a permanent committee dates from the 5th Congress, programmed for St Petersburg in 1918 but cancelled due to the war, and finally organized in Brussels in 1923: http://www.isime.it/public/archivio/materiali-pdf/Inventario_CISH.pdf

in the third millennium too. Apart from anything else, this can be seen in the number of recent publications: not only monographic essays and articles in specialist journals (many exclusively on Late Antiquity), Round Tables and Conferences (which have proliferated extraordinarily, above all during the Constantinian celebrations in 2005-2013), but now, too, various "Guides" to Late Antiquity, like the *Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, and "Companions", like the recent *Companion to Ostrogothic Italy*. No less significantly, University Manuals in various languages are now given over entirely to the late-antique period,[3] the rapid increase in research in this area of ancient history combining with the general reader's growing need for up-to-date material.

- The last centuries of the Roman Empire have not just been a major research area. There has been some historiographic thought on the late-antique period in the last fifteen years, which has now extended enormously, crossing the boundaries of Europe to embrace almost all the historiographic cultures of the world. As there are unlikely to be any complete solutions to the many problems involved in the short term, I thought it would be sensible to offer the 22nd *CISH* (*ICHS*) the subject of "Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate". Activating a discussion among those who spontaneously responded to a call for papers, as suggested by the *Comité*, seemed a good way to understand how much this kind of historiographical thinking can help us understand the period better.

- The unifying theme for the 22nd *CISH* (*ICHS*), though broken down into Major Themes, Specialized Themes, Joint Sessions and Round Tables, was "globality", or "history in a period of globalization".[4] As one of the central questions in the contemporary debate on Late Antiquity concerns the possible chronological definition both of the period and of its geographical context, I believed that this historiographical discussion, though it was presented among the Specialized Themes for being concentrated on Antiquity, was particularly connected to the intended central theme of the Congress.

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[3] I would like to mention here some of the Manuals: from one of the earliest, *L'évolution politique, sociale et économique du monde romain de Dioclétien à Julien* by André Chastagnol (1981) to the various works since 1993 by Averil Cameron, such as *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*; from *Empire romain en mutation* by Jean-Michel Carrié and Aline Rousselle in 2000 to *Das Ende der Antike* by Hartwin Brandt in 2001; the *Storia di Roma: l'età tardoantica* by Lietta De Salvo and Claudia Neri in 2010, and the recent *Die Spätantike. Der eine Gott und die vielen Herrscher* by *Rene Pfeilschifter* in 2014, which was also translated into Italian in 2015.

[4] Tortarolo 2016.

2. A New, Old Subject: An Excursus

Bas-Empire *and Late Antiquity*

Ever since Plato and Aristotle, the theme of the decline of states had aroused lively discussion in the literary tradition of the ancient world, as to its causes and inevitability. This was natural enough, as some writers of the ancient world had directly experienced the birth, growth and decline of empires (from the Persian Empire to the series of hegemonies in Greece and the Empire of Alexander the Great). Polybius had applied these principles to the Roman world, expressing the idea that all people, the Romans included, had both Hellenistic and barbaric characteristics, and that the predominance of one over the other depended on the vitality and quality of the institutions. In his view, even the moral degeneration of the ruling class, which was inevitable after a city had reached its greatest splendour, derived from the atrophy of its institutions.[5]

The present debate on historical periods, however, does not depend on the Greek philosophical tradition and discussions on imperialism and its legitimacy. Its form derives from the paradigm of decadence and decline that has been proposed in various terms in the modern age—after Charles le Beau had been the first to introduce the term *bas-Empire* in his *Histoire du bas-Empire, en commençant à Constantin le Grand* (1756)[6]—by Charles-Louis de Secondat (better known as Montesquieu, 1689-1755), in his *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romans et de leur décadence* (1734), William Robertson in his work on *The Progress of Society in Europe* (1769-1792), and Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) in his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1766-1788).[7] The application of these categories to the last centuries of the Roman Empire in particular led to them being judged in terms of the decadence of the antique, *die Antike*, a term coined shortly after the mid–eighteenth century

[5] Greek reservations about Roman policy of conquest and dominion profoundly influenced Polybius' theory of the inevitable decay of all states, once they had reached their moment of greatest perfection: Musti 1978, 54–56. The contemporary destruction of Carthage and Corinth in 146 BCE profoundly influenced the formulation of this theory: Eckstein 1995; Champion 2004, 67–9; Pocock 2003, as an introduction to the first fourteen books of Gibbon's work.

[6] Mazza 1987 (2009).

[7] For these authors, the fall of the Empire was a consequence of a slow intellectual and moral decline (which advanced as a result of the inadequacy of the institutions and the spread of Christianity) that created the conditions for the success of the barbarian invasions. See Bowersock 2004, 8; Ando 2008a, 59–76.

with reference to the figurative arts, which from 1860 on was used more and more in the sense of classical Antiquity.[8]

During the nineteenth century, indeed, a negative perspective had been strengthening, particularly among those who took a mainly political-military interest in ancient history, so much so that Mommsen could think of 410 as the real moment of transition towards the Middle Ages.[9] After the fall of the Second Reich, Otto Seeck developed the theory of the "Ausrottung der Besten" to explain the end of a decadent world that had abandoned the ancient gods.[10] A different account of the last phase of the Roman Empire appeared in the *History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene* by J.B. Bury (1889). Discussing the East, and not only the political-institutional questions, he regarded Constantine's age as the start of a Roman-Christian civilization, which became stronger in 395 and lasted until the birth of Charlemagne's Roman-Germanic empire in the ninth century. Such a wide-ranging periodization, which Bury later took as far as the age of Justinian, regarded the Middle Ages rather than the ancient world, so much so that the first volume of the *Cambridge Mediaeval History*, which he edited, began with Constantine's Christian empire. For Bury, like Gibbon, classical civilization had vanished with Marcus Aurelius and, after more than a century of chaos, the first Christian emperor had inaugurated a wholly new era.[11]

It was the great Austrian art historian Alois Riegl who then provided a wholly new perspective from that which had dominated since the late eighteenth century, and who was the first to use the concept of *Spätantike* in a new way.[12] In what may be his most famous study, *Die spätrömische Kunstindustrie,*[13] he offered a new approach to the history of art, starting from concrete objects (found on Habsburg territories, particularly in

[8] Marcone 2004, 25.

[9] Mommsen never wrote Vol. IV of his *Römische Geschichte*, but in the period 1882–1886 he ended his courses at the Humboldt University with the year 410 CE, when Alaric and his Goths entered Rome: Mazza 2005.

[10] Leppin 1998; Rebenich 1998.

[11] Zecchini 2015, 32.

[12] Mazza 2008. A century after his death two important conferences were organized, one in Vienna in October (Noever, Rosenauer, and Vasold 2010) and the other in November in Rome (Bösel, Mazza, and Mertens Franz 2008), whose contributions are useful both for the cultural context of late-eighteenth-century Vienna and for the development of Riegl's historical and artistic thought.

[13] Riegl (1901) 1927. The volume was published in Italian in 1953, entitled *Industria artistica tardoromana* (Florence: Sansoni) and reprinted in 1959 as *Arte Tardoromana* (Turin: Einaudi).

Croatia) of the "dark" period *par excellence*. Riegl claimed that there were no qualitative differences between the different styles, and still less were there periods of decline.[14] The art of the late-Roman period—which he placed between Constantine and Charlemagne—also had its own aesthetic dignity, with its own formal characteristics that made it autonomous and distinct from previous manifestations.[15]

This change began to give significant fruits above all in the late twentieth century, with the development of research in the juridical-institutional field,[16] both in purely economic questions[17] and in the history of ideas.[18] There was also Ernst Stein's general account of the late period of the Roman Empire in a work that focused mainly on economic-institutional questions while respecting the fabric of events in a period that he saw as starting with the reign of Diocletian (284CE) and ending with the death of Justinian (565CE).[19]

We need, however, to recall some remarks in the *Prefazione* to *Stilicone*—published in 1942 though essentially dating from 1936—[20] to note Santo Mazzarino's precocity of thought in this sector:

> La storia del tardo impero è, in un certo senso, una scienza relativamente giovane: concepita per lungo tempo come una 'storia della decadenza' imperiale (storia del 'basso' impero), essa apparve soprattutto in funzione negativa rispetto ai periodi che l'avevan preceduta e di cui invece era, anziché in contrasto, la più naturale spiegazione. Il superamento del concetto illuministico di una storia del basso impero intesa come storia della decadenza imperiale, e il tentativo di dare a questo periodo un'autonomia storica ed una funzione positiva è, si può dire, una conquista relativamente recente: tornare alla interpretazione di Gibbon appare, a noi moderni, impossibile, e s'impone pertanto una revisione analitica dei vari

[14] On the concept of *Kunstwollen*, a word coined by Riegl that is difficult to translate ("force", or "will directing and guiding artistic development"), see Meyer 2013, 204.
[15] Giardina 1999, 157.
[16] Lot 1927.
[17] Mickwitz 1932.
[18] Rehm1930 (1969); Straub 1939.
[19] Stein 1928-1949. After the first volume on the history of the Roman Empire from 284 CE to 476 CE, published in Austria (and in 1959 in an updated French edition, edited by Jean-Remy Palanque, in Bruges), the second up to the death of Justinian appeared in Belgium twenty years later, again edited by Palanque.
[20] The work is based on his graduation thesis *Intorno alla storia romana del periodo stiliconiano*, on which he was examined in June 1936: Giardina 1990, n. 14; Mazza 2008.

> problemi che quella storia suscita, al di là dell'astratto concetto di decadenza, e dei limiti che esso può implicare.[21]

The claim that we can transcend the limitations of the Enlightenment's interpretative categories by "an analytical revision" of the problems of the period derives directly from Mazzarino's research approach. The significance of the age of Stilicho started from a specific politico–institutional issue—whether Illyricum belonged to the prefecture of Italy or of the East—which seemed to him to involve all the religious and social problems of a now hopelessly divided world. The theory expressed in it is significant. The Theodosian Stilicho, who had in vain tried to keep the two *partes Imperii* united, had lost. His failure was in turn a metaphor for the failure of an empire whose institutional and political structures had imploded through both internal and external centrifugal forces. Clearly, for the young Mazzarino, attributing "a positive function" to the history of the empire's last centuries did not mean having an optimistic vision of Late Antiquity, so much as freeing himself—and it—from prejudice towards an age that till then had been regarded as unworthy (because not classical), and reconstructing it in its complexity through its specific characteristics.[22]

Almost at the same time, in his doctoral thesis of 1937, Henri Irénée Marrou discovered the age of St Augustine, and described the intellectual development of a man of the *Bas-Empire*, partly through the variety of literary genres he had adopted under the impulse of Christianity. Literary and allegorical exegesis of sacred texts, apologetics, and homiletic eloquence brought to Christian texts the language, grammatical structures and thought of the classical age.[23] That literary production, in the view of an inveterately classicist tradition, was the fruit of a protracted decline of antique culture, as Marrou himself at first believed. However, the impression that this was not so oozes from every page of *Saint Augustine* and, after a decade, resulted in the pondered awareness of the *Retractatio* (that was being reprinted), where the definition of *lettré de la decadence*, previously used, is rejected.[24]

To understand the change that emerged in those years in the studies deriving from Marrou, one of Arnaldo Momigliano's first contributions on

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[21] Mazzarino 1990 (1942), 3.

[22] On how to judge appropriately Mazzarino's need to attribute a "positive function" to Late Antiquity, see the comments by Giardina 1990, VII-XIII.

[23] Marrou 1938.

[24] Marrou 1949: the *Retractatio* appears as an appendix in the reprint of *Saint Augustine et la fin de la culture antique*.

the subject of Late Antiquity has been cited.[25] In his work *La formazione della moderna storiografia sull'Impero romano*, published in 1936, thirteen years before the reprint of *Saint Augustine,* the idea recurs that imperial universalism had been replaced by Christian universalism, as in the entry on *Roma: età imperale* in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*. However, in the former, the central consideration is that the decadence of the ancient world can only exist in an Enlightenment conception of history. According to Momigliano, Enlightenment thinkers had separated the history of the Empire and the history of the Church, and this had actually prevented them from understanding that the problem of the end of the ancient world did not really exist, as the Church had filled the void left by the Empire, and had also succeeded in communicating with the barbarians.[26]

Momigliano's theory was attractive to those, like Marrou, who did not see the problem of Roman decadence in traditional terms. In *Le christianisme et l'education classique* and *L'apparition des écoles chrétiennes de type médiéval*, the last two chapters of the *Histoire de l'éducation*, published the year before,[27] Marrou showed how the culture of that turbulent world acted as an intermediary for the civilization of mediaeval Europe. He returned to these topics in his posthumous last work, *Décadence romaine ou antiquité tardive?*(1977).[28] In it, he rejected decisively Gibbon's bias, which saw in the *Bas-Empire* the triumph of religion and barbarity, while Late Antiquity—from the third to the sixth century—took form from the changes that the spread of Christianity had produced in customs, entertainment and art.

The research carried out between the wars was on various sectors (history of ideas, juridical-institutional history, administrative history, history of Christianity), which were sometimes kept rigidly apart, and it had laid the foundations for many later developments. Again, however, we should turn to the works of Santo Mazzarino to understand in what terms the study of the late-antique period was set up in Italy. When he reworked his *Stilicone* in the middle of a world war, he was convinced that to properly know the late-imperial world, he needed to look at the period in its totality. The result of Constantine's revolution (not 'change', but 'revolution', in

[25] See Marcone 2006, 226–227; 229–230.
[26] Momigliano 1936a, and Momigliano 1936b. According to Cracco Ruggini 1989a, 167–170, it was the historiographical approach that aroused Momigliano's interest in specific aspects of Late Antiquity; see also Cracco Ruggini 1989b, 703–704, and Marcone 2006, 219–225.
[27] Marrou 1948.
[28] Marrou 1977.

Gramsci's sense of passive revolution[29]), the new institutions had changed the modes of production, while monetary and fiscal reform had acted on the social structure, altering it profoundly. The work thus contained, *in nuce*, the main lines of research that would mark the later output of Mazzarino (and others) on the Late Empire.

In *Aspetti sociali del IV secolo* of 1951,[30] taking up the question of the contrast between East and West, to understand why the West surrendered to the Barbarians, while the East had overcome the crisis, he tackled difficult "technical" problems through an equally arduous scrutiny of the surviving papyri and the imperial constitutions. He discussed the disproportion between productive forces and armed forces; the contrast between natural economy and monetary economy (overturning Mickwitz's theory that functionaries and soldiers preferred taxes to be paid in kind); and the continuing coexistence of slaves and coloni, and the effect of this on military conscription, which deprived the great landowners of the latter, but not the former. He also dealt with questions of population and depopulation, and showed how the introduction of the *solidus* had brought about a divarication between the very rich and the very poor (*honestiores* and *humiliores*).

The morphology of the period emerges from the interactions between institutional and economic factors, and the ways in which these had acted on a society that was affected by deep religious and cultural changes too. The interpretative categories used there are still at the centre of present-day historiographical debate. Among others, the idea that European society originated from the separation between the East and West of the Empire, which had already been expressed in *Stilicone*, does recur again in *Aspetti sociali del IV secolo*. This subtle perception came not just from the historian immersed in ancient sources, but also from the man, aware of the division of the post-war world in two opposed blocs, which would shortly lead to the Cold War.

Though engaged in other research too, in the course of twenty years Mazzarino identified the main centres of enquiry for the imperial age. We cannot consider here his many contributions on specific aspects of the age, for which he drew on unknown or little-known literary texts, new papyri or new inscriptions, solving thorny philological and linguistic questions and dating problems. Many of those essays were included in the later

[29] In this sense, Constantine's institutional and monetary revolution cannot be regarded as a real turning point as it was a conservative reshaping of the social morphology: Giardina 1990, XXVII.

[30] Mazzarino 1951 (1961). The volume is a collection of seven monographic essays, each concentrating on a specific topic.

Antico, tardoantico ed èra costantiniana,[31] and they are still the indispensable starting-point for any research on the late-antique period.

Three further works, however, deserve mention. His *L'impero romano*[32] reconstructs the life of the Empire from Augustus to the Arab invasions. It is worth noting that the third century is the hinge of the work, with almost equal parts given to the Principate and the Lower Empire. Christianity also takes on a central role in the socio-cultural development of the period, as it was both cause and expression of the "democratization" of antique culture. Mazzarino returned to this topic in the paper he gave at the *XI^e Congrès International des Sciences Historiques* in Stockholm, but scholars are still divided on the significance of this process.[33]

In a sense, *La fine del mondo antico* sums up Mazzarino's research on the imperial age up to that point. Almost all the previous questions he had tackled are treated there more expansively, and are accessible to a non-specialist readership.[34] He also gives importance to the historiographical reflections that had appeared (against Momigliano's views[35]) in the monograph of 1954 *Storia romana e storiografia moderna*.[36]

Finally, there is the short work, *Storia sociale del vescovo Ambrogio*, published posthumously in 1989 on the basis of rough drafts Mazzarino had put aside ten years earlier, intending to return to it later.[37] In my view, it should still be admired by anyone wanting to understand the thought and work of this late-antique bishop in all its complexity. It raises questions of historical method that remain highly important, discussing such things as laws, inscriptions and Ambrose's writings, which prove indispensable for understanding aspects of the Bishop of Milan's historical personality that still require further study, such as his aristocratic origins, his legal-philosophical training, and the management of his property before and after he took orders.The talk '*Ambrogio nella società del suo tempo*',

[31] Mazzarino 1974–1980.

[32] Mazzarino 1956. Being much more than a manual, the *Trattato di storia romana* II was republished in three volumes in 1973 and 1976 entitled *L'Impero romano*, and in two volumes in 1980.

[33] Mazzarino 1960. There are some thoughts and contributions on the question in Cantino Wataghin and Carrié 2001.

[34] Mazzarino 1959. This volume, reprinted in Italy in 1988, was translated into various languages. The German version appeared in 1961 to widespread acclaim, and English and American editions followed in 1966, as well as a French translation in 1973.

[35] Marcone 2006, 226, n. 23.

[36] Mazzarino 1954.

[37] It was published in 1977 by the *Direzione Editoriale del Comune di Milano*. On the phases of publication of the volume, see Mazzarino 1989, 5–7.

which was included with additional material in the volume, had been given in 1974, but, though he had already insisted on Christianity as a major factor in the period of Constantine's revolution, in the twenty years between 1940 and 1960 Mazzarino had become required reading especially for those studying the economic and institutional aspects of the late-antique period.

In the 1960s it was Arnaldo Momigliano who gave impulse to the research on the religious changes that characterized the last centuries of the Roman Empire. He did it from his Chair at University College London. In 1958–1959 he organized a series of seminars at the Warburg Institute, in which scholars such as A.H.M. Jones, Joseph Vogt, Edward A. Thompson, Alphons A. Barb, Henri-Irénée Marrou, Patrice Courcelle, Herbert Bloch and himself presented their research results on questions that later became central in the international historiographical debate. These included the social context in which Christianity "fought its battle against paganism"; the co-presence of pagan and Christian members in the family of Constantine the Great; Christianity and the northern barbarians; the characteristics of the new Christian historiography compared with the traditional pagan one; the spread of magic arts; the conversion of Synesius of Cyrene to a Neo-Platonic Christianity; Christian Platonism, or even neo-Platonic Christianity, from Arnobius to Ambrose; the late-fourth-century pagan renaissance in the West; and Christianity and the decline of the Roman Empire.

It is true that each speaker was left free to choose his topic, and the invitations had come from the Director of the Warburg Gertrud Bing, and not from the work's future editor. Nevertheless, those seminars allowed Momigliano to focus on a problem that he had indicated to Carlo Dionisotti in 1946 as central to his thought: the role of Christianity, which was no longer a revolutionary force but one legitimizing "any kind of pagan state that would give a free hand to the Church."[38] Actually, unlike Mazzarino, who was said to have been 'a late-antique historian from birth',[39] Momigliano became interested in late-Roman civilization and its forms of expression while pursuing various other research interests, to which he was drawn by deep personal needs.[40]

[38] Dionisotti 1989, 106. See Lizzi Testa 2011, 11.
[39] Cracco Ruggini 1989c, 706.
[40] On the deep-seated links between the personal and intellectual life of a scholar who studied the history of the great Jewish, Greek and Roman civilizations as a means of examining himself and his *tria corda*, see Gabba 1983, 7; Gabba 1989, 17; Cracco Ruggini 1989d, 108; Lizzi Testa 2013, 2.

Although he often responded critically and unpredictably to the appearance of a book with a theory or dating he did not share, nevertheless his contributions on late-antique texts or problems increased between 1954 and 1956. They were motivated by various factors. He was curious about the output of a period that saw some traditional genres like biography or historical accounts undergo changes in the writings of new intellectuals, pagans who had become Christians. I think we should interpret in this way his contributions on the *Historia Augusta*[41] and the *Origo gentis Romanae*,[42] as fictitious biographies, or parts of *corpora* created with works of various authors from different periods. This would also explain the essays written at the same time on the culture of the time of Cassiodorus and on the Anicii and Latin historiography.[43] The debates in that period on modern historiography of the Lower Empire had most certainly emphasized after 1954 his interest in that period and its culture,[44] but, above all, he was driven by the conviction that religious phenomena had greatly influenced historical processes. Momigliano linked in particular the function of Christianity with the value and significance of Hebraism in the history of civilization, as an essential element in the formation of culture and modern consciousness.[45]

The two essays (*Christianity and the Decline of the Roman Empire* and *Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D.*) were published in the volume *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, which collected the Warburg Lectures, first in the Oxford and then in the Einaudi edition.[46] In them Momigliano clearly combined lines of research that had only recently come to his attention with ideas he had been developing since 1936 (on the Mediterranean *koiné* created by Augustan Rome, on the limitations of classical Greek freedom, and on the function of Judaism as a vehicle for spreading Christianity in the Mediterranean[47]), and he then linked them to the problem of the decline of the Empire.

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[41] Momigliano 1934; Momigliano 1954.
[42] Momigliano 1958.
[43] Momigliano 1955; Momigliano 1956.
[44] Cracco Ruggini 1989a, 168–170.
[45] Clemente 2011. Cameron 2014a.
[46] Momigliano 1963. *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* did not appear in Italy until 1968. On the long correspondence of Momigliano with Giulio Einaudi, see Melloni 2011, 3–37. On his essay *Christianity and the Decline of the Roman Empire*, often reprinted for its centrality in the debates on the end of the ancient world and its causes, see Cameron 2011.
[47] Clemente 2014.

Momigliano rejected the idea that the end of classical civilization depended on the spread of irrational beliefs in the masses and on the intellectual surrender of the elites (*in nuce* in the philosophical prejudices of David D. Hume, and that he could then glimpse again in some recent publications). He also, rightly, remained aloof to the theories circulating on the eve of World War Two that revived an exaltation of "Germanic virility" and contempt for "Mediterranean effeminacy", of the kind that had already been current in the late nineteenth century. He was therefore convinced that Christianity, rather than the barbarians, was the force that unleashed the events of the fifth century CE.

This was not a neo-Gibbonian theory of Christianity as the cause and reason of the crisis, as Arnaldo Marcone seems to suggest.[48] For Momigliano, Christianity had not been the cause of the end, as it was for Gibbon, but, rather, the cause of the enormous changes that had made the passage from ancient to modern civilization possible. And these changes, whether positive or negative, had meant that a new period and civilization took shape without wholly losing that of the past. In this sense, the barbarians' influence on the crisis of the ancient world was relative. Once the solidarity between the Empire and its ruling classes had been broken, the richer, more cultured elements had become new Christian elites and had transmitted to the mediaeval world a Christian culture that was permeated with the values of Judaism and classical culture. In the same way, the Church and its structures, which had been organized so as to live in the world and rule it, gradually replaced the imperial ones.

It was a profoundly original perspective then, and one that was repeated in the following decades in contributions that studied further the results of these social and cultural changes, particularly in literature: both in biography, for its mixing of biography and autobiography in Christian hagiographic writings,[49] and in historical writings, where ecclesiastical historiography had supplanted secular history, which was now reduced to innocuous compendiums for ambitious, uncultured imperial functionaries.[50] Indeed, the last historian to write in Latin, Ammianus Marcellinus, had been a sort of paradox in the new Christian climate, "a lonely historian".[51]

In my view, Momigliano's Warburg Lectures had a fundamental influence on Peter Brown's first approach to Late Antiquity.[52] Nor is there

[48] See Marcone 2006, 222.
[49] Momigliano 1985.
[50] Momigliano 1969.
[51] Momigliano 1974.
[52] In 1957 Momigliano had been chosen as Peter Brown's supervisor at Oxford for his thesis in Mediaeval History: Cracco Ruggini 1988, 741.

any contradiction with the fact that Brown himself regards his discovery of Marrou's '*Retractatio*' and Piganiol's *Empire chrétien* as marking the beginning of his interest in Late Antiquity,[53] as there had by then already been long-term mutual influence and close collaboration between Momigliano and Marrou.[54] The link between Peter Brown, the young reviewer of *The Conflict*,[55] and Momigliano was, in any case, deep, lasting, very complex, and marked over the years by an intellectual exchange of ideas, so that, significantly, we also owe to Brown one of the most penetrating evaluations of Momigliano's work on his death.[56]

The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity suggested a range of new research, and created a ferment in international culture. This was in part due to an exceptional generation of young scholars who devoted themselves to the study of the later period of the Empire, transmitting to their pupils their passion predominantly for the cultural aspects of the late-antique society and literary output, following exciting new perspectives, as we shall see below.[57] At the same time, in the 1960s, Momigliano and other eminent scholars invited to the Warburg had identified some fundamental problems that would guide research on Late Antiquity, as is borne out by the fact that some recent books are still responding, more or less indirectly, to the stimuli of some of the essays collected there.[58]

More and more scholars had approached the study of last centuries of the Roman Empire in the period before and immediately after World War Two. They arrived by different routes, pursuing lines of investigation that often arose from their cultural interests, but also from profound human experiences. Attracted by the quantity of important documentation in the period, they had become pioneers in going beyond Gibbon's old idea of the last period of the Roman Empire as marked by inexorable decline from the age of the Antonines on. Serious reassessment of this was only

[53] Brown 1997, 5–30, and70–79.
[54] Supra, n. 25.
[55] Brown 1963.
[56] Brown 1988.
[57] There is an overview of the problems raised in *The Conflict* and the developments they have had for three generations of scholars linked to Momigliano and his work in Brown-Lizzi Testa 2011.
[58] See Ratti 2010; Cameron 2011, su cui Lizzi Testa 2013; Ratti 2012; and now Salzman, Sághy, and Lizzi Testa 2016, on the culture and religious feeling of the last pagans in Rome, and on whether we can speak of "conflict" between pagans and Christians; and Inglebert 2014, on the development of classical historiography in universal history.

possible as the immense tragedy of the war had been internalised and conceptualised.[59] So incommensurable were contemporary problems that the distant tragedy of the fall of the Roman Empire could be seen in a new perspective, allowing the period to become interesting for other features too. It was even possible, then, to be ironic about the end of the Western Empire in 476, as was Momigliano, who spoke of the Empire falling "without a sound".[60] However, more than half a century went by before it was understood that moments of "noiseless fall" need to be judged against a background of the extraordinary impression caused by other moments.[61]

In general, studies on Late Antiquity from the 1930s to 1960s were central for a deeper understanding of the period. They enjoyed, though, the advantage of the extraordinary season inaugurated by the journal founded in Strasbourg on 15 January 1929 by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre. Among other things, they encouraged thinking about the meaning of history, the dignity of the historian's work, and his role in society, which has had various influences on scholars of Late Antiquity.

Late Antiquity and sciences sociales

> Peut-être arrivera-t-il bientôt dans la manière d'écrire l'histoire ce qui est arrivé dans la physique. Les nouvelles découvertes ont fait proscrire les anciens systèmes [...] Voila déjà un des objets de la curiosité de quiconque veut faire faire l'histoire en citoyen et en philosophe. Il sera bien loin de s'en tenir à cette connaissance; il recherchera quel a été le vice radical et la vertu dominante d'une nation; pourquoi elle a été puissante ou faible sur la mer; comment et jusqu'à quel point elle s'est enrichie depuis un siècle; les registres des exportations peuvent l'apprendre. Il voudra savoir comment les arts, les manufactures se sont établis; il suivra leur passage; et leur retour d'un pays dans un autre. Les changements dans les moeurs et dans les lois seront enfin son grand objet. On saurait ainsi l'histoire des hommes, au lieu de savoir une faible partie de l'histoire des rois et des cours.[62]

Despite Voltaire's enlightened exhortations to make ancient and modern history useful for the citizen by studying economics, art, and changes in customs and laws, and putting the lives of men and women at the centre of historical research, "rather than a small part of the history of kings and courts", branches of knowledge like economics and social studies had

[59] Giardina 1999, 173.
[60] Momigliano 1973.
[61] Ando 2008b, 40.
[62] Voltaire 1878 (1744), 138—140.

remained almost wholly side-lined by nineteenth-century historiography, which had continued to concern itself mainly with political events.

This meant that *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* was a genuine historiographic revolution. Its original name reflected a preference, by Marc Bloch in particular, for the problems highlighted by Marxist historiography, as well as by the economic crisis that was to explode a few months later in October 1929.[63] As the desire from the start was to converse with all the other human sciences, from social anthropology to geography and ethnology, problems and issues that were largely unknown to traditional historiography multiplied. In the first year it published articles centred mainly on economic and social questions, such as the price of papyrus in ancient Egypt and the education of merchants in the Middle Ages, but it also embraced almost 2000 years of history, with articles on German industrial activity after World War One and the population of the USSR, as well as on the land register, the finances of Alexander the Great's war, and the history of the banks in the modern age. Later, the subjects covered were even more varied.[64]

Bit by bit, partly through a change in the journal's name and editors, and its interaction with a research institute in the field of human and social sciences founded by Lucien Febvre in 1947, which became the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in 1975, the supposed historiographic school of the *Annales* brought about a genuine extension of the idea of history.[65] Even the approach to these questions was new, favouring an interdisciplinary perspective in subjects and the use of documents. And so

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[63] Bloch's first work in 1924 (*Les Rois thaumaturges. Étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre*), was centred on "représentations collectives", a problem of socio-psychology that was developed in various ways by historical anthropology, history of mentality and comparative history. However, after being invited by the Institute for the Comparative Study of Civilizations to give papers on agrarian history in Oslo, he concentrated on French and European mediaeval agrarian history, publishing the first volume of *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française* in 1931 (the second volume appeared posthumously in 1956, drawing on the author's papers: an electronic edition of both volumes is in preparation).

[64] The numbers of *Annales* down to 2002 can be consulted on the sites Persée (1929–1932, 1939–1941 and 1943–2002) and Gallica (1929–1938). In the first decades of the journal's life, rural life and agrarian archaeology, coins and prices, climate, population, food, transport, trades, book-binding, literacy, reading practices, forms of publication, and typography were recurrent topics.

[65] Since 1969 *Annales* has been run by an editorial board that has included Marc Ferro and Jacques Le Goff. Since 1994 it has been entitled *Annales. Histoire, sciences sociales.*

there was a relaxation in the rigid separation between sectors of study that had previously constituted so many autonomous, non-communicating disciplines. Sources of every kind outside ancient historical narrative and traditional literary works were now seen as useful for understanding society and culture. Christian texts, for example, began to be taken seriously for the information they provided for historical reconstruction that had been of little interest to the historians of religion and theologians who till then had monopolized them.[66]

The relation between the historian and his sources was reconsidered too. Interpretation acquired new significance, powered by the capacity to question the evidence, so that history became research on a problem, rather than a mere enumeration of unconnected facts. The line between history and non-history was identified very simply in the capacity to ask new questions of the sources and to answer them scientifically.[67] Bloch's exhortation was to consider history no longer as "la science du passé", but as the "science des hommes dans les temps et qui sans cesse a besoin d'unir l'étude des morts à celle des vivants," in a kind of hermeneutic circularity of present and past.[68] Reflecting on the epistemological problem of the legitimacy of history, he showed it has a fundamental role in maintaining memory, which is essential for any present and future civilization, thus underlining the moral and civil responsibilities of the historian, as well as his fundamental creative task.[69] It is clear how much these problems have also influenced how scholars of the twentieth century reconstructed the antique and late-antique ages. Nevertheless, we should note that the historians who studied the final centuries of the Roman Empire and interacted with the research published in the *Annales* were also willing to extend the spectrum of usable sources while avoiding unrestrained comparativism. They took on board and encouraged methodological thinking without being distracted by over-rigid interpretative models, while still respecting traditional periodization.

The fourth century went on being a major focus for research in the 1950s, but in the following decade the results, particularly in the political, administrative and economic field, appeared in the first great overview, A.H.M. Jones' *The Late Roman Empire A.D. 284-602*, published in 1964.

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[66] Burke 1992, 112–115.
[67] Bloch 1952 (1949), 40–42; see Mastrogregori 1987, 131.
[68] Bloch 1952 (1949), 16–30; Arnaldi 1969, XXIII-XXVIII: Febvre actually preferred a more restrictive definition, considering history as scientifically conducted study and not as science.
[69] Febvre 1969, 4–5.

This work is unequalled for its wealth of documentation among other things, and is still a fundamental general account for the subjects its deals with: government, administration, finances, justice, senators, civil service, the army, Rome and Constantinople, city and country, industry, trade and transport, the Church, religion, morality, education and culture, and the decline of the Empire.

For Jones, as for Ernst Stein, the late Roman Empire began in 284 CE. The whole work expresses an awareness that a new period cannot begin with a religious revolution, or with a controversial military reform, such as that of Gallienus, but that it may originate with the institutional and socio-economic reforms of the late III century, which brought about profound changes in society that also touched everyday life. The end of Maurice's reign in the early seventh century as the endpoint of the late-antique period might seem more problematic, but the explanation is again institutional:

> The Roman Empire ultimately weathered the storm, but when it re-emerges into the light of history it is a very different empire from that which vanished from our view in the early seventh century.[70]

The "collapse" following the acclamation of Phocas and the elimination of Maurice seemed to constitute a clear watershed, because the reforms of Heraclius (610–641) in the East and a Western landscape dominated by the Roman-barbarian reigns, as well as the imposition on the Italian peninsula of a new Lombard way of governing, were blueprints for societies that were overall completely different from that of the Roman Empire as reformed by Diocletian.

In some recent historiographic surveys of those who promoted the present expansion of studies on Late Antiquity, A.H.M. Jones is the only scholar cited alongside Marrou and Peter Brown, and a vague mention of Momigliano.[71] As we have seen, though, the discovery of the late-antique age was something more complex than may appear from the three volumes of *The Late Roman Empire*, and downplaying, as Jones did, the impact of religion as an inescapable contributory factor to the institutional changes is an objective limitation of his work.[72] Nevertheless, it was hugely significant, opening a new stage of research on the period in England, and encouraging enquiry into the institutions and administrative life of the final centuries of the Empire, and their inter-relations, in cooperation with French and Italian scholars.

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[70] Jones 1964, I, 317.
[71] Johnson 2012, XXII.
[72] Cameron 2008.

At the same time, the idea of the vastness of the late Empire and the peculiarity of a structure that had been held together over the centuries by the fertile relation between central administration and local autonomy, led to the study of specific regions, particularly those that had undergone structural changes in the last centuries, such as *Italia Annonaria*.[73] There also followed in the next twenty years a detailed enquiry on the cities of Roman Africa, whose late *facies* was reconstructed by listing and interpreting all the sources then available.[74] These works showed clearly the importance of material culture and aspects of economics that until then had been unexplored—such as the organization of production, and the distribution and consumption of goods—for reconstructing the *facies* of the city. The effects they had on the social life of a specific area is now a permanent feature of the best historical research, whether Marxist in inspiration or not. [75]

Examining the *Fasti*, the physiognomy of the main ruling groups, and the functions of the city prefecture and the main organ of government in the capital were reconstructed.[76] Prosopography, a new branch of study still being tried out in the 1970s, brought new confidence in being able to understand the links, careers and alliances between the great senatorial families, and the careers of figures of equestrian rank and members of the central and provincial administration. As well as the British Academy's *Prosopography*, which Jones had pressed for,[77]*Prosopographie chrétienne* was founded by Marrou and Palanque under the auspices of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.[78] It thus became possible to verify the

[73] Ruggini 1961. A second edition with new *Introduzione, Bibliografia di Lellia Cracco Ruggini, Errata-corrige, Appendice con rettifiche, Appendice bibliografica*, was published in the series edited by Domenico Vera (Munera 2) in 1995.
[74] Lepelley 1979–1981.
[75] In Marxist tradition, however, the definition of a mode of production is always linked to an analysis of every sector of society. The three volumes by Schiavone, and Giardina 1981, on life in the Italian peninsula during the first four centuries of Empire clearly show the emergence, establishment and decline of the system of slave manufacture.
[76] Chastagnol 1962. Chastagnol 1960. Chastagnol 1992.
[77] Jones, Martindale and Morris 1971. After Vol. I, which covers the period from 260CE to 395CE, Vol II (on the years 395-527CE) and Vol III (from 527CE to 641 CE), both edited by J.R. Martindale, appeared in 1980 and 1992 respectively. On how the project was devised and carried out, as well as the improvements to it made by updatable databases, see the interesting contributions in Cameron 2003.
[78] The two parallel and complementary projects of prosopography for the late-antique imperial age were presented by Jones and Marrou in a joint talk at the first *Congrès International des Ètudes Classiques* (Paris, 1950). The first volume,

reliability of supposed noble ancestry, by which powerful fourth-century families claimed ancient origins in the first Republican Age.[79]

Research showed that Christianity did not just change people's minds, the face of the elites, and how they expressed themselves in literature, but that the Christianizing of a city shifted its traditional centre and brought changes to the calendar of holidays. In the same way, the presence or absence of the imperial Court could redefine transit routes, trade flows, and the economic organization of one or more regions. This led to studies of the changes to cities such as Rome, a pagan centre that became *Roma Christiana*,[80] and Constantinople, which Eusebius of Caesarea said had been founded to function exclusively as a Christian capital of the Empire. By contrast, a literary examination of Byzantine sources from the sixth to the ninth century suggested that the latter was a Hellenistic-Roman city, refounded with traditional practices, with no more than one or two *martiria*, and perhaps a Christian church, apart from the Mausoleum Constantine had wanted for himself.[81] These studies are still fundamental for the ongoing work on specific aspects of the main research lines that were mapped out then.[82]

Longue durée *and Late Antiquity*

After the 1960s, the research of *Annales* had encouraged a different relation between history and time. Reworking the intuitions of Henri Bergson at the prompting of contemporary structuralist thought, Fernand Braudel had applied to the history of Mediterranean civilization the idea that only the subjective sense of time, where past and future coexist, can give meaning to duration and lived time. This means that subjective time

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dealing with Africa (Mandouze 1982) appeared shortly before the Austrian scholar J. Divjak discovered in two codices in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris thirty unpublished letters, twenty-seven of them written by St Augustine, which have added hugely to the prosopography of Christian Africa. For the two volumes on Italy, see Charles and Luce Pietri 1999-2000; the prosopography of the Diocese of Asia (325-641) is in Destephen 2008. For Christian Gaul, see Pietri and Heijmans 2013.

[79] The studies by Jacques 1986, and Lepelley 1986 are fundamental. Note too, along the same lines, the work by Chausson 2007.

[80] Pietri 1976. See Fraschetti 1999.

[81] Dagron 1974.

[82] A fundamental collection of research perspectives developed internationally in the mid-1980s is that of Giardina 1986. The two volumes on the late-antique age in the *Storia di Roma*, planned by Arnaldo Momigliano and Aldo Schiavone, are of great value: see Carandini, Cracco Ruggini, Giardina 1993.

alone can allow a global consideration of events, while clock time, which delineates a succession of instants, is, at most, useful for studying the phenomena of the inorganic world. He prioritized cyclical oscillations rather than the "short-breathed" accounts of traditional history, and the validity of the duration of the former over the short rhythms of events. "Long duration" also seemed to demonstrate, contrary to the pessimistic vision of Oswald Spengler in his *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918–1922), that grand new civilizations almost always arose out of the most acute crises.[83] The very texture of biological and social life seemed to Braudel to be genuinely modified only by great economic imbalances, and so it became imperative to extend historical enquiry not only to long duration, but also to broad spaces.[84]

Historical discourse that appealed to ethnology and cultural anthropology and geo-history was then directed mainly to the development of societies rather than institutions, to uses more than to events. Rituals and symbols that reflect collective sentiments (such as magic cultures and witchcraft), or individual emotions with social repercussions (like love, sickness and death) became major areas of research, placing at the centre ideas and the way in which individual groups socialize them at the level of the imaginary.

Young researchers in cultural anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas and Edward Evans-Pritchard), historical anthropology (Jacques Le Goff), and sociology (Georges Gurvich), and mediaevalists like Georges Duby, scholars of history of mentality (Philippe Ariès, and Florence Dupont), and the psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, who was both a philosopher and psychoanalyst, were reaching similar conclusions. Under the influence of the research of Jakobson in linguistics, Barthes in literary criticism, and Althusser in epistemology, the human world was studied as if it were a structure, and hence as an organic, global whole, whose elements have no autonomous functional value, but assume it in the relations of each element with the others in the whole. In this way it seemed possible to discover what systematic, constant relations intervened in socio-cultural phenomena, and within what, often unconscious, limits individual action was constrained.

These studies were very influential in encouraging a continuist vision of history, as was the so-called "Pirenne controversy", which arose around the book by Henri Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (1939), and was

[83] Braudel 1949.
[84] Braudel 1967–1979.

revitalized at the prompting of the new intellectual movements. Pirenne had denied that the fall of the Roman Empire in the West was an epochal break, claiming it was the Arab conquest, and not the Germanic invasions, that had sealed its fate. However, unlike Riegl, Pirenne did not shift the traditional break between Roman Empire and Middle Ages to the seventh century as he regarded those last centuries of the Empire as worthy of autonomous evaluation, but rather because he thought the decline of the West had simply been longer.[85] The theory that it was the Arab conquest that had interrupted trade and disrupted Rome's political, social and cultural homogeneity stimulated lively debate on the extent of Mediterranean trade from the fifth to the sixth century. As much material was in the form of pottery of uncertain date, for decades it remained at the level of mere polemic.

In the last thirty years of the twentieth century, Fernand Braudel's perspective in the 1949 volume, by which the barbarians were simply a "superficial disturbance", also encouraged new research on the kind of impact the barbarians had caused. A period of revision began, both for those who shared the model of migration and invasion, and those who preferred to emphasize slow waves of infiltration and penetration by the Germanic peoples.[86] In both cases, the more sensitive scholars saw these problems as having serious implications for the contemporary world. In the late nineteenth century, the claim that the invasions had been the work of groups with a precise ethnic physiognomy had already encouraged the illusion of being able to identify in the hordes of "giants", who descended on the "decadent Roman dwarves" (to use the definition of the German philosopher Herder), the ethnic roots of the modern nation states. Recently, the champions of the new nationalisms of Eastern Europe have used not dissimilar historical explanations.[87]

By contrast, insisting on the issues of acculturation,[88] the gradual entry into the Empire of groups whose ethnic identity would only be fashioned in contact with Roman civilization,[89] also seemed a way of removing any historical support for such ideological claims. Some years ago, however, Bryan Ward Perkins energetically reasserted the traditional vision that

[85] So Brown 1973, 26, in a summary of "Pirenne Thesis": "In short, *The Empire of Charlemagne* [...] marks the true beginning of the Middle Ages; all that preceded it was the autumn of the ancient Mediterranean culture"; see Giardina 2004, 43.
[86] Influenced by Musset 1965.
[87] Bratož 2005.
[88] Goffart 1980.
[89] Mathisen, and Shanzer 2001.

relates the dissolution of the Roman Empire with the great invasions of the Germanic peoples. He indicated some paradoxical aspects of an extreme interpretation of the new model that had established itself in English-language studies, obsessed by politically correct key words such as seepage, accommodation and gradualism, to be used in place of migrations/invasions.[90]

In the introductory chapter, entitled *Did Rome Ever Fall?*, Ward Perkins establishes a close link of dependence, or, better, consequentiality, between the new vision of relations between Rome and the barbarians, and that of a continuist interpretation of the late-antique age, whose "guru" (his word) was Peter Brown.[91] From the picture we now have before us, it is clear how imprecise this judgement is. Brown was not the first to consider the impact of the barbarians as relatively insignificant for the end of the Empire, and it was, rather, the general intellectual temper of the late twentieth century that made the problem of periodization secondary. It is certain, however, that, from the 1970s on, Brown's vast output exercised great influence on research on the last centuries of the Roman Empire, and not just those written in English, helping to find new directions for late-antique studies. We can try to identify some of the main ones.

In a vivid monograph on Augustine of Hippo, completed in 1967, Brown reconstructed the characteristics of the fourth and fifth centuries, which were dominated by tumultuous events and the fall of centuries-old certainties. He did it, examining (like Marrou before him) the travails of an exceptional figure, who emerges from his work as being as unscrupulous in breaking with tradition as he was, with his late doctrinal and political choices, suitable for reflecting the effects of a century of the institutionalization of Christianity.[92]

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[90] Ward-Perkins 2005. In similar style Heather 2005 has energetically reasserted the concept that the fall of the Roman Empire corresponded to the end of a civilization, because the catastrophe of the fundamental structures affected the daily life of everyone, quite apart from the continuity of ideas or of a culture in general, which was limited to the *élites*.

[91] Ward-Perkins 2005, 3.

[92] Brown 1967. The new edition (2000) has two new chapters as an *Epilogue*, where some of the author's thoughts on the *Confessions* and sermons of the bishop in the last years of the Roman government in Africa are reviewed in the light of recently discovered new letters and sermons of Augustine. A Forty-Fifth Anniversary Edition was published in Berkeley in 2013. See now *Le premier Saint Augustin* by Ratti 2016, which is deeply influenced by Brown 2013.

The research that from 1963 to 1970 had accompanied the drafting of this work[93] was published a few months after *The World of Late Antiquity A.D. 150-750*.[94] It was this short book that made Late Antiquity a term really popular and that influenced whole generations of younger researchers. Published in London in 1971 and translated into many languages over the next decade, it adopted the categories of social and cultural anthropology in its historical analysis, and reconstructed the society of the time as a period of varied, multi-faceted cultural output, very close to a modern sensibility in the issues it expressed. The late-antique world was not a classical world in decline, but an extensive area where the "fall" of the Empire in 476 CE had been noiseless because it had not happened. The most varied forms of artistic experimentation had marked that period, as the extensive iconography showed, which was also a novelty in books of ancient history.

Religious syncretism was a central component of it, from late polytheism, including Neo-Platonism, to Mithraism and the religious experiences that had penetrated the Eastern borders of the Empire, such as Zoroastrianism. This was no empire of triumphant Christianity, as theologians and scholars of patristics liked to depict it. In the "Peter Brown model" the "age of anxiety" of Eric Robert Dodds (who already owed much to psychology and psychoanalysis applied to history) became an age in which the homogeneity of the Christian Mediterranean was guaranteed by the changes that had led to the conversion of the world to Christianity, and Christianity to the world.

It was not the end of the institutions, then, but the religious change wrought by the consolidation of the Muslim East in the eighth century, that had irreparably shattered the unity of Mediterranean civilization. Placing the cultural changes at the centre of enquiry—the religious ones being part of these inasmuch as they were anthropological symptoms that reflected broader social changes—Late Antiquity was able to embrace six centuries (from the age of Marcus Aurelius to Mohammed, as the title reads in some editions) and to extend from the Western provinces to Sassanid Iran.

The history of mentality and cultural history might seem resistant to carefully considered problems of periodization. The very chronological terms proposed in *The World of Late Antiquity* (from 150 to 750 CE) might seem, rather, an instinctive response to Gibbon, for whom the fall of the Empire had suddenly presented itself as a problem—so much so that

[93] Brown 1972.
[94] Brown 1971a.

he had continued his narrative down to 1453, once he had realized he could not halt where he had intended to.[95] Actually, a short contribution on the "Pirenne Thesis" in the 1973 number of *Daedalus* given over to the *Proceedings* on *Twentieth-Century Classics Revisited*, clarifies why Peter Brown considered Pirenne's periodization perfectly legitimate.[96] The continuity of ancient Mediterranean civilization, after the Germanic invasions and until the final victory, not of the old Roman Damascus, but of Baghdad,[97] might seem a paradox on the basis of the material documents Pirenne had used to confirm the continuing commercial role of the Mediterranean in the fifth and sixth centuries. But it was not if we consider the "mental horizons" of those living in that period.[98] Contacts between Gaul and the Eastern Mediterranean, which the trade flows of the sixth century denied, were alive in the ways of conceiving relations between God and man that had become common in the "*Romania* à la Pirenne". These were distinguishing features of urban civilization in the Mediterranean that had been built up ever since the Empire first felt the changes introduced by Christianity.

Actually, an article by Peter Brown in 1971 on "Holy Men" had brought out how deep-rooted in both East and West was a tradition till then known only in the Middle Ages, of holy men—anchorites, stylites, Christian monks, and also Neo-Platonic ascetics and charismatic figures of every kind—assuming the role of patron of a city, on which the Roman social system had always rested.[99] His book *The Cult of the Saints*, too, identified the centrality and horizontal unity of the Mediterranean in the affirmation of a different sensibility towards sanctity, death and life, as well as in the expressions of culture, art and piety that it produced.[100] Local distinctiveness disappeared, almost as if it were a stereotype to be set aside, like the opposition between popular religion and enlightened theism. In Brown's view, indeed, it was the educated classes that became impresarios of the sacred, responding to needs shared by the educated minorities as well as the masses.

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[95] Bowersock 2004, 9.

[96] Brown 1973, 31, republished in Brown 1982, though not in the Italian edition of the volume (*La società e il sacro*) of 1988.

[97] Brown 1973, 28: "the battle was fought within Islam itself, between Syria and Iraq—between old Roman Damascus and new Baghdad, heir to the majesty of the Sassanian Empire.".

[98] Brown 1973, 31–32.

[99] Brown 1971b.

[100] Brown 1981. An enlarged edition with new Author's Preface was published, again in Chicago, in 2015.