Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate

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Edited by

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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.

It is, however, significant that study of this phenomenon is circumscribed to the sixth century, the years of the frequent outbreaks of the great plague of 543, which Brown in 1973 indicated as a possible turning point in the history of the Mediterranean, at least as perceived by contemporaries, rather than the date suggested by Pirenne.[101] And his sifting of the remarkable quantity of evidence that he included in *The Body and Society* in 1986 begins in the second century and ends with Augustine. This was the work in which the changes in society are read through the change in the concept of the person, which the Christian ideal of continence and renunciation of sexual life caused.[102]

Though the chapter on *Antiquité tardive* that Brown had written for the *Histoire de la vie privée* edited by Ariès-Duby in 1985[103] developed suggestions by Paul Veyne[104] under the influence of the philosophical-psychological research of Michel Foucault,[105] it indicated that the three scholars had a different approach to their shared subject. Brown showed more clearly in the book that he did not wholly accept Veyne's idea that Christianity had been just the expression of an interiorization of public life that had taken place between the Hellenistic period and the first imperial age, as its contribution had been the more original. Apart from that, while Foucault's failure to localize "the discourse on the self" in the real world of political change means that chronology is usually ignored and textual references are limited, *The Body and Society* is constructed in a temporal arc of three centuries (from the second to the fourth) and with a boundless wealth of literary sources.

By accentuating the psychological and sociological aspects of the enquiry, however, abstinence and sexual renunciation become motors of change, as if ideas alone (in this case, those powered by a certain kind of Christian preaching) could modify the daily life of most people and the

[101] Brown 1973, 27; Brown (1981) 2015, 123.
[102] Brown 1986; on which, see Cracco Ruggini 1988, 750, and Consolino *et alii* 1992.
[103] Brown 1985, 225–300.
[104] Veyne 1978.
[105] In 1984, the year of Foucault's death, vols. II (*L'usage des plaisirs*) and III (*Le souci de soi*) of the unfinished *Histoire de la sexualité*, were published posthumously, after the appearance in 1976 of vol. I (*La volonté de savoir*); a fourth volume on Christianity (*Les aveux de la chair*) has never been published, but its general intentions are clear: starting from the idea that all discourse, which implies a desire for truth, has in itself a desire for power, Christianity—which developed a discourse that was both totalizing and individualist (and thus very strong)—spread a different kind of particularly repressive power relations: Cameron 1986, 266.

face of a civilization.[106] Accordingly those customs would seem to have spread very broadly at various levels of society, whereas, in fact, they only affected a minority.[107] Other important research at the same time on the poor in cities and villages, on women and other social minorities who had not been the subjects of history, gave more depth to the contexts.[108]

There is a similar approach in *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, a reworking of his 1988 Curti Lectures, which was the result of his continuing dialogue with the contemporary research of Averil Cameron. In 1990–1991 she was dealing with the ways Christianity found to become the dominant discourse, taking from the sophisticated literary culture of the period symbols, propaganda tools and literary genres.[109] As in Cameron's *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, Brown's work sees rhetoric as the totality of ways of expression that have the power of persuasion, which history ought not to ignore as it can provide parallel or converging explanations to those of research on institutions and economics.

Brown seems to place the waning of the antique age and the birth of the Christian world between the fourth and sixth centuries, when non-institutional figures like monks and holy men, or some special bishops, managed to replace the educated provincial classes in their relations with central power, which was represented locally by imperial functionaries, and with the Emperor himself in his various late-antique residences. Control over the lower orders was ensured by charity to the poor, no longer just to the traditional recipients of classical euergetism, while "love for the poor" provided an acceptable justification for the growing wealth of the Church.[110]

Peter Brown was not the first, then, to see Late Antiquity in positive terms. However, his work has made study of the period more attractive, both to those wanting to consider in more confined spatial and temporal conditions the function of codes of behaviour linked to the cultural and religious phenomena he discussed, and those mainly interested in the

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[106] Different perspectives emerge, anchoring the research in time and space: Consolino 1986 and Consolino 2006; Giardina 1988.
[107] Lizzi 1989.
[108] Patlagean 1977, on which, see Caseau 2012, 1–12.
[109] Cameron 1990 and Cameron 1991. Cameron 2014b takes up topics left unfinished in 1991.
[110] Brown 2002. On the difference between "holy poor" (clerics, ascetics) and "real poor", see Brown 2016, which, more generally, traces the origin of monasticism in Western Europe and modern Western attitudes towards charity and work in the kind of monasticism that spread through Egypt and Syria in the fourth century.

institutions and economics. In addition, since *The World of Late Antiquity*, extending research beyond the confines of the Empire strictly defined has encouraged a multicultural perspective in which the cultures of the non-Greeks of the Eastern Mediterranean—not just Jews and Judaism, but Arabs and Islam too—have been studied by historians of Late Antiquity.[111]

3. A Long or a Short Late Antiquity?

There are, however, some risks in the way of reading Late Antiquity that came to the fore after the 1970s in *Annales*, which was then dominated by structuralism and Foucault's psychology applied to history. A thematic approach may be useful when it is functional to our understanding of a subject clearly set in time and space, but when it asks us to analyse constant small-scale changes, it remains unyielding in the face of hiatuses, ignores crises, and denies the end. History, seen as a constant flow of events or as a process of imperceptible change, disregards context, forgets dates, and ignores periodization.

A long Late Antiquity extending well beyond 476 CE set adrift chronological reference points and any capacity to place precise historical situations in time. A great book, which is remarkable for the quantity of different sources and settings that are analysed, follows the process of forming a Christian Europe over the course of nine centuries.[112] The joint work by Glen Bowersock, Peter Brown and Owen Grabar *A Guide to the Post Classical World*, originating in Princeton, takes in the period between the mid third and the late eighth century and a geographical area that extends beyond the Mediterranean to the neighbouring Islamized East, as

> The tax system of the Islamic empire continued with little break the practices of the Roman and Sassanian states. Its coins were *denarii, dinars* […] For all the startling and self-conscious novelty of their religion, the early Muslim conquerors of the Middle East found themselves heirs to a past of extraordinary density.[113]

There is no reference in the work to the idea of crisis. The idea of decline is also jettisoned. Late Antiquity appears as little different from the classical world because it derives from it. External societies to the ancient

[111] Cameron 2013 is particularly sensitive to this aspect.
[112] Brown 1995 (2003).
[113] Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar 1999.

world are not alien to it simply because they were decisively influenced by the changes taking place in it.

Already in 1993 Garth Fowden had shown what consequences there might be for ancient history if it followed unchecked a model that gave priority to long-term historical structures. In his *Empire to Commonwealth*, Late Antiquity embraces the caliphates of the Omeiades of Damascus (661-750) and the Abbasides of Baghdad (750-1258) in the name of a monotheism used to interpret the political history of the Mediterranean for more than ten centuries.[114] More recently, Polymnia Athanassiadi has also suggested a new paradigm, the *longue époque hellénistique*, from the Macedonian conquest to the formation of the Islamic Caliphate, on the basis of a continuity of Hellenistic culture in the worlds in which Islam managed to set down roots and "pollinate with its spirit" the area.[115] We forget too easily, however, that the new conquerors used military means, bringing destruction and ruin, which makes pollination a somewhat inappropriate metaphor.

In her 1997 Lecture in Spoleto inaugurating the *Settimana di studi sull'Alto Medioevo*, Averil Cameron had no qualms in expressing her doubts and misgivings, as well as making clear the growing difficulty for the historian in speaking on any topic, if a clear chronological watershed was not first defined. Self-critically aware of the many interpretative lines that had developed in the English-speaking world, she expressed her fear that historians of Late Antiquity might see their subject dissolving.[116]

The "explosion of Late Antiquity" reported by Andrea Giardina in a now famous article of 1999 thus brought into the open reservations that were widely shared. The criticisms made in the essay are few in number, but so significant that their resonance was enormous:

1. Over-expanding periodization, while denying the epoch-making significance of the fall of the Empire and emphasizing the factors of continuity at the expense of those of a breach, ends up making it impossible to find a framework for these events. Expanded endlessly, Late Antiquity risks losing its definition as an autonomous period that it achieved with difficulty after centuries of neglect.

[114] Fowden 1993. Fowden 2013 reduces to the year 1000 the time span of the previous volume.
[115] Athanassiadi 2015.
[116] Cameron 1998, 30—31.

2. History seen as a continuous flow is essentially cultural history, while, if we are to understand a historical period, we need to define it through the specific features of its economic and institutional structures. These very structures lose any distinctive character in an excessively continuist perspective.
3. The insistence on gradual change or changes has led to a rejection of the category of transition, which, though it is sometimes used as a synonym of change, in Italian is actually its opposite. A transition from one period to another, in one of which a series of factors have reached a point that produces a change so profound that it can characterize a new period, is a term that cannot be used to indicate slow, protracted changes that lead to another scenario directly, without tensions or sudden breaks.[117]
4. Seeking another identity for the Late Antique to that we can reconstruct through its specific economic and politico-institutional structures, and thinking we can find it in those aspects of modernity that seem closest to the climate of our own time, risk emptying it of meaning.

This short article aroused huge debate, which shook the general perception of the late-antique period, extending historiographic thinking enormously. Here I can list only some of the most significant contributions in the early phase of the debate. Starting from a review of Vol. XIII of the *New Cambridge Ancient History*,[118] Arnaldo Marcone gave an account of the new conceptions that were developing on Late Antiquity.[119] Averil Cameron reconstructed the cultural context in which Late Antiquity established itself as an autonomous discipline, and the range of themes that the historian must master if he/she is not to drift helplessly in the currents of ideology.[120] A Round Table on *Gli spazi del tardoantico*, held in Capri on 11 October 2000 and published in 2004, included contributions from Elio Lo Cascio, Glen Bowersock, Lellia Cracco Ruggini, Arnaldo Marcone,

[117] Giardina 2007, 29.
[118] The original edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History* (1923-1939) ended in 324, with Constantine sole emperor, thus avoiding not only the Christian Empire, but even the foundation of Constantinople, which were dealt with in Vol. I of the *Cambridge Mediaeval History*, edited by J. Bury. The new edition not only opened with the Late Empire, but devoted two volumes to the period: XIII, from 337 to 435, and XIV, from 425 to 600: Cameron, and Garnsey 1998; Cameron, Ward-Perkins, and Whitby 2000.
[119] Marcone 2000.
[120] Cameron 2002.

Aldo Schiavone, and Giardina himself. The title of Wolf Liebeschuetz's *Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (2001) deliberately recalls Gibbon's, to suggest provocatively that sometimes, in special situations, we urgently need to rediscover the concept of crisis between the imperial age and the High Middle Ages. Luke Lavan, for example, has shown that in Roman England we certainly cannot speak of transformation: the end of the Roman Empire there was a traumatic fact that coincided with that of the ancient city.[121] But we should also recall the discordant voice of Garth Fowden, a convinced advocate of a long Late Antiquity.[122]

The debate had not run its course by 2002, as one might expect for a question concerning just one phase, however important, of ancient history. This confirms that it had stirred up complex levels of historiographic awareness. For example, the first number of the new review *Journal of Late Antiquity*, edited by Ralph Mathisen, published three important articles on this question in 2008 (by Arnaldo Marcone, Edward James, and Cliff Ando), indicating that the debate had crossed the Ocean and still required adequate responses.

In this context of new historiographic reflection, one notes now a different atmosphere, greater sensitivity to breaks and discontinuities, as well as the need for shorter periodizations. It is now becoming clear that establishing periodizations and chronologies is not a dogmatic, sterile exercise, but part of the very process of historical reconstruction, because—as Croce wrote—"pensare la storia è certamente periodizzarla."[123]

Peter Brown's *Through the Eye of a Needle* (2012) may be symptomatic of the new atmosphere. The book analyses how the Christian *élites* appropriated the theme of wealth, developing a new way of conceiving it and evaluating its uses. While *The Body and Society* betrayed at times the effort of making a harmonious picture out of the reconstructed social *milieux* that were often very different from each other in time and space, *Through the Eye of a Needle* concentrates on the Western world between 350 CE and 550 CE. The author claims to be convinced that the specific changes in the institutions and the imperial economy, as well as those effected in some important Christian congregations by the great influx of wealth, favoured the development of a different way of conceiving wealth and its use. The volume is therefore full of references to economic structures and political events.[124]

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[121] Lavan 2001.
[122] Fowden 2002.
[123] Croce 1917 (2007), 94; Giardina 2012, XXIX.
[124] Brown 2012, XXI.

Certain constants emerge from this *excursus*. The periodization of Late Antiquity and the identification of the causes of the end of the Roman Empire were sometimes the result of unconscious processes in scholars, who were led to assimilate their own personal affairs, and/or those in the world around them, with the event that was the "archetype of every decline."[125] On other occasions, the interpretative models they adopt guide their choice. In general, those who give importance to institutional structures, the ways governments function, economic systems, and military events, and have an essentially Western outlook tend to contract the late-antique period, emphatically bring back the question of the end, making it coincide with dramatic moments, and see its beginning with the advent of Diocletian.[126] Similarly, those who emphasize culture, religion, and mentality dilate the times and spaces of ancient civilization, seeing it converge in Christendom, and, looking eastwards too, consider the peoples of regions other than the Empire in the strict sense, opposing the idea of decline and a traumatic end, like Bury. The Constantinian age, in many cases, is for them the beginning of the late-antique centuries.

In this perspective, though Jones regarded it as impossible, two religious changes—the transition of the Mediterranean from paganism to Christianity in 312, and from Christianity to Islam in its South-Eastern half after the battles of Jarmuk and Kadisiya (636-637)—have recently been suggested as terms of periodization.[127] I wanted to mention this proposal, because it clearly shows how even a thoughtful awareness in the choice of historical events to be considered as terms of periodization is inevitably influenced both by the ideological proclivities of the historian, and the suggestions he receives from contemporary, in this case particularly traumatic, events.

Given this context, the call for papers I launched for the specialised Theme *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate* at the 22nd International Congress of Historical Sciences underlined the need to produce a new

[125] Otto Seeck's famous theory of the elimination of the best as cause of the end of Rome was certainly influenced by the defeat of the German aristocracy in the Second Reich: Zecchini 2015, 31. Above all, after World War Two, the recent trauma of the Nazi occupation of France and the collaborationism of the Pétain government made him think again of the barbarians as mainly responsible for the end of the Empire. Not unlike André Loyen and Patrice Courcelle, Piganiol 1947, 422, thought that "la civilisation romaine n'est pas morte de sa belle mort. Elle a été assassinée", assimilating France to Rome, and the barbarians to the German invaders: Cracco Ruggini 1993, XXXV.

[126] As did Ernst Stein and A.H.M. Jones, followed by Demandt 1998 and 2007[2].

[127] Zecchini 2005, 69 and Zecchini 2015, 40.

evaluation of what we know about Late Antiquity, inviting contributions that focus on two general themes, broken down into more questions, that seemed to me central for the final centuries of the Roman Empire:

1. the definition of an age, and, in relation to Late Antiquity, the possibility of reaching this definition through periodization or by different methodological approaches.

2. the conceptual validity of the alternative between transformation and transition, to understand if the interpretative paradigm of transformation is really the only one functional to cultural, religious and social history, and/or if the same paradigm can also be applied to the systematic investigation of political and legislative structures, as well as the administrative and economic institutions of the late-antique Empire.

The essays collected here respond to these questions, analysing different sectors of history, using different sources, and with the guidance of very varied interpretative models. It seems to me that a more carefully considered evaluation of Late Antiquity emerged as a result.

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HISTORIOGRAPHY 1

CHAPTER ONE

EMPIRE AND AFTERMATH

CLIFFORD ANDO

1. Introduction

Contemporary research on late antiquity is both very robust and very narrow.[1] It is robust insofar as the development of late antiquity as a field of study postdates many transformations in the evolution of history into a modern science.[2] What is more, late antiquity has participated as rapidly as any field in ancient history in several emergent areas of inquiry (of course, this may not be saying very much): the history of gender and sexuality, as well as religion, peasant studies, labor history, slavery, and more recently law and society, as well as varied forms of economic history.

On the other hand, late antiquity can be described as very narrow for several reasons. Let me focus on two that are related. One is that our historical ambitions are now very circumscribed. The failure of history as a form of critique has gone hand-in-hand with a retreat into the study of particulars. The pastness of the past having been secured, European late antiquity has become but one among many exemplars of historically attested contexts for human existence. It is one ambition of the larger project to which this essay contributes to explain the final role that Edward Gibbon played in effecting this revolution, by tracing its earlier presence in European historical self-consciousness.

A second cause of the narrowing of the field derives from a radical constriction of the notion of decline and fall. Here I draw attention to one of the very great achievements of the third volume of J.G.A. Pocock's *Barbarism and Religion*, whose subtitle was "The First Decline and Fall."[3] To describe that work in my own language rather than Pocock's, the

[1] Surveys of recent historiography on late antiquity abound: see, for example, *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1.1 (2008).

[2] On the long history of Late Antiquity see Ando and Formisano forthcoming.

[3] Pocock 2003, reviewed by Ando 2004, 219–221.

ancient tradition of decline and fall once had multiple, imbricated objects of explanation and deployed an extraordinary variety of theories of causation. Most importantly, the original field of inquiry was not the monarchic empire of the first centuries of this era, but the republic and its empire in the second century BCE. Indeed, the earliest participants in the tradition of decline and fall are prospective—they sense decline, and anticipate fall—and become visible in the cultural crisis motivated by the fall of Carthage.[4]

The concern at that moment was that, the fall of cities and empires being inevitable, Rome, too, must needs fall, both as empire and city. In this logic, the forces that would destroy Rome existed in historical time *in statu nascendi*. In consequence, all great political and martial actions were fraught, as all operated simultaneously on two plains, the immediate and the existential, and the possibility could not be avoided that an action that conduced an advantage of the moment operated on another plane to the detriment of the city.

Here arises a second aspect of ancient and medieval thought on decline and fall that we have ceased to treat as a problem in either historical or normative terms in the tradition of decline and fall as we now understand it. Or, perhaps I should say, we so distinguish it as an object of inquiry that its relation to late antiquity is now wholly obscured and the literatures that advance this argument are largely no longer read, at least, not as contributions to the historiography of late antiquity. This is the argument whereby the collapse of city and empire was forestalled by the violent surrender of republican government and establishment of monarchy. In this tradition, the dynamic of republican empire was self-defeating: the dynamics of republican politics and the cultivation of elite and plebeian republican virtues were essential to imperial domination; but the conditions they brought into being so operated as to confront Rome with the choice, either to remain a republic and give up empire, or retain the empire and cease to be a republic.[5] The violence of the price they paid, and the magnitude of what it purchased, is the tale of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Not for naught is the first claim ever attested that Rome and its empire might last forever advanced in that epic's deeply ambivalent celebration of monarchy.[6] Infinitude was alike the tribute demanded by monarchy sufficient to its ego, and the justification one whispered to oneself as sufficient to its cost.

In this long tradition, the problematic of decline and fall takes on board multiple historical phenomena and processes and establishes them in

[4] Bertrand 2015.
[5] Pocock 2003, 153–235.
[6] Vergil, *Aen*. 1.278–9.

complex causal relationship. What is more, it is permeated by a deep ambivalence: the fall of one's city, the persistence of republics, the grandeur but finitude of empires, the limits of virtue. The necessity of their unfolding even in the case of Rome made their power as forces in sublunary, postlapsarian history incontrovertible. Not for naught had the tradition of *translatio imperii*, the interpretive trope of succession to empire, become current at Rome in the late Republic.[7] In that age, the question to be posed was not whether Rome was last and final, but who would succeed Rome, and when. To imagine Rome as final or ultimate, and the only possible agents of its undoing as divine, was to replace politics with theodicy, and history with metaphysical speculation. In the historiographic tradition studied by Pocock,

> the seeds of decline and fall were there from the beginning, and it was possible to relate the whole history of the empire as that of their latency and increasing agency; as if the empire at its most prosperous had been aboriginally engaged in its own decline.[8]

For the purposes of the present context, which is to say, an inquiry into earlier engagements with *our* late antiquity, a number of consequences follow from these observations. First, empire as political form was doubly condemned: the forces necessary to its acquisition had inevitably been returned to its seat, and the forms of domination that democratic and republican peoples had sought to exercise over others had come through destructive violence to structure their own lives as well.[9] To this was added a sense, however provoked, that the present diversity of Europe, to wit, the situation of oneself and one's people, was a product of Roman disintegration. The recreation of some imperial unity was neither desirable nor even imaginable, without violence that would destroy all that one sought to gain; and if that were so today, the conclusion could not be avoided that it had been true in the past, as well.

To put the matter in different language, Rome had had to fall to produce the European present. This was a claim both historical and moral. In this logic, Europe was not imperial; on the contrary, empire was something Europe had had to overcome. In consequence, the fall of Rome became lamentable necessity, and the explanatory task of historical inquiry, whatever its empirical basis, was not to explain rise and fall, or even decline and fall, but the trajectory that led from then 'til now. Once

[7] Fuchs 1938, 62–73; Swain 1940; Ando 2011b, 64–66.
[8] Pocock 2003, 27.
[9] For a modern essay in this vein see Ando 2011b, 81–114.

the problem is framed in these terms, two aspects of Humanist, Renaissance and Enlightenment historiography come into view: first, how vast is the landscape of historical writing that commenced with fall of Rome and carried the story to one's own day; and second, how varied, and how essential, are the assertions of *discontinuity* across that time period. A most radical and simplistic example might be a fifteenth-century gloss on a ninth-century manuscript of a Carolingian chronicle, the so-called *Annales regni Francorum*:

> All the Romans who then lived in Gaul were killed at that time by Clodoveus, such that scarcely one could be found. Also, the Franks seem to have learned the Roman tongue in those days, from the Romans who had been living there, which tongue they use up till today. As for what had been their native tongue before, it is not known in those parts.[10]

In this case, the prima facie continuity of social institutions and material substructure was made to constitute the explanandum, a radical discontinuity of blood, amounting to a wholesale swap of one people for another, being supposed. The history of Spain by Pedro Mexía (1497–1555), studied by Pocock, offers a structurally similar claim: contemporary Spaniards derive their valor the Goths, who hid from the Moors before re-emerging to reclaim the peninsula. The relationship with Rome was one of both rupture and superimposition, even as the possibility of Moorish admixture was foreclosed.[11]

Still another model was offered by Leonardo Bruni's (c. 1370–1444) history of the Florentine Republic. Having narrated the conquest of Etruria by Rome, Bruni mentions its two revolts—in the Second Punic and Social Wars—but otherwise observes that, as a result of conquest, Etruscan virtue had been enfeebled and it remained under Roman rule for 700 years. The next sentence commences in the fifth century CE (1.36–37). The Florentine

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[10] BNF ms. lat. 10911 fol. 7v: *Omnesque Romanos tunc, qui tunc in Gallia habitabant, exterminavit Clodoueus ut unus vix potuisset inveniri. Et videtur Franci illis temporibus linguam Romanam, qua usque hodie utuntur ab illis Romanis qui ibi habitaverant didicisse. Quae autem eis prius naturalis lingua fuerit, ignoratur in partibus istis.* Cited from Reimitz 2004, n. 72, 295; see also Pohl 2014, 408.

[11] According to Pocock (2003, 251), in Mexía's work "[t]here emerges a perception of history not to be expected of Italian humanists writing of their cities: the kingdoms of the west are barbaric in origin, and the barbarians, having overthrown empire, were the authors of new political forms which the history of empire and its *translatio* does not explain because it does not contain. The narrative of Decline and Fall takes on a new dimension."

people therefore had a continuous ontology but a discontinuous history, the absence of autonomous political action foreclosing the possibility of narrative.

In the larger project sketched by these remarks, I survey this landscape of historical, political and moral thought from Flavio Biondo (1392–1463) to Edward Gibbon (1737–1974). For this brief presentation, I want to focus on two figures at the end of the tradition, Montesquieu (1689–1755) and William Robertson (1721–1793), both writing immediately prior to Gibbon and each immensely influential upon him, though it was he, as I have said, who more than any other laid the empire to rest as the past that explained our present.

2. Montesquieu's Considérations[12]

Montesquieu published the *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* in 1734, in the decade between *The Persian Letters* and *The Spirit of the Laws*. It is a late and noteworthy participant in the tradition under analysis, not least because Montesquieu is nearly alone with Gibbon in dating the fall of Rome to the sack of Constantinople.

The *Considérations* present two arguments worthy of attention in this context. The first consists in Montesquieu's balancing of continuities and discontinuities across history. It is imperative, he urges, that people have a proper understanding of what is essential in human nature, in light of which one can abstract general causes operative in history regardless of context. Further, it is in light of these that one is to assess the ability of institutions and cultures to respond to so-called accidents, the contingent stuff of history.[13]As a related matter, the specifics of cultural identity yield before structural analysis of power relations. "Il n'y a point d'État où l'on ait plus besoin de tributs que dans ceux qui s'affoiblissent," he writes.[14] Hence, he observes, the depredations of the late Roman state as described by Salvian. He continues:

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[12] The text of the *Considérations* is cited from Caillois 1951, vol. 2. The English translation is that of Lowenthal 1965, reprinted 1999. On Montesquieu's engagement with Rome in the *Considérations* in particular, see Oake 1955; Krause 2002; Pocock 2003, 338–360; as well as the introduction to Lowenthal's translation.

[13] *Considérations* chapter 18, 173 (Lowenthal 1999, 169); see also chapter 1, 71 (Lowenthal 1999, 26) and 3, 80 (Lowenthal 1999, 39).

[14] *Considérations* chapter 18, 175; Lowenthal 1999, 171: "No states are in greater need of taxes than those that are growing weaker."

> Ceci servira à expliquer, dans notre histoire françoise, cette patience avec laquelle les Gaulois souffrirent la révolution qui devoit établir cette différance accablante entre une nation noble et une nation roturière. Les Barbares, en rendant tant de citoyens esclaves de la glèbe, c'est-à-dire du champ auquel ils étoient attachés, n'introduisirent guère rien qui n'eût été plus cruellement exercé avant eux.[15]

In other words, serfdom was a product of empire before it was a product of conquest. In this perspective, a change of personnel at the top of a hierarchy—of which ethnic change among the ruling class is but an example—was merely calqued onto pre-existing forms of domination.

As regards the Romans, Montesquieu elaborates in continuous sequence an essentially Machiavellian view, according to which an ideal republic seeks merely to persist (Chapter 9, p. 17 [Lowenthal p. 92]). However, there exist also republics forever at war, which must needs do one or the other of two things: perish, or "overcome all others, which were at war only intermittently and were therefore never as ready to attack or as prepared to defend themselves."[16] So long as Rome was confined to Italy, its practices of socialization and the normative power of its institutions—its "constitution"— kept its people, of whatever generation, on the straight and narrow.[17] (Machiavelli offers this argument apart from a moral judgment; Montesquieu, by contrast, is emphatic: Roman virtues were "si fatales à l'univers," "fatal to the world" (chapter 1, p. 74 [Lowenthal p. 29]).) But when once Roman arms traversed "the Alps and the sea," the power of these institutions failed.

The problem is, the choice to carry their arms so far afield was entailed by Rome's status as a republic forever at war, and had it not been such, it would have been a republic organized to persist, at radical disadvantage in respect of any rival organized for war.

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[15] *Considérations* chapter 18, 176. Lowenthal 1999, 171–172: "This will explain, in our French history, the patience shown by the Gauls in enduring the revolution which was to establish so overwhelming a difference between a nation of nobles and a nation of commoners. In making so many citizens serfs—that is, slaves of the field to which they were attached—the barbarians scarcely introduced anything which had not been more cruelly practiced before them."

[16] Lowenthal 1999, 27–28. *Considérations* chapter 1, 73: "une nation toujours en guerre, et par principe de gouvernement, devoit nécessairement périr, ou venir à bout de toutes les autres, qui, tantôt en guerre, tantôt en paix, n'étoient jamais si propres à attaquer, ni si préparées à se défendre."

[17] *Considérations* chapter 1, 74 (Lowenthal 1999, 29); chapter 8, 115 (Lowenthal 1999, 87).

> Il est vrai que les lois de Rome devinrent impuissantes pour gouverner la république : mais c'est une chose qu'on a vue toujours, que de bonnes lois, qui ont fait qu'une petite république devient grande, lui deviennent à charge lorsqu'elle s'est agrandie; parce qu'elles étoient telles, que leur effet naturel étoit de faire un grande peuple, et non pas de le gouverner.[18]

By "laws of Rome," Montesquieu means form of government. Republican government being inapposite to the world it had created, Rome resolved Machiavelli's paradox by retaining empire and preserving itself at the expense of its democratic republican form. But where Machiavelli was content to observe the bitter irony of the self-destructive power of Republican virtue, Montesquieu's historical gaze embraced the fall of Roman power, too. In this long perspective, Montesquieu's cold assessment was unequivocal. Rome was good at monarchy, too, but monarchy was insufficient to empire:

> Mais les divisions, toujours nécessaires dans un gouvernement républicain pour le maintenir, ne pouvoient être que fatales à celui des empereurs, parce qu'elles ne produisoient que le changement du souverain, et non le rétablissement des lois et la cessation des abus.[19]

> Voici, en un mot, l'histoire des Romains. Ils vainquirent tous les peuples par leurs maximes : mais, lorsqu'ils y furent parvenus, leur république ne put subsister; il fallut changer de gouvernement : et des maximes contraires aux premières, employées dans ce gouvernement nouveau, firent tomber leur grandeur.[20]

The logic is inexorable. The success of republican empire necessitated the institution of monarchy, and successful monarchy entailed an end to virtue

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[18] *Considérations* chapter 9, 119–120; Lowenthal 1999, 94: "It is true that the laws of Rome became powerless to govern the republic. But it is a matter of common observation that good laws, which had made a small republic grow large, become a burden to it when it is enlarged. For they were such that their natural effect was to create a great people, not to govern it."

[19] *Considérations* chapter 20, 187; Lowenthal 1999, 189: "But the dissensions that are always necessary for maintaining republican government must be fatal to imperial rule, their only effect being a change of sovereign rather than the reestablishment of laws and the cessation of abuses."

[20] *Considérations* chapter 18, 173; Lowenthal 1999, 169: "Here, in a word is the history of the Romans. By means of their maxims they conquered all peoples, but when they had succeeded in doing so, their republic could not endure. It was necessary to change the government, and contrary maxims employed by their new government made their greatness collapse."

and the failure of empire. To employ the terminology of Montesquieu's own title, the cause of the Romans' decline was their greatness. *Imperium sine fine* was a mirage. Hence, he judges late in the work, the empire's ultimate fall had for all intents and purposes been assured even while its territorial integrity remained.[21]

3. William Robertson and *The Progress of Society in Europe*

William Robertson was the most popular and widely read historian in the United Kingdom before Gibbon and a scholar of immense discipline and great erudition. In 1769 he published a three-volume history of the reign of the Charles V, whose four-volume seventh edition, published in 1792 (the year before Robertson's death) I cite here.[22] The entire first volume of that work consisted of a prefatory essay in three parts entitled, "A View of the Progress of Society in Europe from the Subversion of the Roman Empire to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century." Perhaps due to the general disdain of Europeans north of the Pyrenees for Spanish achievements, this essay—and often this essay only—has been regularly reprinted in the two hundred and twenty years since that edition.

To begin with, Robertson takes a number of epistemic, methodological and political stances that bear on his project. For example, Robertson allows that events and actions often have effects quite distinct from those foreseen or intended by contemporary actors. (Failures of percipience of this kind serve as the most common justification for Gibbon's ironic mode.[23]) Although, therefore, Robertson emphatically proclaims that the Crusades had many useful long-term effects, he declares pilgrimage to Palestine a "useless voyage" (26) and insists, regarding the Crusades overall, that "[t]he only common enterprise in which the European nations

[21] *Considérations* chapter 19, 179: "Ce ne fut pas une certaine invasion qui perdit l'empire; ce furent toutes les invasions. Depuis celle qui fut si générale sous Gallus, il sembla rétabli, parce qu'il n'avoit point perdu de terrain; mais il alla, de degrés en degrés, de la décadence à sa chute, jusqu'à ce qu'il s'affaisât tout à coup sous Arcadius et Honorius" (Lowenthal 1999, 178: "It was not a particular invasion that destroyed the empire, but all of them together. Since the invasion that was all but universal under Gallus, the empire seemed reestablished because it had not lost any territory. But it sent by slow degrees from decline to fall, until it suddenly collapsed under Arcadius and Honorius").

[22] Robertson 1792. On Robertson see O'Brien 1993; O'Brien 1997; Brown 1997; and Pocock 1999, 258–288.

[23] Ando 2008, 65.

ever engaged, and which they all undertook with equal ardour, remains a singular monument of human folly" (30). Robertson also allows that the complex causal relationship among historical factors is sometimes best clarified outside the chronological structure of sequential narrative (25), a position likewise endorsed by Gibbon.

As regards the Roman empire, Robertson like Montesquieu takes an essentially Machiavellian position. Rome conquered Europe by "the wisdom of its civil maxims, and the rigour of its military discipline" (7). But these assessments of its early power only rendered more salient the question of why Rome subsequently proved so vulnerable to the barbarian invasions. The answer lay in the revolutions in government and political culture set in motion by the very progress of Roman arms. On the one hand, republican government had proved insufficient to empire, and the Romans had had to change their form of government; and yet, "the jealousy of despotism [...] deprived the people of the use of arms" (8). At the same time, "the dominion of the Romans, like that of all great Empires, degraded and debased the human species" (3). In sum, neither the Romans nor their subjects-turned-fellow citizens continued to possess the virtue and vigor that had once been theirs, and this transformation was consequent upon the very pursuit of empire that had brought them together.

As a result, again like Montesquieu, Robertson deems the fall of the empire to have occurred in potentiality before it occurred in fact: "The limits of the Empire continued to be as extensive as ever, while the spirit requisite for its defence declined, and its resources were exhausted" (8–9). Even so, the destruction and suffering occasioned by the barbarian invasions and overthrow of the Roman state was extraordinary. In words echoed by Gibbon to a similar end, Robertson supposes:

> If a man were called to fix upon the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most calamitous and afflicted, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Theodosius the Great, to the establishment of the Lombards in Italy. (11)

Indeed, Robertson admits the scale of the disaster to have been so great that the available evidence fails to convey its magnitude, as the failure of cultural production has left the historian without primary material. Hence, Robertson measures the magnitude of the disaster by the degree of the rupture visible in social life when cultural production resumes.

> New forms of government, new laws, new manners, new dresses, new languages, and new names of men and countries were everywhere introduced. To make a great or sudden alteration with respect to any of these, unless where the ancient inhabitants of a country have been almost totally exterminated, has proved an undertaking beyond the power of the greatest conquerors.[24]

Whatever the peculiarities of this as a mode of analysis or historical observation, what I would emphasize is that it echoes in method and valuation exactly the judgment rendered by Robertson on the Roman conquest of Europe with which he began:

> During those long and fierce struggles for dominion or independence, the countries of Europe were successively laid waste, a great part of their inhabitants perished in the field, many were carried into slavery, and a feeble remnant, incapable of further resistance, submitted to the Roman power. (2)

In this way, Robertson exposes as ironic his summary judgment on the sequel to conquest, to wit, that "having thus desolated Europe," the Romans "set themselves to civilize it" (2). But across this trajectory, he does three further things worth of remark. First, he most emphatically clarifies and underscores the parallelism he might seem facilely to have drawn in his opening sentence, between the violence wielded by Romans against others and that wielded by others against them:

> Two great revolutions have happened in the political state, and in the manners of the European nations. The first was occasioned by the progress of the Roman power; the second by the subversion of it. (1)

Second, he aligns himself with Montesquieu in privileging forms of domination as objects of both historical inquiry and moral judgment over against any easy esteem for the grandeur of empire. Finally, he implicitly allows that the recovery of Europe after Roman violence might be understood as kindred to the recovery of Europe from barbarian violence,

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[24] Robertson 1792, 12–13; see also 66: "No custom, how absurd soever it may be, if it has subsisted long, or derives its force from the manners and prejudices of the age in which it prevails, was ever abolished by the bare promulgation of laws and statutes. The sentiments of the people must change, or some new power, sufficient to counteract the prevalent custom, must be introduced. Such a change accordingly took place in Europe, as science gradually increased, and society advanced towards more perfect order."

with the caveat that its long recovery thereafter might ideally be to a world without empire.

4. Conclusion

Even this preliminary survey reveals three important features of the literature of decline and fall of the Renaissance and early Enlightenment that preceded our own Late Antiquity. First, it was not simply hostile to empire; its hostility to empire sharpened its gaze beyond our own. That is to say, writers in this tradition uniformly gazed upon the imperial republic with clear-eyed vision. *We* speak of republic and empire as if these were constitutional forms[25]; for them, empire was a stance in international relations, pursuit of which characterized the Roman republic and led to its replacement by monarchy. Second, as empire—and Rome—were things Europe had to overcome, so important ruptures were attributed to the post-Roman world, whether demographic and cultural. At the same time, those ruptures achieved analytic salience in light of explicit avowal of varied forms of continuity, whether of social and cultural institutions or structures of domination. Third, participants in this tradition exhibit a strong reluctance to distinguish periods in the years they narrate. In part this is consequent upon the complexity of their individual views about the fall of Rome, and in part it follows from disagreements within the tradition on that topic. None of them regarded "decline and fall" a simple matter; the only firm date it might be assigned, 1453, did little other than affirm the extraordinary complexity that inhered in any notion of Roman and post-Roman. Even employing the simplest possible lens, that of public law, different regions became post-Roman at different times; and none of our historians believed public law a lens of sufficient perspicuity for his topic. But their reluctance to periodize also follows precisely upon their sense of themselves as post-Roman, that the trajectory of Europe in their own day had to be explained in a continuous arc that led from the fatal violence that Rome turned inward upon itself to the tenuous freedoms and stability each sought to affirm in the critical lens of history.

[25] Ando 2011a, 39–40.

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CHAPTER TWO

CRISIS, TRANSITION, TRANSFORMATION: THE END OF THE ROMAN WORLD AND THE USEFULNESS OF USELESS CATEGORIES*

PABLO C. DÍAZ

> Alaric being already in the vicinity of Rome and having besieged its people, the Senate began to suspect Serena of attracting the barbarians to the city; for this reason, the Senate as a whole, speaking with one voice, and Galla Placidia, paternal half-sister of the or, decided that she should be executed for being the cause of the calamities of the city. In fact, they believed that once Serena had been removed, Alaric himself would have to withdraw from the city, since there would be no one left whom he could expect to betray it.[1]

At first glance, this quotation from Zosimus might seem out of place in a study focusing on the fall of the Roman Empire, on the collapse of a seemingly perfect and eternal power machine, and on assessing whether categories of analysis such as "crisis" can explain the imminent outcome of the practical disappearance of Roman rule in the West. While this extract has been chosen almost at random, there is a vast amount of testimonial evidence that could be used to explain why, in the fifth century, the Western Roman Empire entered the irreversible downward spiral that would lead to its dissolution. However, the death of Serena allows us to contextualize the issue of analysis.

Crisis (ghrisè) is a Greek word that was incorporated into Latin and subsequently into Western languages, with its meaning practically unchanged. Originating in a medical context, it essentially refers to the

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[1] Zos. 5.38.1

period when a health disorder becomes aggravated, thus being a relapse in a quasi-chronic illness. In view of this, it is hardly appropriate to consider the Roman Empire as being in a state of crisis from, say, the rule of Marcus Aurelius to that of Anastasius.[2]

Serena was the niece and adopted daughter of Theodosius I, who in 395 arranged her marriage to Flavius Stilicho, *magister militum*. Serena and Flavius had one son, Eucherius, and two daughters, Maria and Thermantia, whom Serena later married to Emperor Honorius, their cousin, although both of them died at an early age. Until she came of age, Gala Placidia, Honorius' sister, was under the care of Serena, whose execution took place at an especially dramatic time. It was September 408, and Rome was besieged by Alaric and the Goths. Stilicho, who had effectively been fighting and negotiating with the Goths with varying degrees of success since 395, had been executed one month before in Ravenna.[3] The reasons are unclear,[4] but a point had been reached where aristocracy and the senatorial elite could no longer bear the success of an individual who did not belong to their exclusive sphere. Theodosius had appointed him guardian of Honorius, who had been elected Western Augustus in 395, when he was just eight years old. However, Stilicho was a barbarian, a Vandal, and following the death of Arcadius in 408, a rumour spread (one that may not have been completely false) that he intended to put his son Eucherius on the throne of Constantinople, and that he was using the Goths to his own advantage.[5]

The arrival of the barbarians at the gates of Rome was a way of further exerting pressure on the city to give Alaric the grants and lands he had been claiming for thirteen years. This was really an unfulfilled promise from when the Goths had been negotiating with Valens in the early 370s, and it had already led to the disaster of Adrianople. However, the senators, stricken with hunger and bitter against Alaric, accused Serena of calling him to her aid. Whether the allegation was unfounded is irrelevant.[6] Serena's death pictures the despair of a world challenged by uncertainty, and a society and political elite that were witnessing a drastic loss of power and room for manoeuvre caused by a barbarian power before which they felt helpless.[7]

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[2] Rémondon 1964.
[3] Zos. 5.34.
[4] Zos. 5.32.1 blames Olympus for making slanderous accusations against Stilicho.
[5] Zos. 5.30–33.
[6] Zos. 5.38.2.
[7] Zos. 5.35.5–6 states that when news of Stilicho's execution spread, it gave rise to rage and persecution of the children and wives of Germanic soldiers serving in the

Nonetheless, the Roman Empire and the barbarians coexisted in time. Border incursions were a constant, which the Roman authorities fought with a sophisticated defensive system that, except at times of internal political disorder, had proved effective for four centuries. Aside from its military apparatus, the Empire had based a large part of its economic system, its communication and supply network, its administrative structures and, certainly, its tax system, on a border that enclosed its domains. Outside it were the barbarians, the source of a whole imaginary marked by otherness, a view that was not without racism[8] or fantasy, where these peoples, especially those of the North, were pictured as disproportionately powerful and violent, constantly waiting for their chance[9]—a negative view shared in the late fourth century by both pagan and Christian authors.[10]

All this led to border awareness, the conception of an internal space of identity in the face of the feared external threat.[11] This dread seems reasonable, given the increasing barbarian pressure, especially on the river border along the Danube and the Rhine, as the Empire advanced. Frankish, Alemannic and Gothic names became familiar to the Roman population; the growing permeability of the border allowed for their incursions and constant raids, attacking farms and destroying crops, leading to the abandonment of extensive productive areas along the territory's border.[12] Military units were forced to seek supplies elsewhere, with the additional costs involved; provisions for the Rhine *limes* had to be brought from Britannia, southern Gaul or Hispania.[13]

Permanent units became ultimately untenable, giving way to the increase of intervention units[14] and reductions in the size of border fortifications. After 371, when Valentinian I, Valens and Gratian promoted the building of a fortification near Gran (Ezstergom, Hungary), in

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Roman army, causing them to desert and join Alaric's troops. Not only that, but Synesius of Cyrene (Syn., *De Reg.* 19) informed Emperor Arcadius of his concern about entrusting the defence of the Empire to soldiers who had not been raised in Roman traditions, and asked him to remove barbarians from positions of power. See Bayless 1976, 70–76.

[8] Cracco Ruggini 1968.

[9] Boatwright 2012, 34–64.

[10] Chauvot 1998, 383–459.

[11] Graham 2006.

[12] Amm. 16.4.1 and 4.

[13] Amm. 18.2.3 on grain obtained from *Britannia*. Remesal 2002, 298-300 on olive oil. See Elton 2013.

[14] Nicasie 1998, 13–42; Rocco 2012, 263–386.

Pannonia,[15] initiatives for defensive building were not clear.[16] Furthermore, these border posts stopped being exclusively Roman, to become trading points, and thus hotspots for border permeability. In 332, Constantine made a treaty with the Goths, although it was a trade pact that left the barbarians outside the border. During the second half of the fourth century, Rome was forced to accept the settlement of more and more contingents within their territory. Many of them arrived peacefully as farmers subject to taxation,[17] others were recruited to the army,[18] and others settled by force, as was the case after the Roman defeat at Adrianople.

In the 370s, Themistius' testimony conveys a feeling of confinement. Following a series of unsuccessful campaigns against the Greuthungi, Emperor Valens was forced to sign an agreement that is praised by the rhetorician for its being:

> an incredible spectacle not seen in a long time: Romans granting peace instead of buying it. There have not yet been rewards in gold for the barbarians, nor as many talents of silver, nor vessels full of robes, nor all that we have been formerly enduring, when we enjoyed a peace that was more costly than their attacks and we paid an annual tax that, although we were actually not ashamed, we refused to mention.[19]

Despite the rhetorician's laudatory intention, the text does not conceal the fact that peace was far from being an imposition by Valens. He had been forced to grant the status of commercial cities to two of the largest forts of the Danube, consequently paving the way for the free movement of people. As noted by Themistius not long after, this situation had been brought about because:

> The hardships of the garrisons had convinced their enemies that war and peace depended entirely on them, since they saw that the soldiers were not only disarmed, but most of them were also unprotected, and their bodies and souls were in a state of absolute collapse. They saw officers and commanders that had become very much merchants and slave traders,

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[15] *ILS* 775.

[16] With the exception of emergency reparations and fortification building in the context of the confrontations that took place after 376. Amm. 31.9.1. See Sarantis, and Christie 2013a.

[17] Modéran 2004.

[18] Liebeschuetz 1990, 21–31; Nicasie 1998, 97–116, believes that the barbarisation of the army as such began after Adrianople. Zosimus (Zos. 4.30) credits Theodosius for this initiative, while drawing attention to the unruly nature of the new troops.

[19] Them., *Or.* 10.135a–b.

> concerned only with how much they bought or sold. They saw how the number of sentinels dropped and that the service pay went to those that remained. And the ruined forts were bereft of men and weapons. In such a scenario, they had plenty of grounds to believe in the success of their raids.[20]

In his eagerness to flatter, Themistius states that Valens solved all these problems by restoring the defence of the borders, posting new soldiers and reinstating discipline. Nevertheless, in spite of certain specific initiatives, such as building the aforementioned fortress, in all probability the situation did not significantly improve.

Ammianus seems to have known that the increasing pressure exerted on the Danube at the time by the different barbarian peoples had been triggered by the Huns, who drove them from their lands, crushing everything in their path "like an avalanche of snow".[21] Rumours reached the Romans that "the people of the North were undergoing extraordinary calamities, the worst that had been reported so far. And […] many unknown peoples, driven from their territory by unexpected attacks, had scattered around the Danube along with their families".[22] Alavivus' group of Goths sought permission from Valens to cross the river with the intention of settling in Thracia. The Emperor granted this request in 376, expecting to benefit from the situation, especially through troop reinforcements.[23] However, abandoned to their fate, cheated and robbed by the officials appointed by Valens to arrange their settlement, the Goths quickly passed from elation to despair. They were soon forced into the sacking that devastated the Balkan provinces.[24] An intensification of violence brought about by the arrival of new groups of Goths soon led to armed confrontation. By the summer of 378, Valens, weary of the situation, decided to solve the problem by initiating a large-scale military campaign.

The defeat at Adrianople (9 August 378) raised doubts about the Empire's defensive capacity.[25] Only one-third of the Roman troops survived, thirty-five tribunes were killed, and the Emperor himself disappeared in the course of the battle. The Goths invaded Illyricum and arrived before the walls of Constantinople. Ammianus ended his report with the Goths' failure at the siege of Adrianople and their withdrawal

[20] Them., *Or.* 10.136a–c.
[21] Amm. 31.3.8. Heather 1995.
[22] Amm. 31.4.2.
[23] Amm. 31.4.4.
[24] Amm. 31.6.5–8; 31.8.4–10; 31.9.3.
[25] Amm. 31.13.1–19. Nicasie 1998, 233–256.

from the attack on the Oriental capital. This is the context in which his text was written and where the events that led to his conclusion took place: when describing the crossing of the Danube in 376 he had no doubt that "these men's eagerness and drive" would lead to the "destruction of the Roman world".[26] Around 390, the situation led the Bishop of Milan, Ambrose, to wonder whether these invasions heralded the end of times,[27] which was to a great extent a prelude to the main thought of Christian intellectuals in the fifth century. This idea was echoed by Maximus of Turin when the Goths, led by Alaric, arrived in Italy,[28] while simultaneously, in Gaul, Sulpicius Severus viewed the mingling of barbarians with the armies and citizens as a prelude to the end of times.[29]

Theodosius' negotiating strategy seemed to change the course of events and, for over two decades, to succeed in involving the barbarians themselves, now in Thracia, in the Empire's plans.[30] However, after his death, the Goths broke their agreements and, in 396, they launched an attack on Greece, while a contingent led by Alaric threatened the panic-stricken Italian Peninsula.[31] Alaric's advance was temporarily halted in 402, when he was defeated by the Roman troops under Stilicho in the battles of Pollentia and Verona, shortly before disaster struck Western Europe.

Stilicho could hardly contain the attack of the Goths under Radagaisus on the Rhine/Danube in 405/406, requiring the aid of troops from Gaul, which had already been decimated when he called for them in his campaign against Alaric.[32] In the summer of 402, following the battle of Pollentia, Claudian reminded the Romans that the peoples of Britannia, the Danube and the Rhine were keeping watch from their vantage points, waiting for the reaction of a faltering empire.[33] During the night of 31 December 406, the fears of whole generations were confirmed: the weakened defences of the Rhine were unable to prevent the crossing of a conglomeration of peoples, made up mainly of Vandals, Alani and Suebi (or Quadi). Before long, the Roman Empire lost control over practically the whole prefecture of Gaul. The process was certainly facilitated by its coincidence with the usurpation of power by Constantine, a Roman army

[26] Amm. 31.4.6.
[27] Ambros., *Exp. Luc.* 10.10. Courcelle 1964, 22; Lassandro 2011; Visonà 2011.
[28] Max. Taur., *Serm.* 2.17–24. Piazza 2009.
[29] Sulp. Sev., *Chron*. 2.3.6.
[30] Neri 2013.
[31] Courcelle 1964, 32–36.
[32] Mazzarino 1990 (1942), 85–101, and 116–128.
[33] Claud., *Get*. 568–573.

officer posted in Britannia, in 407/408. However, as a result of this, the disappearance of Roman power structures and administrative systems became irreversible.[34]

In 396, Jerome had already reported his feelings regarding the events that had taken place in Greece and, drawing up a diagnosis of its causes ("the barbarians drew their strength from the Romans' vices and sins"[35]), cannot but lament the fact that "innumerable and most savage peoples have invaded the whole of Gaul. All that lies between the Alps and the Pyrenees, enclosed between the Ocean and the Rhine, has been devastated …".[36] Jerome's text is usually quoted as an example of catastrophism, similar to Hydatius' picture of cannibalism brought about by the famine that followed the invasion.[37] Nevertheless, these bleak testimonies deserve attention.[38] The defeat at Adrianople and the ensuing events, with thousands of barbarians settling within the Empire's borders, was a serious blow to Roman self-esteem. In fact, the wedge between the West and the East that had meant the Goths' invasion of Thracia, Moesia and Illyricum, with incursions into Greece and Northern Italy, resulted in a split of the territorial unit that was greater than the administrative division between both parts of the Empire.[39] However, while the Western forces were under Stilicho's leadership, there was still a feeling of superiority. His murder in 408, Alaric's return to Italy, and his successive sieges of Rome, which culminated with its sacking in 410, together with the barbarian occupation of Hispania between 409 and 411, are where the sequence of events really reached its peak.

Returning to the suggested definition of "crisis", it seems clear that the events that took place between 405 and 411 marked the major crisis of the Western Empire. What ailed it? In the eighteenth century, Gibbon introduced a biological metaphor for the process of "decline" that preceded the fall of the Empire. The noun *decline* is currently used to describe "a gradual and continuous loss of strength, numbers, or quality", but in the eighteenth century it was applied to "any disease in which bodily strength gradually fails" and especially used for the condition of patients with tuberculosis. In the eyes of this English author, the weakening of Rome

[34] Ward-Perkins 2005, 63–83.
[35] Jer., *Ep.* 60.17. Ammianus (Amm. 31.5.14) also believed that Rome could not oppose the invaders as it had done in the past, since its licentious lifestyle had ruined the frugal tradition of its ancestors.
[36] Jer., *Ep.* 123.15.
[37] Hydat., 40.
[38] Lee 2013, 127–133.
[39] Mitchell 2007, 91.

was a result of its betrayal of the principles that had once made it strong, essentially those of republican freedom and military discipline, which were replaced by "the capricious rule of emperors", the effeminacy of its citizens, a loss of patriotism and widespread institutional corruption.[40] Gibbon held that such negative changes were brought about to a large extent by the influence of Christianity, whose transcendental beliefs had led Romans to transfer their loyalties from the Empire to their divinity. Even without in-depth discussion of Gibbon's emphasis on these moralistic approaches, it is clear from his works that, whatever the cause of its weakness (including Christianity as an infectious agent), the Western Empire collapsed under the pressure of the barbarian invasions.

There are many theories that are the subject of analysis and discussion to explain the fall of the Roman Empire, resulting in even more models from their random combination, but most of them can be reduced to two facts: internal breakdown and external aggression. However, while external aggression seems an objective factor, the internal facts are debatable: a combination of epidemics and a falling demographic growth rate, natural disasters, falling productivity, changes in the property and production systems, ill-managed monetary policies, mismanagement of tax revenues, inefficient military reforms, the strategic incompetence of emperors, the proliferation of child-emperors in the hands of incompetent or ambitious generals, inadequate administrative rearrangements… All these facts are ambiguous in their implications, and can be analysed as part of a process of change and adaptation to the Empire's needs, and they all have certain positive features.[41] However, the Empire collapsed, unable to withstand the pressure from the barbarian peoples. This is hinted at in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century historiography, although it was retrieved after World War Two by authors from different historiographical backgrounds. Piganiol, for example, argued that the Empire had been murdered;[42] Jones believed that its internal weakness was not crucial to its decline;[43] and Demandt claims that if the role played by the Germanic peoples were to be disregarded, nobody would be able to see what in its place brought the dissolution of the Empire.[44] The debate remains open.[45]

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[40] See Bowersock, Clive, and Graubard 1977; Jongman 2007.
[41] Jones 1964, 1025–1068; Bowersock 2000, 175–185.
[42] Piganiol 1947, 422.
[43] Jones 1964, 1068.
[44] Demandt 1984, 587.
[45] Wickham 2005, 80, sees barbarians as an essential part of the "catalyst that resulted in the end of the western empire"; Heather 2005, xii, views them as co-participants, although he believes that all they did was to take advantage of more

Researchers believe that the effects of the crossing of the Rhine in 407 were far more devastating to the structures of the Empire than those of the crossing of the Danube thirty years earlier. The collapse of the Western Empire (*Fall* in Gibbon's view) was sudden in most of its territories, certainly in the Atlantic provinces, and cities were left with no military protection, in most cases with no central government authorities, even without sound municipal structures, and those that survived did so in a state of isolation that made them completely ineffective. The real importance of these events is difficult to assess, although the year 410, beyond the symbolic value of the brief sack of Rome, is clearly a key moment in their development. In 418, with the treaty for the Visigoths to settle 'autonomously' in Aquitania in exchange for military services, Roman-barbarian relations reached a point of no return.[46] Aside from certain initial victories achieved through this collaboration, the Empire was unable to recover Hispania, and when the Vandals left the Peninsula and moved to Africa in 429, the process of dissolution became irreversible.

The tax reforms made during the fourth century had often been traumatic, and the initiatives of Diocletian, continued by Constantine and his descendants, required a period of adaptation. Thus, the desire to tie peasants to the land in their place of origin to prevent them from avoiding taxes was a double-edged sword, leading many to flee and others to seek the patronage of those who were powerful enough to avoid taxation.[47] Nevertheless, in spite of the riots in the Balkan area and the huge expenses of war, in the year 400 the Roman economic structure, including its tax system, was still operating effectively.[48] And as long as the tax system remained effective, since it was the lifeblood of all the Empire's expenses (army, administration, transport and legal system), unity seemed an absolute fact. Conversely, if the tax system were to fail, the Empire would crumble.[49]

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serious problems. However, further on, he considers (450–459) that the crises of the last seventy years of the Empire were a political consequence of previous invasions. On the other hand, Halsall 1999, believes that the barbarians were a symptom rather than a cause; Goffart 2006, 22–39, prefers to see the barbarians as the protagonists of a peaceful and protective process of integration, and he views the theory that the Germanic tribes caused the downfall of the Empire as insufficiently grounded (233, and 238). Lee 2013, xii, believes that to argue that the fall of Rome is a result of its confrontation with the barbarians is a simplification.

[46] Burns 1994, 247–279.

[47] Kehoe 2006, 163–191.

[48] Whittaker 1980.

[49] Wickham 2009, 74.

This is exactly what happened. The events that took place between 405 and 411 rendered the taxation machinery of the Western end of Europe useless, resulting in a drastic fall in overall tax revenues at a time when needs were greater.[50] Suddenly, the Empire could no longer afford to pay its troops, not even low-cost ones made up of slaves.[51] On the other hand, Africa was Rome's main source of food supplies, so that the Vandal conquest between 429 and 439 ruined the forwarding of tax remittances, income and food supplies to the great imperial properties. One of the immediate effects was a massive drop in population in the city of Rome, which had so far been fed free of charge with Africa's surpluses.[52] Although this is no more than a plausible guess, we do know that Rome was extremely sensitive to supply shortages. Claudian regrets that since "Egypt's harvests were sent to the new Empire, our only hope lay in Libya, which provided us with supplies painstakingly and with great difficulty".[53] In 397, Gildo's revolt in Africa left Rome "swamped by denying it its grain", in a state of "harrowing hunger" that resulted in "the scourge of the plague, graves full of corpses and many deaths on account of bad air".[54] In 409, when Heraclianus blocked the African ports to force Attalus to surrender, the city was once again prey to fierce starvation.[55] It is reasonable to believe that the lack of alternative sources of supplies would lead to flight from the city. However, the need to face a chronic situation might have also spurred on the search for new sources of supplies, or acted as an incentive to turn to trade,[56] in spite of the expense it involved.[57] Nor should we forget Genseric's treaty with Rome in 442, which remained in force until 455, by which he committed to pay the Emperor a yearly subsidy in exchange for the recognition of his conquests.[58]

[50] This was aggravated by the fact that it was necessary to lower the tax on land in those provinces that had been devastated by the barbarians. *C.Th.* 11.28.7, a. 413; 11.28.12, a. 418.
[51] Ward-Perkins 2005, 71.
[52] Wickham 2005, 34.
[53] Claud., *Gild*. 61–64.
[54] Claud., *Gild*. 17–18, 36–37, 38–40.
[55] Zos. 6.11.1.
[56] De Salvo 2014.
[57]Noy 2000 suggests that the arrival of immigrants to the city continued into the fifth century; Barnish 1987 estimates the increase in pig demand to distribute among the population at 20% between 419 and 452.
[58] Proc., *Bell. Vand.* 3.4.13.

However, the city of Rome was only part of the problem. The loss of Africa meant the end of the tax equilibrium.[59] Around 440, the state probably collected only 25% of what had been available on the eve of Adrianople.[60] Tax deficit became a common source of worry for the Empire. In a law created in 444, Valentinian III admitted "it is not possible to obtain enough resources from the exhausted tax system to supply either recently recruited troops, or former armies, with food and clothing".[61] Changes in wealth were so radical that in little more than one generation the Empire was forced to renounce its regular army, replacing it with barbarian federates.[62] Simultaneously, a significant number of those who held positions in the government bureaucracy lost their jobs or faced a dramatic reduction in their economic wealth.[63] The Western Empire was not able to respond, the occasional brief periods of stability were achieved at the expense of relinquishing its sovereignty over wide areas, and political initiatives such as those headed by *magister militum* Aetius between 433 and 454 were hardly enough to maintain control of Italy and part of Gaul. Attempts to recover Africa, which was crucial for the Western Empire to regain a minimum of dynamism and resilience, came late and proved unsuccessful.[64] Regardless of the treaty of 441–442, the lack of understanding between Rome and the Vandals was constant, culminating in Genseric's sack of Rome in 455, the Vandal conquest of Sardinia, and their constant harassment of Sicily and the Italian coastline. Majorian and Anthemius failed in their respective campaigns of 461 and 468, despite considerable support from Constantinople, and this was the final blow to an Empire that at that stage barely had control over one part of the Italian provinces.

In fact, the downfall of the Western half of the Empire was most probably a result of the combination of strategic incompetence within a constantly changing political context, and the gradual loss of territories and their resources. Except on rare occasions, the nominal emperors of the fifth century, especially after Valentinian III, were court puppets in the hands of their generals, rarely Roman, mostly barbarian. Imperial power

[59] Wickham 2005, 87–93, and 711–712.
[60] Brown 2012, 389.
[61] *C.Th., Nov. Val.* 15.1. See also 1.3; 4; 6.3; 10; C.Th., *Nov. Maj. 2.*
[62] Jones 1964, 198–201, believes that between 395 and 425 Roman troops in the West were reduced to less than half their size, while federates were paid with land. See Liebeschuetz 1993.
[63] *C.Th., Nov. Val.* 3, 4, and 10, aa. 440–441: privileges and exemptions granted to illustrious figures, palace servants and even the Church were cancelled.
[64] Heather 2005, 390–407.

dissolved like a sugar cube in water. No one seemed to notice when Romulus Augustulus was deposed in 476, or when his predecessor Julius Nepos died in Dalmatia in 480, still holding his claim to imperial rank.[65] Odoacer was in charge of day-to-day politics, a position formerly held by Ricimer, and when Theoderic the Amal settled in Ravenna in 489, daily life in Italy scarcely changed, mainly because, until his death in 526, Theoderic followed Roman government patterns as closely as he could.[66]

What became of the crisis? The archaeological mark left by the Sack of Rome in 410 seems almost insignificant. Without questioning the Goths' keen engagement in plundering, it is clear that their goal was neither to gain control over Rome, nor to destroy it. Nevertheless, the arrival of Alaric and his men in the Eternal City shook public opinion throughout the Empire, and the intellectuals of the time, both pagan and Christian, became aware of the symbolic significance of the moment.[67] Beyond the military defeat at Adrianople and the following loss of territories, the sack of Rome symbolised the disaster that had befallen a notion of power and the social group that sustained it.[68]

Nonetheless, the complex machinery of the Roman State also involved what would nowadays be known as private sectors, essentially aristocracy, in charge of the administrative structures and, to a great extent, of the army, as well as being the administrators of their own properties and, as such, part of the tax system as a whole.[69] For much of the fourth and fifth centuries, big landowners had become delegates of the taxation system. Mostly for reasons of convenience and, occasionally, because of the incapacity of tax agents, they collected taxes from their dependents.[70] Out of loyalty to the system they belonged to, they delivered the amounts collected to the redistribution centre, minus those resulting from excess profits and presumable corruption. Simultaneously, within a context of conflict, powerful aristocrats become guarantors of security, firstly of those dependent upon them, but also for neighbouring communities, and even cities; this was sometimes voluntary and at others forcibly imposed.[71] This pattern by no means contradicts the image of a strong *res publica*, since they were one of its components.

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[65] Momigliano 1973; Neri 1976.
[66] Licandro 2012, 53–82.
[67] Cracco Ruggini 2011.
[68] Lizzi Testa 2012; Valverde 2012.
[69] Wickham 2005, 57–59.
[70] Tedesco 2013.
[71] Salv., *De gub.* 4.30–31; 5.17–45. Schlumberger 1989.

However, when the imperial machinery began to retract, when complicity with its core began to cool, when the invaders undertook military and actual control, these tax-collecting and defensive units broke away, although they remained operative and even prosperous,[72] watching expectantly the development of events, able to reintegrate into either a restored tribute-based system or one based mainly on property and land rents. Of course, this was all part of a mixed system mostly developed by the Germanic monarchies that succeeded the imperial rule. While able to survive as self-sufficient entities in periods when there was no clear power, circumstances forced these big landowners to abandon their luxurious villas and move to the cities, their wealth no longer evident and occasionally losing properties. Nevertheless, most of them did not cease to administer their assets and remained in control of their work force, while in cities they soon monopolised episcopal seats that became influential positions of power. Against this background of double economic and political-religious hegemony, they became the interlocutors needed for negotiation with the emerging barbarian powers.[73]

Historians have tried obsessively to set a specific end-date, but they have equally searched for euphemisms to avoid it. One such is that the unity of the Empire did not crumble, but lived on in the eyes of the Eastern Empire, a view they justify by the attempts made in the sixth century to win back the Western territories. Reference has often been made to the legal unity that would mark the feeling of being an Empire where there was even room for most of the barbarian kings, who would act as delegates of the imperial power, seeking, sometimes obsessively, recognition of their role as managers of the Empire's fate. There are also theories that the Empire survived as an identity long after its political disappearance. This leads to the claim that "the fall of Rome is no longer needed",[74] and explains the historical events as an adaptation and response to certain circumstances, rather than as signs of decadence and collapse.[75] From this perspective, the term "crisis", whose explanatory capacity we have attempted to define, proves inadequate and even misleading when transferred from the field of political and economic history to other areas where war and power relationships are not so relevant.

Although certain background factors could justify an association with the '*longue durée*' definition suggested in French historiography,[76] the

[72] Vera 1983.
[73] Barnish 1988; Conant 2012, 130–195, for the case of Africa.
[74] Bowersock 2000b, 197.
[75] See Mitchell 2007, 1–13; Halsall 2007, 19–22.
[76] Braudel 1958.

proposal to transfer the focus of attention from the theological pattern involved in the *Decline and Fall*, to the idea of a transformation born of creative realities as the actual seed of future Western society, was conceived by Peter Brown.[77] The purpose of this new paradigm was to reconcile the breach-discontinuity dichotomy and go beyond the term "transition" which, questionable as it may be, was and is charged with interpretative connotations.[78] Brown hinted at the finite nature of the Western Roman Empire and suggested new lines of study where the separation between imperial and post-imperial reality became anecdotic.[79] To this end, he proposed a new chronological framework where Late Antiquity would go from Marcus Aurelius to Mohammed, and an inversion of Gibbon's assumption, believing that, rather than a disease that weakened the Empire, Christianity was the new element of creativity that would perpetuate its achievements. The analysis of the integrated force of conversion, capable of overriding local traditions and particularities, is based on the study of Christian sources, to which Gibbon paid no heed. Ordinary people become relevant and the emerging authority of ecclesiastical institutions vis-à-vis political power is analysed. This new framework paved the way for the study of social behaviours, mentalities, identity and ethnicity, religious controversy and violence, among other approaches. However, the fact that he often disregards contextual parameters entails the risk of decontextualisation.[80]

Within the pattern of transformation, we can acknowledge the fact that Roman institutions themselves were adapted and reused. Nevertheless, though it is easier to understand the nature of certain Germanic kingdoms from a perspective of continuity rather than of breach, and though we must admit that they clearly used the pre-existing Roman administration patterns, and though they employed the same administrators and jurists, who in the short-term (depending on the area) became occasional tax

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[77] Brown 1971.

[78] The term "transition" was mainly used in historical materialism to refer to a shift from a slave-based production system to a feudal production system. Insofar as the socio-economic realities and production structures of the late-antique world are currently perceived as more complex than the slavery/feudalism pairing may suggest, "transition" has become obsolete. For a transitional explanation, see Anderson 1974.

[79] Contrasting with this, Brown 2012, 385–407 ("The Crisis of the West in the Fifth Century"), provides a faultless definition of "crisis" and the clear feeling of the end of an era, though, true to his theories, the general idea is that when Rome falls it is replaced with Christendom.

[80] For a review, see Mitchell 2007, 8.

collectors, and though all this took place within a system as effective as the Roman one was before its collapse, everything had changed.

On the one hand, the political, military and administrative apparatus that had made up the centralised Roman State was replaced by limited monarchies whose motivations remained tribal for a long time, despite their surrounding courtly environment and the paraphernalia adopted from the Empire. On the other hand, and as part of the same process, the interregional trading system and the tax exchanges that had served the Empire's global machinery disappeared,[81] replaced by political units that worked as peripheral structures with local concerns and little interest in interaction.[82] While there may be reports of import goods in unexpected places, most marketing and monetary exchange channels were cut off. Monument building became an exception, even in religious contexts, cities did not disappear, but their functional nature underwent deep changes,[83] evidence of imports and exports is scarce, and sophisticated crafts were forced to wait for better times. The association of this loss of prosperity with the fall of the Empire is not fanciful.[84] Generally speaking, the post-imperial world fell to the most basic levels of economic simplicity, and literary culture was practically relegated to the realm of religion.[85]

However, this does not obscure the undeniable fact that the introduction of Late Antiquity as a chronological and analytical category has proved essential to overcome the impasse reached as a result of the sudden disappearance of the Roman world.[86] Most of the cultural events, including political culture, socio–economic structures, religious beliefs and their institutional hold, and even identity-based definitions, that unfolded over the fifth and sixth centuries, are rooted in the last two centuries of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, insofar as life went on, we might speak of continuity or legacy, in the same way as we can regard the concept of transformation in itself as banishing the idea of breach. If we subject this issue to interpretative analysis, the term "transformation" is undeniably legitimate,[87] although so are "crisis", "decadence" and "fall".

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[81] Bowman, and Wilson 2009, 3–84.
[82] Moorhead 2001, 248–270.
[83] Liebeschuetz 2001, 29–168.
[84] Temin 2013, 255.
[85] Ward-Perkins 2005, 183, states that living standards in many places went back to those of prehistoric times in Europe.
[86] See Marcone 2008.
[87] Pohl 2013, 3, defends the term as the most suitable for the numerous changes of the time: destruction and discontinuity, decadence and reduction, reform or recycling, experimentation and innovation.

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METHODOLOGY:
SOURCES AND PERIODIZATION

CHAPTER THREE

TRANSFORMATION AND TRANSITION IN THE ART OF LATE ANTIQUITY

JUTTA DRESKEN-WEILAND*

Late Antiquity differs from "classical civilisation" even when we can find in this period long continuities with the ancient world. To study such a long period one must be constantly aware of the tensions between change and continuity. Early Christian Art is a good indicator of such tensions. It is both old and new, and shows both continuity and revolution. Apparently there was no distinctively Christian art before the end of the second and the beginning of the third century, which means that Christians did not need Christian imagery or images that could be interpreted in a Christian way before.

It is the traditional view that Christian images began to appear in the second third of the third century in the Roman catacombs, first as single images that are included in a maritime landscape or in bucolic scenes. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that the origins of Christian art pre-date the catacombs and are present in different contexts.[1]

The first Christian image: The London gem

Gems stand for continuity and for "the new". The earliest known artefact showing a Christian image is a gem preserved in the British Museum in London.[2] It belongs to the group of the so-called "magic" gems: "magic"

* The English text has been revised by Richard Bates with the financial support of *Giunta Centrale degli Studi Storici* (*GCSS*).

[1] The earliest text referring to the existence of Christian images is a pamphlet written by Kelsos about 178 CE, which mentions images of Jonah and Daniel, although without reference to the context, Dresken-Weiland 2011, 64 with bibliography.

[2] Michel 2001, 269–291; Spier 2007, 73, nr. 443, S. 74f.; Harley, and Spier 2007, S. 228f. nr. 55; Dresken-Weiland 2010, 33–36 Fig.1–2; Engemann 2011.

here generally refers to incised images and inscriptions, which made the gems into amulets. These images and inscriptions reflect beliefs and conceptions that are expressed in magic texts and papyri; they are here conferred on amulets. These magic gems originated in Roman Egypt and were popular and widespread above all in the second and third century throughout the Roman Empire. The authenticity of this gem cannot be doubted, because it corresponds in size, material and workmanship to the standards to be found in this group of objects. Besides, other Christian images and symbols are also to be found on these gems. The London gem may be compared to other gems that can be dated to about 200 CE, according to their style, material and inscriptions, which are characteristic of magic gems of the late second and early third century. So it is about a generation older than the earliest catacomb paintings.

This gem is the earliest preserved example of an iconography that was to become the characteristic image of Christianity since the Middle Ages, so we should dwell on it here.

It shows the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. His name is given at the top: [ΚΥΡ]ΙΕ ΠΑΤΗΡ ΙΗΣΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΕ. In the gem image, Christ is tied to the cross, which has a T-shape. His hands hang down powerlessly. His bearded head is turned to the left. He is naked, and his legs are crooked slightly. This representation corresponds, as I demonstrated recently, to an ancient method of crucifixion.[3] This method of crucifixion was reconstructed on the basis of a skeleton discovery in an ossuary in Jerusalem,[4] dating to the beginning of the first century CE. The heel of Jehohanan (his name is written on the ossuary) was perforated by a nail 17 to 18 centimetres long, so it was not fixed frontally in the well-known

[3] Dresken-Weiland 2010a, 33–36.
[4] Zias 1996; see also Zugibe 1988, 74.

iconographic tradition, but must have been fixed somewhere laterally. The perforation of the heel fixing can be explained by the legs being placed one over the other or in a splayed position. The latter position explains the seemingly strange position of the legs on the London Gem.

A medical examination of the arms of Jehohanan suggests that the convict was bound and not nailed to the cross. Our gem in the British Museum also shows the hands hanging down. The binding of the arms to the cross may indicate that the convict had to carry the cross bar to the place of crucifixion.[5] Although the written sources are not clear in their distinction between the cross bar and the cross as a whole, the T-shape of the cross on the London Gem allows the possibility that the cross bar was inserted separately into the vertical element. Medical historians suggest that the way the arms were fixed determined the duration of the death struggle. It is clear that there were probably no limits to the arbitrary cruelty of those executing the crucifixion.

There are several texts that indicate that the convict was *de facto* attached naked to the cross,[6] as the London Gem shows. In the Gospel according to John (John 19,23–25), it is explicitly reported that Jesus' clothing was divided by the soldiers in four parts, and that they cast lots for the coat, which was seamless. Casting lots for Jesus' clothing is also mentioned in Mark 15,24. Another direct testimony is provided by Artemidoros in his "Oneirocritica" (second century). In the context of interpreting the significance of somebody dreaming of being crucified, Artemidorus explains that it has a positive significance for all seafarers, and continues: "It is also auspicious for a poor man. For a crucified man is raised high and his substance is sufficient to keep many birds. But it means the betrayal of secrets. For a crucified man can be seen by all. On the other hand, it signifies harm for rich men, since the crucified are stripped naked and lose their flesh."[7]

Indirectly, the disrobing before the crucifixion is confirmed by two texts from the first and second century, which emphasize that, unusually, the convicts were crucified with all their fine clothes and jewels.[8] It is clear that the nakedness added to the humiliation and shame of the crucifixion.

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[5] For arguments against, see Zestermann 1868, 40, but see also *ibid*. 35f.

[6] Already stated by H. Leclercq 1914, 3047, who indicates *Acta iuris pontifici*, 5, 50.

[7] Artemidorus, *Oneirocriticon* 2.53 ed. Pack 1963, 183; ed. White 1983, 127. See also Harris-McCoy 2012, 236f.

[8] Tacitus, *hist*. 4.3 and Iust. 18.7.

The gem thus illustrates vividly the violent and cruel death of Jesus. It is the violent death that makes Jesus interesting for a magical context. Gems with representations of the crucifixion belong to the group of amulets which aim at "regeneration and divine protection"; the latter is desired for life after death. The amulet character of the green-brown jasper in the British Museum arises from the inscription that frames the crucifixion. There are typical magic words like "Somamnôamôa", which consist of the repetition of three similar syllables, and anagrams, in which are encrypted the words "Iaô" and "Jesus". On the back of the gem, the inscription contains other magic words familiar from other magic texts. Their significance is not known. In order to obtain protection from the gem, the crucifixion is clearly recognizable and represented in detail. In addition, the material, the green-brown jasper, is generally used for images designed to protect and help in the afterlife.

It is important to note that the image of the crucifixion of Christ is first documented in a magic context. The interest of the image is in the atrocity and barbarity of crucifixion. We do not know who wore this amulet, if he or she was pagan, or a Christian with a penchant for magic. The gem was worn invisibly below the clothing, so that it could not be seen readily. Obviously, Jesus Christ and his death on the cross were widely known in the ancient world, perhaps giving people the idea of referring to it in a magical image.

Other Christian gems in the third century: "public" affiliation to the Christian faith

Of course there are also other Christian gems with new images that can be dated by their shape and by the form of the ring if it is preserved. They acknowledge the religious affiliation of their bearer when the gem shows the inscription ΙΗΣΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ[9] or the Christogram constituted by the first letters of Christ's name, the Chi and the Rho.[10] The use of these gems illustrates a tolerant public atmosphere in which Christianity was as normal as the belief in a pagan god or in Jahve.

Regarding the genesis of an Early Christian art, a passage from the "Paidagogus" of Clement of Alexandria (d. between 211 and 215) is frequently cited, which refers to images for Christian gems. In this text, Clement recommends as images for Christian gems the dove, the fish, the ship, the lyre and the anchor (3, 59, 2). Clement's proposal does not

[9] Spier 2007, 29f. nr. 88, dated to the third century.
[10] Spier 2007, 30–34.

correspond to the choice of images of his fellow Christians: they preferred, as the preserved examples show, an anchor flanked by two fishes, the criophoros, and the Chi-Rho-monogram. The fishes with the anchor is the earliest image interpreted in a Christian sense and can frequently be found in the third century as an abbreviated confession of faith. The dove, a favoured symbol in early Christian art, is only rarely to be found on gems before the late fourth century; the ship is relatively common on pagan gems, but rare on Christian ones.[11] The lyre is not represented on Christian gems at all.[12] Obviously, Clement's proposals on gem images did not correspond to the historical reality and the taste of his time. That is not surprising, as it was the laity who took the first steps towards a Christian art.

Other third-century Christian artefacts in everyday life

In everyday life of the third century, apart from the gemstones, "new" elements which refer to Christianity are rare. There is a well-known *graffito* in the so-called *paedagogium* on the Palatine hill in Rome, which was, according to the names known from inscriptions, frequented by slaves and freedmen. It can be dated to the late second and early third century.[13] It shows the crucified figure with a donkey's head on a T-shaped cross. To the left, a standing man, also in a short garment, turns towards him and lifts his right hand in a gesture of worship. The inscription reveals the *graffito*'s intention as caricature: ΑΛΕ/ΧΑΜΕΝΟC/ΣΕΒΕΤΕ ΘΕΟΝ. Obviously, the Christian Alexamenos was to be ridiculed with this image. It remains unclear if this mockery refers to the rumour, also known in contemporary written sources, that Jews and Christians adore a god with a donkey's head, or if it alludes to the asininity or contrariness generally attributed to donkeys.

A typical object of everyday life is a lamp found in Rome, today preserved in the Bode-Museum in Berlin. The lamp was, according to the inscription on its bottom, produced in the workshop of Florentius, which was active in the late second and early third century. It is the only one with Christian scenes. It shows in the middle the criophoros with seven sheep, above him the busts of Sol und Luna with seven stars, on the left Noah's ark, represented in the form of a box, without Noah and the dove or the raven; below Jonah ejected by the fish and Jonah lying beneath the gourd,

[11] Spier 2007, 52 nr. 310–315.
[12] Dresken-Weiland 2011, 64 n. 5.
[13] Dresken-Weiland 2010a, 36f.

with a tree on the right. The seven stars, Sol and Luna refer to the cosmic order and to the beginning of a golden age,[14] and the criophoros stands in pagan art for a condition of quiet and untroubled happiness.[15] When the shepherd is represented together with images from the Old and the New Testament, he may be interpreted as the Good Shepherd Jesus. Images of Jonah are regarded as the expression of the Christian hope of resurrection and salvation from death,[16] whereas representations of Noah convey more general ideas of salvation.[17] The Berlin Lamp shows that in the early third century there were individuals interested in Christian images. Only centuries later did Christian themes appear regularly on lamps, namely on lamps from the main producer, Africa, after the second third of the fifth century.[18]

[14] See recently Dresken-Weiland 2013, 53f. nr. 39.
[15] For the state of the research concerning the shepherd, see Dresken-Weiland 2010, 77-79.
[16] For the interpretation of Jonah-images, see Dresken-Weiland 2010, 96-100.
[17] Dresken-Weiland 2010, 287.
[18] Dresken-Weiland 2012, 235.

The transformation of the funerary realm

1) Catacomb painting

In contrast to objects of everyday life, a profound transformation starts in the funerary realm in the second third of the third century, with "new" images in catacomb painting. Although the catacombs play an important role in the creation of Christian art, they mark, above all, a certain level in the historical development of the Christian communities in Rome. This means that a) they have the means to acquire land and to excavate a subterranean cemetery; b) they are numerous enough to fill such a cemetery in the course of the years; and c) they have developed the idea of forming a community that wants to stay together even after death,[19] waiting for the Second Coming of Christ. The creation of the catacombs as cemeteries offering the possibility of dignified burial for all, marks, of course, the material appearance of Christianity.

The process of the emergence of Christian images was a slow one. Christian images were still rare in the third century: Reviewing the catacomb paintings attributed to the third century, we find in the second third of the third century, nine rooms in four catacombs with Christian paintings, and in the last third, six rooms in three catacombs.[20] It seems that it was the laymen who decorated their tombs with paintings. The clergy showed no interest in Christian images: in the so-called crypt of the popes in the catacomb of Callixtus, where the third-century Roman bishops were buried, no remains of Christian images were found. In the "Cubiculum of Orpheus", situated opposite the crypt of the Popes, and probably also a tomb for clerics, Orpheus, the Thracian singer is represented, but no piece of Christian iconography. Nor are Christian images used in the *Cubiculum* of the deacon Severus, installed before 304 in another region of the catacomb of Callixtus: in the back of the room we find only a decoration with vine branches.[21] These examples convey the impression that the leading hierarchy of the church stuck to traditional images,[22] and that they were clearly not interested in the new imagery.

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[19] Fiocchi Nicolai 2004, 381.

[20] Dresken-Weiland 2011, 65f. The catacombs with grave rooms with images from the second third of the third century are Callixtus, Domitilla, Priscilla, Praetextatus; and, from the last third of the third century, the catacomb at Via Anapo, Priscilla, Petrus and Marcellinus.

[21] For the localization of this tomb see Spera 1999, 123; for the tomb and its decoration, see De Rossi 1877, 44-49 Taf. IV, 48 for the painting.

[22] Dresken-Weiland 2011, 68.

This fact reminds us that the choice of a pagan or conventional decor can be determined by cultural proclivity or personal taste, and does not necessarily hint at a religious attitude.

2) Sarcophagi

The same is true for marble sarcophagi, the most prestigious and of course expensive[23] form of sepulchre, where Christian images appear only at the end of the third century. If a Christian decided before the end of the third century on an interment in a marble coffin, he (or she) chose a pagan sarcophagus, whose images were acceptable for cultivated and traditionally-minded Christians.[24] In the late third century, 15 images from Old and New Testament were represented on 23 chests and 41 lids, making a total of 64 known Christian sarcophagi.[25]

Tab. 1: Chronology of pagan sarcophagi in comparison with Christian production[26]

	270–300	300–330	330–400
Achill – Amazons	6	1	–
Apollo – Graces	3	–	–
Bucolic images	92	82	7
Dionysos/Dionysiac themes	10	–	–
Erotes	26	5	–
Hunting	101	69	3
Season	161	53	–
Lions	120	19	–
Maritime scenes	10	31	?
Muses	32	13	–
Philosophers	45	2	–
Private life	119	23	–
Vintage and harvest	55	17	2
Chariot race	8	2	–
Total number	788	317	12
Christian sarcophagi	71	463	325

[23] For the prices of sarcophagi, see Dresken-Weiland 2003, 76–80.
[24] Dresken-Weiland 2005, 124-126.
[25] Dresken-Weiland 2011, 66.
[26] Dresken-Weiland 2003, 64f.

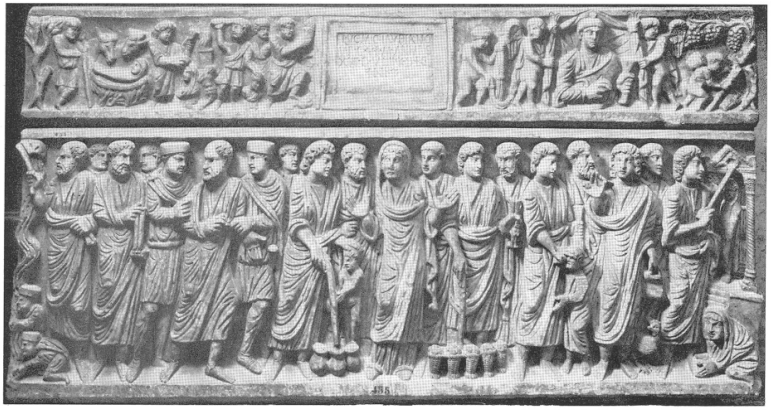
Production increased in the first third of the fourth century, when the number of Christian sarcophagi surpassed that of pagan ones: With 463 examples they are the most important art genre of the Constantinian period. Individuals who decorated tombs or objects of everyday life with Christian images, in the third century were replaced by financially strong and numerous buyers. This overview of the themes of sarcophagi produced in the city of Rome also shows that the transition from pagan to Christian themes was not a gentle one, but was carried out rapidly, once the production of Christian images had started.

New Buyers/ commissioners for a new iconography

To understand the particularities of catacomb painting and sarcophagus sculpture and Early Christian art in general, it is important to ask who the persons who ordered and bought these monuments were. The inscriptions show that buyers of early Christian sarcophagi belonged to the upper class more often than buyers of pagan sarcophagi in the second and third centuries. From the early fourth century on, marble sarcophagi with Christian reliefs were chosen much more frequently by upper-class Romans.[27] This marks an important change in the buyers of sarcophagi. Obviously, marble sarcophagi were favoured by people ennobled by Constantine; as social climbers, they were intensely interested in a traditional form of sepulchre modernised with Christian images.[28]

In the catacombs, aristocrats can be found only rarely, and it is very probable that those who ordered a painter to decorate their graves belonged to a "middle class". The difference between the two groups choosing interment in a catacomb or in a marble sarcophagus with Christian themes also becomes clear when we compare the choice of images. It is fundamentally different: whereas in the catacombs scenes from the Old Testament prevail, scenes from the New Testament are dominant on sarcophagi. As in Early Christian Art, scenes from the Old Testament are generally more popular than scenes from the New Testament, and this preference for Jesus' life and deeds is to be emphasized as characteristic.

[27] Dresken-Weiland 2003, 33f., 42f.
[28] Dresken-Weiland 2003, 46f. For the preceding historic developments in the third century, see Davenport 2012.



The favourite theme in Christian funeral painting, Moses striking water from the rocks in the desert, is changed on the marble coffins to Peter striking water from the rocks of his prison. On the sarcophagi, this scene becomes part of a Peter sequence, the most striking difference to the imagery of the subterranean cemeteries.[29] The other scene of this sequence is Peter walking between two soldiers and talking to them. It precedes Peter striking water from the rocks in his prison: Peter converts the soldiers who have arrested him to Christianity and baptizes them in his cell. This story is recorded only later in the Apocrypha, and only in outline; in the fourth century, it must have been a local, famous and orally transmitted story, which was far too well–known to be written down by anybody.[30] (On the sarcophagus from the National Museum in Rome in the illustration, these scenes are represented on the left side.) The scene with Christ, Peter and the cock is another favoured New-Testament theme on sarcophagi. The choice of scenes with Peter must go back to the decision of the commissioners, who determined the iconographic programme. The intense veneration of Peter by the upper class can be seen in St. Peter's, the pre-eminent church in fourth-century Rome. Here Peter is especially frequent in the images of the sarcophagi. Probably, persons buried in a sarcophagus depicting scenes with Peter expected his help and protection in the afterlife, and were expressing this hope for their future

[29] Dresken-Weiland 2010, 119–146; Dresken-Weiland 2012, 109–127.

[30] These texts are the *Passio Petri*, the so-called Pseudo-Linus, written down in Rome between the fourth and sixth century, and the *Passio* of the Saints Processus and Martinianus, composed only in the course of the sixth century: Dresken-Weiland 2010, 119f.; Dresken-Weiland 2012, 109.

well-being. The particular veneration of Peter may be explained by the self-conception and the self-image of the upper–class Roman Christians. Belonging to the elite of the city of Rome, they put the image of a leading figure on their marble coffins; they chose the image of the man who was venerated as the founder of the Roman community and as the successor of Christ. These Peter scenes adequately express the self-image and claims of the Roman upper class.[31] Interestingly, soldiers appear in these images, and thus reflect contemporary reality: in fact, soldiers had assumed a multitude of administrative tasks since the reorganisation of the public administration in the third century and, consequently, were present in everyday life. Their clothing of a short tunic and a cloth cap corresponds to their contemporary dress, and these scenes are a mirror of historic reality in Constantinian times.

This choice of Christian images does not mean that all persons buried in a Christian sarcophagus were in fact Christian. For the upper classes, baptism on one's deathbed was a current practice, so that a positive fate in the netherworld could be organized in the last minutes of life. A sarcophagus with Christian images may refer to such a choice taken at the end of life. Another explanation may be that the imagery, which frequently expresses the hope of life after death, was attractive in a situation in which the life of a beloved person had ended, bringing solace for the survivors. A magical, protective sense may also have been attributed to these images. Without a doubt, the change in the political climate in the age of Constantine would have played its part.

Other social groups did not fall into line with the prince of the apostles, for Peter is not often represented in the catacombs. The imagery of the sarcophagi, characterized by its predilection of New Testament scenes, the representation of Peter and the abandonment of traditional themes, was probably created by a theologically educated elite. In this they were unlike the clergy: until the end of the fourth century, clerics never chose marble sarcophagi with Christian reliefs for burial,[32] so the iconography of these sarcophagi was certainly invented and created by laymen.[33] During

[31] Dresken-Weiland 2010, 144–146; Dresken-Weiland 2012, 125–127.

[32] The sarcophagus of Bishop Concordius of Arles, Rep. III, 65 (late fourth century) was, as the iconography shows, produced for a couple, and must have been placed at his disposal: Dresken-Weiland 2012a, 172–174 nr. III 1. The lid fragment Rep. I, 141, Dresken-Weiland 2003, 122, 381 nr. E 41 of a …*pus episcopus* cannot be dated better than fourth–fifth century; apart from this, nothing can be said about the chest and its possible decoration.

[33] See Dresken-Weiland 2012b.

Antiquity, burial grounds were always in private hands, so direct influence by members of the church is not very likely.

So what do these observations mean? We have seen that the "invention" of Christian imagery started fairly slowly in the third century, and that it was only in the early fourth century that there was a sudden explosion in the number of themes, when the aristocracy opted for sepulchres in the form of marble coffins decorated with images taken from the new religion. At the same time, the catacombs, too, were amplified considerably; their great period ended in the 360s.[34]

The innovative character of Christian art

Early Christian art is highly innovative. It makes use of pagan elements, particularly of bucolic[35] and maritime[36] images, and creates at the same time a multitude of scenes with a new and unique iconography for which there are no known prototypes. Obviously, new contents also needed a new figurative language. Even the *virga*, Jesus Christ's rod, was a Christian invention. Without knowing the original stories, Christian images could not be understood: a non-Christian spectator would have no clue what the iconography of the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes meant, which is one of the most popular Christian images. It was, like nearly all other images from the Old and New Testaments, invented *ex novo*. Elements from imperial iconography were used to express the kingdom of Christ, but had no value of their own.

In conclusion, we have to ask why this evolution of Christian art took place in the catacombs and on sarcophagi. The grave is a private realm that is not controlled by any authority. The reason for the choice of Christian images may lie in the Christian hope for an afterlife, which was one of the factors that favoured the rise of Christianity. This hope could be expressed in images rather than words; Christian epigraphy remained in the overwhelming majority with fairly standardized formulary.[37] The sphere of images with their immediacy and ambiguity seems to be more suitable when facing death. This is shown by a very particular composition in the catacomb of Praetextatus in Rome, which stages the belief in resurrection.

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[34] Fiocchi Nicolai 2004, 386, 391.

[35] Dresken-Weiland 2010, 86–95 for images of the good shepherd.

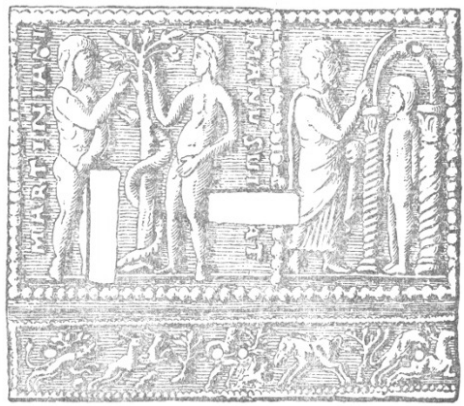
[36] Images of Jonah, integrated in a maritime landscape, are numerous, but mostly decorate places of secondary attention, i.e. in the catacombs the vaults of the intrados of a grave or its ceiling; on sarcophagi the lid, see Dresken-Weiland 2010, 118f.

[37] Dresken-Weiland 2014.

Adjacent to a representation of the resurrection of Lazarus, we find a rectangular opening, measuring 0.10 x 0.15 m. Via this opening, it is possible to look into the grave behind the wall, at the remains of the body laid down there and waiting, like Lazarus, for the resurrection.[38]

The slow Christianisation of objects of everyday life since the fourth century

On this side of the grave, in the decoration of the house and objects of everyday use, there was no such rapid transformation. The decoration of the house continued with traditional and pagan themes; pagan decorative sculpture was produced intensively in the post-Constantinian period.[39] Christian images are sometimes present in the form of mobile tapestry, both woven and painted, which have been conserved since the fourth century.[40] Obviously, the rich owners of Roman villas, which saw a period of particular splendour from the late fourth century on, stuck to the themes and the traditional iconography that had been familiar for ages. They behave like the commissioners of epitaphs, who prefer metrical texts and the echoes of poets, especially Virgil.



[38] Dresken-Weiland 2010, 228f. fig. 104.
[39] Vorster 2012/2013; Hannestad 2014. For the use of older statuary in Late Antiquity see Stirling 2014a.
[40] See Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, Flury-Lemberg, and Schiessl 2004. A few Christian themes are represented on other genera of portable luxury goods, see Stirling 2014b.

In general, Christian images appear in the fourth century on two kinds of objects:

1. They occur on metal fittings[41] of wood caskets, widespread in the Roman world, particularly in the Balkans (in the illustration, an example from Trier). Besides the Christian images, traditional and pagan scenes can also be found. These objects have not been studied in detail. Most probably, they belong to "middle-class" houses because luxury versions would be manufactured in silver. Their iconography indicates that these wooden boxes were used by men and women for different purposes to retain anything that was important for them. It is interesting to observe that these "middle-class" objects reacted quickly in their imagery, maybe because they could be produced easily and because they have no representative attitude. Silver caskets with Christian scenes have been documented only since the end of the fourth century;[42] they appeared later than the metal fittings of the wooden boxes, and they served as reliquaries, which means that they did not belong to a secular context. In the rich villa, caskets retained their pagan imagery, as the famous casket of Proiecta or ivory and bone caskets[43] illustrate.
2. They also occur on objects of everyday use, gold glasses, mostly produced in fourth-century Rome, which present conventional, pagan, Jewish and Christian images,[44] due to the different use of these objects in different contexts. A group of these gold glasses shows images of saints and Roman bishops and inscriptions with texts like "drink and you will live"[45] (here in the illustration, with the apostles Peter and Paul) or the wish to protect the sleep of the dead.[46] It has been suggested that these were used in ceremonies in

[41] In Ságvár, metal fittings were found in a dump from the second phase of the fortress between 374 and ca. 430, see Tóth 1995, 150. A metal fitting from Czsászar comes from a grave containing glass jugs from the second half of the fourth century, see Nagy 2012, 88f. The metal fittings of the wooden sarcophagus of saint Paulinus in Trier are dated to the second half of the fourth century, see most recently Weber 2015.
[42] Noga-Banai 2008 *passim*, and 155–157.
[43] See, for example, a bone casket in Cairo: Strzygowski 1904, 172–175 nr. 7060–7064 pl. 11–12.
[44] The fundamental monograph is still Morey 1959; see recently Vattuone 2013, 1241–1250.
[45] Morey 1959, nr. 102 ("zeses"), 344 ("pie zeses").
[46] Morey 1959, nr. 235 (*Petrus cum tuo somne*); Lega 2012, 265f. fig.1.

honour of the dead; the saints represented were expected to help the deceased in the time between death and resurrection. Here, once again, it is the cultic context that determines the choice of the imagery. As for the other scenes from the Old and the New Testament, it is possible that they were presents, like the examples with portraits and family images, and also used for drinking.

3. Images of the Old and New Testament occur now and then on gems,[47] sometimes in a very personal sphere, where they may express faith as well as the hope to be protected by these images. They continued to be produced until the end of Antiquity.

This short *tour d'horizon* on Christian images makes clear that in the fourth century a Christian art is rare in the private realm. It only appears when the objects have a function. They refer to the hope of afterlife in the grave and may also have had magical aspects. In the course of the transition and transformation of Late Antiquity, Christian images conquered the graves in the fourth century and gradually disappeared in the fifth century. The places and the customs of burial had changed. The inhumations took place in churches and under a plaque, possibly equipped with an inscription. The inscription of the epitaph becomes the funerary monument *par excellence*. In the future, Christian images would have their places in churches and on liturgical objects.

[47] Spier 2007, 63–75, nr. 410–447.

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CHAPTER FOUR

DEFINING LATE ANTIQUITY THROUGH EPIGRAPHY?

IGNAZIO TANTILLO[1]

In his prodigious work on verse dedications for late-antique governors and imperial officials (*Hellenica* IV Paris 1948, 108–110), Louis Robert suggested we define le *Bas-Empire* in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean as the period characterized by a very peculiar epigraphic style, distinct from previous styles, though remaining refined and sophisticated. Robert stressed the unity and originality of this style—whose life-span extended from the late third to the sixth century—and observed the correspondence existing between the time limits of its diffusion and the "coupures chronologiques dans les institutions et la civilisation." This was a step forward from the empirical and negative definition of late inscriptions, which were generally identified only by the poor quality of their realization, and connected to the general decline of written culture, as well as to social and political degeneration.

Louis Robert perceived a correspondence between a period already defined in historical works as different from the previous and successive ones, and the transformation of a specific custom that concerned the social and political life of later Roman cities in the East: the habit of setting up statues. If he did not actively periodize, he nonetheless successfully contributed to the identification and recovery of this historical phase.

As we shall see later, Robert's was an unrepeated exploit, unparalleled in other sub-disciplines of ancient epigraphy. Still, the huge debate that eventually developed around the definition of the last phase of antiquity also involved epigraphy and epigraphists. Epigraphic studies are a very active sector of scholarship. So what has their role been in shaping the concept of Late Antiquity? How did they contribute to periodizing it? How

[1] The English text has been revised by Richard Bates with the financial support of the *Giunta Centrale per gli Studi Storici* (*GCSS*).

have the boundaries between classical epigraphy, Christian epigraphy, mediaeval epigraphy in the West, and Byzantine epigraphy in the East shifted in the last fifty years?

My paper aims at investigating at least some of the fundamental methodological and historiographical issues connected to these topics. For obvious reasons I do not claim to offer an exhaustive overview, nor is that my intention: some relevant topics will not be addressed, others will be treated sketchily, and only a small, select bibliography will be provided.

In epigraphic studies, the problem of Late Antiquity first emerged, indirectly, as part of the practical problem of setting boundaries between the classical and the mediaeval world.

In 1847, Theodor Mommsen submitted his project for a general collection of Latin inscriptions, the future *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, and explained its guidelines in detail. The very first questions concerned the nature of the evidence to be collected and the chronology:

> Die Sammlung soll alle römischen Inschriften umfassen. Aber wo hören diese auf und wo fangen die mittelalterlichen an?
> [The collection should include all the Roman Inscriptions. But where do these stop and where do the mediaeval ones begin?]

Mommsen resumed his points in half a page as follows: he argued that a clear-cut chronological frontier could not be traced, and accepted the proposal already put forward by French scholars to include inscriptions down to the end of the sixth century, in order to ensure the publication of all the inscriptions with consular and post–consular dates. In cases of ambiguity, the choice should be left to the personal sensitivity of each editor, an empirical principle followed by the recommendation: better to include than reject. The Christian inscriptions would also be included: they were not so many outside Rome, and the Volume VI of the *CIL* did not contain them, as G.B. De Rossi was preparing a special *corpus*, the *ICUR*.[2]

[2] Mommsen (1847) 1900, 523: "Die Sammlung soll alle römischen Inschriften umfassen. Aber wo hören diese auf und wo fangen die mittelalterlichen an? Einigermaßen willkürlich ist jede Zeitgrenze; nicht unzweckmäßig indes haben die Franzosen dafür das Ende des sechsten Jahrhunderts n.Chr. festgestellt, was sich besonders dadurch empfiehlt, daß die Konsulate, die vollständig zu geben wünschenswerth ist, um diese Zeit ganz aufhören. Bei den nicht chronologisch bestimmbaren Inschriften ist freilich dem Takt der Herausgeber alles überlassen. Man hat die Ansicht geäußert, daß aus der vollständigen Sammlung der lateinischen Inschriften doch die christlichen wegbleiben könnten. Es ist indes nicht abzusehen, weshalb man gegen diese, die doch ebenso gut römische

Let us return for a moment to Mommsen's chronological choice and the reasons for it. His allusion to "die Franzosen" refers to the French project for a universal collection of Latin inscriptions, the most important and ambitious enterprise of those that had been proposed in previous years by various scholars with similar purposes.[3] It was initiated in 1843 by the Minister Villemain (himself educated as a classicist), and abandoned in 1846 when Villemain left office.[4] A special commission—composed of epigraphists, philologists and historians—had been created. As early as August 1843, the young *secrétaire* of this commission, Emile Egger was able to send an official report in which he presented the results of the preliminary work and replied to the request made by the Minister himself, who wanted to confine the field of inquiry to "proper antiquity" (former proposals included mediaeval inscriptions). Some resemblances with Mommsen's plan can be detected in Egger's report (Mommsen had been named *correspondant étranger* of the French project in 1844 and in the autumn of the same year, during his stay in Paris, had met Egger, who informed him about the progress of the Project). For instance:

Inschriften und für manches der wichtigsten Resultate eines C.I.L., wie z.B. für die Konsularfasten, Hauptquelle sind, ein Exceptionalgesetz in Anwendung bringen will. Das soll indes nicht geleugnet werden, daß diese Klasse von Inschriften mehr als alle andern arm ist an Resultaten und Interesse, daß ihre Behandlung Kenntnisse und Studien voraussetzt, die von den sonst erforderlichen unendlich weit abliegen und mehr von dem Theologen als von dem Philologen und Juristen erwartet werden können , und daß die Willkür und Inkorrektheit der Paläographie dieser Inschriften unglaubliche und durch nichts vergoltene Druckschwierigkeiten verursachen wird. In Erwägung dieser Umstände ist es ein günstiger Zufall, daß gerade jetzt Pius IX. dem Scrittore der Vaticana Cav. Rossi die Mittel zu Gebote gestellt hat zur Herausgabe seiner Sammlung der sämtlichen christlichen Inschriften der Stadt Rom, die mit Benutzung der großen schriftlichen Vorarbeiten Marini's und der reichen Sammlungen des Vaticans gearbeitet ist und ein brauchbares Werk zu werden verspricht. Es ist zu erwarten, daß dasselbe früher erscheint, als ein C. I. L. zu Stande gebracht sein kann, so daß es letzterem entweder als werthvolle Vorarbeit, oder vielleicht selbst als integrierender Theil wird dienen können. Die christlichen Inschriften außerhalb Rom, die diese Sammlung nicht umfaßt, sind nicht zahlreich und nur auf verhältnismäßig wenige Städte beschränkt, so daß deren Redaktion, namentlich wenn die Hauptmasse der christlichen Inschriften schon bearbeitet vorliegt, wenig Schwierigkeiten machen wird."

[3] As far as France is concerned, Villemain's project was preceded by those of Le Bas and Mérimée.

[4] Reinach 1914, 329–330; Scheid 1982, 337–353; Gran-Aymerich, and von Ungern-Sternberg 2012, 29.

> A cet égard, votre intention déjà exprimée était de vous renfermer dans l'antiquité proprement dite, et d'exclure au moins provisoirement le moyen âge. Mais où finit l'antiquité, où commence le moyen âge?
> [In this regard, you had already expressed your intention to stick to proper Antiquity, and to exclude, at least for the moment, the Middle Ages. But when does Antiquity finish, and when do the Middle Ages begin?]

The commission agreed that it was impossible, and unreasonable, to stop at CE 476: most of the world of the sixth century (Constantinople under Justinian, Ostrogothic Italy) was still "Roman" from a social and cultural, if not institutional and juridical, point of view. The collection should thus have embraced all the inscriptions dating to the sixth century. Individual editors would have the choice of including dubious cases, especially if they could provide evidence for ancient Roman times.[5]

[5] Egger 1843, 591–592: "Le comité choisi par vous au sein de la commission d'épigraphie [this is one of the very first occurrences of the word: Favreau (1969) 1995, 2 with n. 4] latine pour proposer le plan, l'ordre, les principales divisions et la forme d'exécution du Recueil confié à cette commission, avait d'abord à déterminer les limites chronologiques de l'ouvrage. A cet égard, votre intention déjà exprimée était de vous renfermer dans l'antiquité proprement dite, et d'exclure au moins provisoirement le moyen âge. Mais où finit l'antiquité, où commence le moyen âge ? La chute de Romulus Augustule et la fondation des royautés barbares semblent d'abord marquer une époque précise ; et le comité s'y arrêtait volontiers. Vos nouvelles observations, Monsieur le Ministre, appuyées dans le sein même de la commission par de graves autorités, ont bientôt fait reconnaître qu'il était dangereux en pareille matière de fixer un millésime et de juger l'état social des peuples d'après le nom de leurs chefs. Au sixième siècle, Justinien conserve encore sur le trône de Constantinople le titre de consul, dernier souvenir de la République qui survit ainsi à la ruine de l'empire d'Occident. Au sixième siècle, le Goth Théodoric est encore un empereur romain, qui s'entoure de toutes les formalités de la législation et de la chancellerie romaine; et, plus tard, quand les Barbares négligent de contrefaire ainsi les vaincus, la société qu'ils gouvernent, en se mêlant à elle par les intérêts de la conquête et les liens de la famille, n'est pas pour cela subitement transformée. Combien de temps il a fallu au christianisme pour régénérer les mœurs et éteindre les vielles superstitions; combien de temps la société reste païenne, malgré l'active influence du gouvernement épiscopal et de la morale évangélique! Or si le Recueil projeté doit servir à contrôler, à compléter par le témoignage des inscriptions l'histoire entière, l'histoire sociale et domestique du monde romain, on ne peut le fermer à l'avènement d'Odoacre ou à la mort de Théodoric. Il vaut mieux simplement désigner pour limite la fin du sixième siècle, en permettant aux rédacteurs de recueillir, même au delà de cette date, toute inscription qui reproduirait quelque chose de la vie romaine. Ainsi nos recherches s'arrêteront sur cette limite quelquefois indécise, mais ordinairement appréciable où le monde n'est plus

Two main differences: in the French project the problem of Christian inscriptions is not explicitly addressed, and the choice of confining the collection to the end of the sixth century is justified on social and historical grounds, while Mommsen shows a more pragmatic and formalistic approach, without resorting to "la Grande histoire." In both projects, wide-ranging autonomy is programmatically granted to editors of single volumes about including or excluding dubiously dated stones.

The principles set by Mommsen have dominated the epigraphic sciences uncontested. He himself repeated and summarized them in the famous prefatory letter to Bartolomeo Borghesi, published in the *Inscriptiones regni Neapolitani Latinae* in 1852 (p. VII) and reproduced in *CIL* IX and *CIL* X, p. VII (1883), as well as in the *praefatio* of *CIL* III (1873). These principles were reaffirmed in similar words by individual editors of the *CIL* and other epigraphic collections, and by authors who dealt with epigraphic projects.[6] They have not been discussed since then. It is quite striking to note that in the great majority of manuals of classical epigraphy the problem of the discipline's chronological boundaries is either not discussed at all or very rapidly alluded to: from the most famous of them all, Cagnat's *Cours d'Epigraphie Latine*, to the most recent ones.[7]

Let us now focus on two more issues. Once the broad time-span was determined, Mommsen did not consider any internal subdivision of the evidence useful, apart from the *inscriptiones antiquissimae* (from the origins to the death of Julius Caesar), which would form a separate volume. The only real exception is the *CIL* VI (first volume 1876), where inscriptions mentioning magistrates are arranged by a single chronological principle into: (a) *Inscriptiones ordinis senatorii ab Augusto ad Diocletianum*, (b) *inscriptiones hominum ordinis equestris*, and (c) *inscriptiones magistratuum post Diocletianum.* This division (which apparently had not been envisaged in 1847) is essentially due to the large numbers of urban dedications to late-Roman senators and office-holders and, more than this, to the transformations in public functions and careers resulting from the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine. It is significant that Henzen does not feel the need to justify this choice in his *praefatio* to Volume VI. The

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romain que par l'usage toujours perpétué de la langue latine".

[6] Waltzing 1892, 78: "[…] on va jusqu'à la fin du VIe siècle; c'est là que finissent les fastes consulaires […] pour les textes non datés, leur âge peut être douteuse: dans ce cas on a préféré les admettre pour ne pas risquer de les rejeter à tort. Les inscriptions chrétiens sont reçues; rattachées à la ville d'origine, elles sont rejetées à la fin, comme étant les plus récentes."

[7] No mention of chronological limits can be found in Buonopane 2009; Andreu Pintado 2009; Lassère 2011; Cooley 2012.

epigraphy of the late-antique aristocracy of Rome from the age of Diocletian to the fifth century and beyond is thus accessible in just one, albeit the most important, volume of the *CIL*: but this is not a consequence of the identification of a late-Roman epigraphy.[8]

Second issue: Christian epigraphy. As observed, the original project was to exclude only the urban Christian inscriptions, as they were about to be published by De Rossi, and so it was. Actually, Christian inscriptions were also excluded in two other volumes: *CIL* II (1869) collecting inscriptions from the provinces of the Iberian Peninsula, and *CIL* VII (1873), containing the inscriptions of Britain. Both were edited by the same scholar, Emil Hübner, who eventually published in 1871 the *Inscriptiones Hispaniae Christianae* and in 1876 the *Inscriptiones Britanniae Christianae*.

This fact should not be emphasised. Hübner (as explained in his *praefationes* to the aforementioned volumes) had operated according to the usual principles, gathering together Christian and secular inscriptions. Only later did he decide to separate them: for Spain, because he thought that most Christian inscriptions belonged to the Visigothic period (i.e. they were seventh-century)[9] while the particular quality of the very different evidence in Britain made it difficult to date.[10] In other words, *CIL* II and VII are exceptional cases, which do not undermine the guiding principles

[8] Thus, inscriptions belonging to other categories—for example dedications to deities and emperors—and mentioning late Roman senators are listed and discussed according to the standard principles.

[9] In the new series of *CIL* II, Christian inscriptions up to 711 (Arab conquest) are now included.

[10] Hübner 1871, XXVI: "verbo denique moneo Christianos Hispaniae titulos, quos collegi, cum ad Visigothorum fere tempore pertineant, in hoc volumine ex lege sillogae academicae universa non proponi; mox autem alio loco eos proponero in animo est." Similarly Hübner 1876, I: "Titulos vero sepulcrales hominum christianorum atque operum publicorum privatoruinve a christianis factorum honorarios vel dedicatorios quaeque similia alibi inveniuntur inde a saeculo fere quarto medio litteris mandata frustra in Britannia quaesiveris. At vero ibi quoque, ut in Hispania accidit, peculiare quoddam monumentorum genus in iocum titulorum illorum cessit. In eis enim potissimum insulae regionibus, in quibus labante iam potestate Romanorum post barbarorum incursiones cum fide christiana etiam sermonis Latini usus servatus est, reperta sunt monumenta non pauca sepulcralia maximam partem, quae cum ab Romanae aetatis titulis christianis omnino diversa sint, in syllogen inscriptionum Britanniae Latinarum, quam septimum corporis inscriptionum Latinarum Berolinensis volumen continet a me editum consilio et auctoritate academiae regiae Borussicae a. MDCCCLXXIII, recipi non potuerunt; ut ibi monui suis locis."

of the collection.[11] It is useful to insist on the fact that Mommsen preferred not to separate secular and Christian epigraphy. Nor did his colleagues working on the Greek evidence: though the Christian inscriptions in the old *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum* were published in a separate section of Volume IV by Adolf Kirchhoff in 1859, they were, albeit not systematically, included in the volumes of *CIG* successors, the *Inscriptiones Graecae*, the *Tituli Asiae Minoris*, the *Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien* …

Things were more complicated for the Christian epigraphists. Modern Christian epigraphy was founded by Giovanni Battista De Rossi (and by Edmond-Frédéric Le Blant in France). De Rossi worked closely with his classicist colleagues, and was actively involved in the project of the *CIL*. In some ways, being part of this process of reshaping epigraphies made it more difficult for him to isolate and find a suitable place for his discipline.

From their very origin (from the anonymous compiler of the Einsiedeln Code to the sixteenth century and beyond), Christian inscriptions had been collected jointly with classical and even later ones. The problem was thus to define and divide.[12] Christian inscriptions, says De Rossi, are those *quae a Christianis religionis causa positae sunt* and not those which, albeit set up or commissioned by Christian individuals, concern the secular sphere (e.g. the dedication of a bridge by a Christian emperor). And what about the period? The starting-point was obviously the very first documents of the new faith on stone, while, for the point of arrival, De Rossi decided not to go beyond the end of the sixth century, which he saw as a sort of borderline: *is veteris aevi et rei epigraphicae Romanae verus limes est*. Crossing this *limes*—as his predecessor Luigi Gaetano Marini had planned to do with the *Inscriptiones Christianae Latinae et Graecae Aevi Milliarii* (that is, of the first ten centuries)—made absolutely no sense from a historical point of view: if one chooses to take into account the inscriptions from the Carolingian period, why not do the same with those of the age of the crusades? Aside from quite generic historical considerations, there was a technical reason to stop the collection at that

[11] For a different view, see Salway 2014, 365: "this same attitude [i.e. the exclusion of Christian inscriptions] was adopted by the original editors of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, which aims to provide a comprehensive record of Latin inscriptions to about 600 CE […] the exclusion of Christian texts from most volumes of *CIL* means that the collection is asymmetric in its late antique sections, undermining its utility."

[12] I summarize here the arguments by De Rossi 1857–1866, ch. XVI, p. XXXVII f., as formulated in his *Praefatio* to *ICUR* I.

point, a reason linked to the very nature of inscriptions themselves: ancient Christian inscriptions are simply different—in their formal and textual features—from later ones. This was so patent that it did not even deserve a preliminary justification in the introduction, where De Rossi in fact simply states "*quam facile autem ut plurimum sit Romanas inscriptiones sex prioribus a Christo positas ab iis, quae ad sequiora tempora pertinent, discernere, toto operis mei cursu clarissimum fiet*".

Though some penetrating criticism of the periodization chosen by De Rossi was made by Angelo Silvagni in 1922 (when presenting the new volumes of the *ICUR*),[13] the conventional date for the end of Christian epigraphy is still the one indicated by De Rossi.[14] And when Edmond Le Blant decided to extend his *Inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule* to the end of the eighth century, he did not do so on historical grounds, but solely for an epigraphic and formalistic reason: the delay with which the "provincial" provinces of Gaul absorbed specific styles and formularies of urban Christian epigraphy, and the fact that they continued to use such styles when they had already come to an end in Rome. This justified the choice of including a century more than De Rossi.[15]

Let us try to invert our perspective, and to look at things from the position of a specialist of the Middle Ages. How did the mediaevalists contribute to tracing the boundaries between epigraphic ages? And, in particular, did they conceive a phase of epigraphy which was neither ancient nor medieval? Such questions lead us to more recent times. A field of mediaeval epigraphy found itself—rather unwillingly—delimited in the nineteenth century when it was detached from the new Christian epigraphy, of which it can be considered an orphan or repudiated son. But it was only in the twentieth century that mediaevalists began to produce *corpora*, compiled on a regional, or rather national, basis.[16] Mediaeval epigraphy is a modern science.

In view of their small number and the abundance of other sources, the importance of inscriptions for the history of the Middle Ages is not comparable to the importance that they have for the classicist, whose

[13] Silvagni 1922, IX-X: Silvagni considered arbitrary, or at least questionable, De Rossi's dating of the end of the ancient world in the seventh century, and advocated further reflection on this point.
[14] For example, the recent *Inscriptiones Christianae Italiae* (published since 1985) still take into account the inscriptions *septimo saeculo antiquiores*.
[15] Le Blant 1856, XV.
[16] For a general account, see Favreau 1997; Treffort 2008; Koch 2010.

knowledge largely depends on them.[17] But, above all, mediaeval inscriptions are an object of interest for palaeographers; in the words of the great expert Robert Favreau, epigraphy "is a part of the vast domain of palaeography".[18] This explains why, in the study of mediaeval epigraphy, the attention paid to formal aspects is predominant. The mediaeval epigraphist is no historian, or is only accidentally an historian (often, in such a case, an art historian).[19] For all these reasons, it is not surprising to discover a widespread lack of interest in periodization. Conventionally, most mediaevalists look at the sixth or seventh century as where to start.[20] But this is no fixed point. In his influential manual of mediaeval epigraphy, Favreau himself seems to assume the chronological boundaries of his discipline as implicit.[21] Often, scholars dealing with mediaeval inscriptions tend to follow periodization patterns developed in the fields of history of manuscripts and written culture, or to apply such patterns to the epigraphic evidence.

On the other hand, such a fluid (or rather fluctuating) demarcation of the chronological ambit of mediaeval epigraphy makes it possible for its specialists to feel free to go back as far as the fourth century CE, and their formal approach enables them to detect some features and investigate problems that ancient epigraphists tend to neglect. For instance, one of the central interests for mediaeval epigraphists has been the relation between epigraphic writing and "normal" writing:[22] they have convincingly demonstrated that this relation was also very close in ancient times. More than this, they have discussed one crucial question: do epigraphic scripts imitate books or is the reverse sometimes the case? In addition, it has been shown how the survival of Roman graphic forms in the ex-provinces of the empire was essentially inertial, but resulted in graphic particularism only in the seventh century.[23] This, and much more, led to a renewal of many

[17] Kloos 1980, 5.
[18] Favreau 1995 (1969), 4.
[19] One of the most profitable reflections on the value of the epigraphic medium can be found in the first volume of the monumental Dietl 2009.
[20] The *Inscriptiones Medii Aevi Italiae*, published by the *Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto medioevo* (Spoleto) since 2002, collect the documents from the sixth to the twelfth century.
[21] See the review of Favreau's *Epigraphie médiévale* by A.J. Costo 2000.
[22] Durliat 1980, and Pl. I–V; a series of important contributions can be found in AA.VV. 1981, with an *Introduction* by Petrucci (265–267), and essays by Favreau (268–274), Guarducci (274–275), Mallon (275–276), Pancera (276–284), Prosdocimi (284–301), Scalia (301–304), Solin (304–311), Susini (311–312); Banti 1995.
[23] See, for example, De Rubeis 2008.

problems concerning the different phases of production of epigraphic texts, in some cases challenging Mallon's long-established principles.

If, then, mediaeval studies have significantly improved our understanding of the developments which affected written culture in Late Antiquity, their contribution in corroborating the identity of this particular historical phase was more incisive than that of isolating and conceptualizing it. This is also true when this topic has been addressed in the broader perspective of the history of written culture. In an important work first published in 1980,[24] Armando Petrucci compares the classical city to the city of the early Middle Ages: the former's public spaces are filled with texts, while, in the latter, writing is rare even in private spaces. Interestingly enough, Petrucci does not consider an autonomous Late Antiquity, but apparently sees the centuries dividing the two cities as a moment of mere transition.

In fact, when mediaevalists began "raiding" the territory of antiquity (especially since the last decades of the last century), classic epigraphic scholarship, both Greek and Latin, was experiencing a profound transformation that directly involved the late-antique period.

The history of Greek epigraphy in the second half of the twentieth century was marked by the influence of Louis Robert. As we noted earlier (and, hopefully, made clear), his *Hellenica* IV was the first and only coherent effort to define Late Antiquity through an epigraphic style. So it is not surprising that the most spectacular progress in the field of late epigraphy has come from the Hellenistic world, especially since the early 1980s. The tradition of studies in Greek epigraphy was different, and the place of Christian inscriptions—i.e. late antique and Byzantine—was ambiguously and confusedly defined, at least until the middle of the last century.[25] I would like to draw attention to a few significant achievements, which are relevant to our enquiry. Firstly, the improvements in our understanding of late epigraphic practices and the "institutionalization" of the discipline (we might think of Denis Feissel's works and the section on the *Inscriptions chrétiennes et byzantines* in the *Bulletin* of the *Revue des Etudes Grecques*) enabled the definition of a Byzantine epigraphy, the very existence of which was considered uncertain by Cyril Mango in 1991,

[24] Petrucci 1986 (1980), esp. 3–5.

[25] In 1952 Louis Robert described the condition of Byzantine epigraphy as "un peu chaotique, où il y a eu un grand nombre de projets, plusieurs débuts de travaux, pas d'achèvements." I found this reference in the excellent overview by Andreas Rhoby 2015.

and which is now flourishing notably.[26] The second issue concerns us more directly: it is the identification of a sharp fracture in epigraphic practices around CE 600—on which Mango himself insisted—with the sudden, drastic drop in epigraphic production, the disappearance of entire categories of inscriptions and the further contraction of others. The awareness of this has resulted, among other things, in a debate on the causes of such a break (causes that appear all the more interesting to investigate as this break occurred in a context of historical continuity, at least at the political level): the end of a certain type of civic life, but also the contraction of literacy. This debate has benefited from the active participation of palaeographers and specialists in the mediaeval West.[27]

Finally, the case-study of Aphrodisias of Caria, a city which has provided exceptionally abundant evidence. In her pioneering book on the late inscriptions from Aphrodisias,[28] Charlotte Roueché has been able both to corroborate Robert's arguments and go further in defining a late-antique epigraphy. Through quantitative statistics, investigation of supports, palaeography, formularies, and the consequent description and isolation of "typical late" features, the world of honorific epigrams depicted by Robert is revealed to us in other dimensions too. Elements of continuity and discontinuity emerge more clearly, such as the fact that some features of inscriptions produced between the third and sixth centuries anticipate further developments in Byzantine epigraphy, with its essentially decorative function. The image of Aphrodisias' late-antique *facies* has been further refined by the formal analysis of statue bases, and their relation with the statues made by Bert Smith.[29] Aphrodisias was the laboratory of a new approach to late-antique written displays, introducing concepts and methods that were later used by other authors in other sites. This was a turning point for isolating this phase epigraphically.

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[26] Mango 1991a, 711: "a discipline of Byzantine epigraphy does not yet exist;" less dramatically Mango 2008, 149: "there is no general discussion of Byzantine epigraphy." An ambitious project of collecting the evidence is the Vienna-based project *Inscriptiones Graecae Aevi Byzantini* (promoted by the Association Internationale des Etudes Byzantines).

[27] See esp. the Proceedings of the 1991 Conference held in Erice, attended by specialists in both the Byzantine and Latin medieval world: Cavallo, and Mango 1995 (see IX, in the *Introduction* by the editors). See also Petrucci 1994: the author insists upon the decrease in levels of literacy as the main cause of the decline in epigraphic production.

[28] Roueché 1989.

[29] See esp. Smith 1999.

If we look at things in a more global perspective, we can say with confidence that it was during the 1980s that a decisive step forward in outlining an autonomous late-antique epigraphy was made. In 1981, a short but extremely influential article introduced the notion of epigraphic habit:[30] in a few concentrated pages, Ramsay MacMullen focused on the quantitative fall of epigraphy in the third century, which he proposed to connect to a lack of confidence in the future. In the same year, another historian, Valerio Neri, assigned a specific identity to the style of fourth–century prose dedications, paving the way for further surveys on the textual aspects of late–Roman honorary inscriptions.[31] In 1982 Giancarlo Susini challenged some of the conventional views about the chronological boundaries of Latin epigraphy (which stopped rather "with the end of the political and cultural unity of the West") and tried to put in a broader historical framework the epigraphic crisis of the third century.[32]

This new trend was consecrated in 1986 by the Congress of Bologna, *La terza età dell'epigrafia*, which was attended mostly by ancient epigraphists and historians, but also by Christianists and Byzantinists.[33] This "third age" of epigraphy is described (the definition is by Gabriel Sanders) not as a period of senescence, but as one exemplified by a different output, numerically inferior and with less impact, but still conscious of itself and its communicative capabilities.[34] The book contains some fundamental contributions that are still the reference-works for several specific aspects.[35] However, as far as the chronology of such a "third age" is concerned, quite paradoxically the question is never addressed directly and very little is said on the problem of circumscribing chronologically this new field.[36]

The eventual outbreak of late–antique epigraphy has no need to be presented here. Contexts of inquiry and approaches multiply and it would be an idle exercise to go through them. The popularity of late–antique epigraphy is consistent with the favour currently enjoyed by late-antique

[30] MacMullen 1982, based on Mrozek 1973.
[31] Neri 1981. Salomies 1994.
[32] Susini 1982, 2, and 165 ff. (chapter entitled 'La crisi del messaggio epigrafico').
[33] Donati 1988.
[34] Sanders 1988, esp. 353: "l'âge qui succède à l'apogée inscriptionnel du Haut Principat et au vide croissant du IIIe siècle, - en termes fleuris, d'un nouvel âge, celui de la chrétienté au pouvoir, qui s'il n'a su rendre au phénomène épigraphique son impact communicationnel d'antan, n'en a pas moins largement exploité les possibilités massmédiatiques."
[35] Such as Chastagnol 1988, N. Duval 1988, and Carletti 1988.
[36] See Mihailov 1988, 8.

studies in general. The future of late–antique epigraphy seems now assured. A section has long since been reserved for it in the international conferences of Latin and Greek epigraphy. Some dedicated sites and databases are either already fully accessible or announced as forthcoming.[37] But one cannot say that its role has been primary or that its contribution to the still very vivid debate on defining Late Antiquity has been important.

On the contrary, one gets the impression that the success of Late Antiquity allowed epigraphists to take for granted the existence of a distinct late-antique epigraphy, and to feel free not to discuss its very existence, unless at local or regional level. Or to pose the simple question: is it, indeed, legitimate to speak of a global, distinctive, late–antique culture of written displays, which involved practices such as commemorating buildings and restorations, inscribing tombstones, dedicating statues and other honorific monuments? The answer to similar questions, in other disciplines, like the history of written culture, is not taken for granted.[38]

Let us summarize some of the issues. As we have seen, in both Latin and Greek epigraphy the positive recognition of a coherent "late style", a "*terza età dell'epigrafia*" is a very recent achievement, and came with a considerable delay in comparison to the discovery of a late–antique world. Epigraphy has followed the path traced by the historians. It has not been capable of playing the pioneering role which art history played at the end of the nineteenth century. The comparison with art history is not accidental, since it suggests one possible reason for which this discipline has had a secondary role in defining historical periods. Inscriptions have long been considered essentially as textual sources: texts, to be edited and treated as such. Only the recognition of their being parts of monuments, ingredients of something that does not *signify* merely by its text, would have allowed us to fully exploit the "epigraphic" evidence in this way. The attention paid to the formal and material aspects, the interest in the "supports" is a new step forward; as is the awareness of the fact that we should perhaps not speak of one "epigraphy", but rather of as many epigraphies as the habits and practices that involved the use of displaying texts.

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[37] The already mentioned electronic version of C. Roueché's *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity*. The Oxford-based project on late ancient statuary by Roland Smith and Brian Ward-Perkins: http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk. An electronic database collecting late-Roman inscriptions was announced by Witschel 2010.

[38] Cavallo 2010.

Drawing on a seminal work by Silvio Panciera presented at the twelfth epigraphic Congress in Barcelona in 2002[39]—where the author makes the point on the internal periodizations developing within Latin epigraphy—Silvia Orlandi, in an important paper, points out:[40] "[…] *l'epigrafia [...] può essere a buon diritto inserita nel dibattito accesosi in questi ultimi anni sulla definizione del tardoantico e dei suoi termini cronologici*".[41]

And we can confidently expect that this will be done. Regarding this proposal, I can only offer some suggestions. While being aware of the geographical distinctions and the existence of various epigraphic habits, as well as different epigraphic traditions and cultures,[42] we should not abandon our attempts to define late–antique epigraphy as a whole, just as we should not miss the overall picture of the late–Roman world when we describe the regional differences in economic and social history. A definition of late–antique epigraphy should begin with a thorough description of the possible common features that can be detected at the "worldwide" level.[43] Ideally, such an enterprise should be accomplished through multidisciplinary cooperation involving epigraphers, historians, art historians, palaeographers and archaeologists. These common features include—just as an example—reuse of ancient supports (or the visible signs of reuse). This practice is a characterizing feature of epigraphic production, especially of statue–bases, from the mid–third century onwards. Obviously it had existed before, but until ca. 250 CE manufacture of new supports prevailed, while it is almost impossible to find a single statue-base from the age of Diocletian or Constantine that does not show traces of its former use (as a statue base or something else). It should be stressed that this is a global phenomenon. Other common features concern the visual and graphic level: casual layout (end of *ordinatio*), irregular lettering, and poor carving, even in important public inscriptions, are not the only characteristics that can be detected almost everywhere. As noticed by many scholars, the abandonment of classical style and scripts was not marked by the introduction of new patterns or coherent new styles. Sometimes it is just the change in single letter forms,

[39] Panciera 2002, I, esp. 83–84.
[40] Orlandi 2012, 297. This paper contains important considerations about the revival of the past in late epigraphical rhetoric which commemorate reconstruction or moving of statues, and complements Behrwald 2009.
[41] Let me just quote Mayer 2003.
[42] See Machado, and Witschel, forthcoming.
[43] Trout 2009 is a very interesting contribution that offers a pragmatic and quantitative approach, though it makes no mention of distinctive styles and formal aspects in late epigraphy.

or the use of different letter forms in the same texts; in other cases (especially in the West) a debasement, a de–structuration, of former scripts.[44] It is difficult to speak of an evolution, or to classify inscriptions in terms of a development of graphic styles.[45]

These formal aspects should be considered together with more substantial features of late–antique epigraphic habits, which underwent profound changes. For example, the disappearance in the epigraphic medium of entire social classes which had stimulated it in previous times (such as the *liberti*), or the exclusion from the statuary habit of most members of the decurional order, who no longer had access to the public spaces of celebration, or no longer showed interest in being celebrated in those spaces. Even in the most traditionalist areas (epigraphically speaking) such as Southern Italy, North Africa, or some cities of Asia Minor, despite the survival of the statuary habit in itself, the share of statues erected for local benefactors was becoming insignificant in the early fourth century.[46]

More generally, a new epigraphic discourse was created. The disappearance of the *cursus honorum* concerned inscriptions of different types (not only honorary) and individuals of every status, from imperial office–holders to local magistrates (with the exception of a handful of Roman aristocrats).[47] Honours were no longer listed even on statue bases, and were replaced in the West by eulogistic formulas in prose, and sometimes, in funerary texts, by sophisticated verses, while in the East, as we have seen, allusive poetic texts became the most common type of celebration. Elements drawn from other epigraphic practices, and previously confined to the private sphere, invaded the public space, honorary and

[44] There are some useful observations in C. Roueché, *Aphrodisias in late antiquity* (http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/ala2004/narrative/script.html): "we are not confronting the development of completely new scripts, but rather a change in the range and type of letter forms considered appropriate for inscribed texts"; McLean 2002, 44; Carletti 2012, 677–678; Del Corso 2010.

[45] Thus, inscriptions can hardly have been used to illustrate the development of writing styles and can offer only partial parallels to the model elaborated by Cavallo 1970, who speaks of two evolutionary dynamics in Greek writing: one is unitary, and homogenous over a wide geographical space, while the other is particular, and appreciable only at regional or local level.

[46] With the exception of a small group of *principales*. See in general Liebeschuetz 2001, 14; the phenomenon had been already stressed by Mrozek 1973, 117. For the case of Northern Italy, Witschel 2006; for the African provinces, Tantillo forthcoming. The case of the Hispanic provinces, where a general drop occurred in the third century, has been reconsidered by Kulikowski 2004, esp. 33–35.

[47] Delmaire 2005; see also Niquet 2000.

celebratory. One could say that here new styles replaced the former ones. Such a transformation is chronologically well defined. In the West the new style appears sporadically from the early third century, becomes the standard from the first quarter of the fourth century,[48] and characterizes production until the end of the fifth; while in the East epigrams on statue bases begin in the mid third century and dominate up to the sixth.[49] The rise of a new language also affected imperial epigraphy, while traditional titles of emperors disappeared and laudatory formulas arose that sometimes find parallels in coin legends or panegyrics.[50] Mention of the old attributes and titles—*tribunicia potestas*, imperial acclamations, consulships….—became progressively rarer, especially from the second half of the third century on. Although this was, on the whole, a slow and gradual process, it can be said that, while not yet completed during the Tetrarchy, it accelerated in the age of Constantine, probably as a consequence of changes in bureaucratic practices at court, which simplified the titles in official documents destined to be disseminated throughout the empire.[51]

I stop here,[52] and underline my opinion: only such an approach—an approach that aims at a global comprehension of changes or developments in epigraphic styles—will help to clarify the problems of periodization. As far as the end of epigraphic Late Antiquity is concerned, we have seen that specialists in different disciplines, on the grounds of extremely different considerations, finally converge in indicating the year 600 CE ca. as a turning point, both in the East and in the West: later dates, though sometimes advanced, have not encountered great success. Epigraphy seems thus to support a short periodization of a period that many would like to extend to Muhammad and Charlemagne. Shall we accept the image of a late antiquity that survives the death of this traditional practice? Do we need to rethink the boundaries of late antiquity? Shall we imagine a further internal periodization of this age? In any case, we expect that epigraphy will continue to make—or indeed will strengthen—its contribution to the debate.

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[48] S. Panciera 2004; Creté 2010.
[49] See also Roueché 2006.
[50] Chastagnol, *Le formulaire de l'épigraphie latine officielle* , quoted above.
[51] Tantillo 2006, 270–274.
[52] But the list goes on: think, for instance, of the new "honorary" function, both in the East and in the West, of milestones from the fourth and early fifth century: Salama 1987, 58–59.

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CASE STUDIES

CHAPTER FIVE

REDDITE QUAE SUNT CAESARIS, CAESARI: THE LATE ROMAN EMPIRE AND THE DREAM OF FAIR TAXATION

GILLES BRANSBOURG*

Introduction

Modern states mostly fund themselves through taxation. Although other resources, like royal or temple lands, plunder, tributary extraction from subject communities and hybrid private–public contributions from oligarchies, played a larger role with ancient states, regular direct or indirect taxation represented a significant source of funding.[1] The Roman Empire—notably from the time of Diocletian's reforms at the turn of the fourth century CE––brought tax mechanisms to a degree of sophistication unknown on such a grand scale in the western world. Income tax, inheritance tax, sales tax, customs dues, regular wealth assessments, and their corollary (litigation, corruption, deficits, coinage manipulations, and official moral justifications of all sorts)—most of the components displayed by modern tax regimes were alive and well.

We shall retrace from ancient sources the path that led a predatory entity—the Roman Republic —into becoming a complex, fully–fledged fiscal regime on an imperial scale. We shall compare imperial discourse with its actual practice. Finally, after a journey across eight centuries of Roman fiscal thinking, we shall settle in sixth–century Roman Egypt in order to assess how taxation was practically implemented— at least, at that time in that region of the Empire.

Key quotes from ancient sources form the backbone of this work until its last section. The main reason behind that choice lies in the fact that we

* The English text has been verified by Richard Bates with the financial support of *Giunta Centrale degli Studi Storici* (*GCSS*).

[1] Monson and Scheidel 2015.

aim at a comparison between the principles and the realities of Roman tax doctrine. As later Roman Egypt is by far the best documented case, none of what preceded it had the prerequisite that could have led to solid numerical estimates of tax–extraction rates. Moreover, extensive qualitative studies of the Roman tax system are available and there was no need to reinvent the wheel.[2] We shall follow the emergence and progressive assertion of Roman fiscal doctrine until it reaches its most fully achieved state of development during the later imperial period. These ancient testimonies will make evident the gradual shift that transformed a predatory process into the procedures of a state sharing common values and interests with all its free inhabitants.

Our final conclusions will challenge some assumptions often linked with Late Antiquity: an overall weakening of the state, an increasingly parasitic landed aristocracy, and a shrinking class of small landowners.

For ancient sources, we have used established English translations where possible, with few exceptions, mostly in French.

Vae Victis: Taxation for the Vanquished. From a Predatory Republic towards the Rule of (Unequal) Law

There is little doubt that Greeks and Romans (and others) entertained mixed feelings as to the legitimacy of requiring citizens to provide compulsory levies. Even though the guards in Plato's ideal republic were supposed to receive payment from the rest of the citizenry, tributary regimes were rather associated with the royal or satrapal economy and did not befit free citizens.[3] The contributions required by Athens after the loss of its first empire logically led to various forms of resistance from the heavily taxed elites, hence the coup in 411 BCE and the support provided by sections of the upper classes to the short–lived regime change in 403. The Roman Republic did have recourse to irregular contributions from its citizens in periods of need–-the *tributum*–-which had originated at the time of the war against Veia in 406–398 BCE as the army was paid for the first

[2] Among many other general overviews of the early Empire: the chapters on taxation in Frank 1933–1940 are still very relevant, after which one might consult Corbier 1991, Rathbone 1996, Lo Cascio 2007, Scheidel 2015; on the tax system in the later Empire, Jones 1986 (1964) remains a keystone study; see also Carrié 1994 and Carrié and Rouselle 1999, 170–215 and 593–615; Bransbourg 2015.

[3] Plat., *Rep*., 3, 416d–417b; ps. Aris., *Oik*., 2, 1.

time.[4] Even the special levies made necessary by the disastrous start of the Second Punic War faced strong resistance.[5] It was understood that such levies should be reimbursed after peace was restored.[6] After the fall of Macedonia in 168 BCE, the *tributum* was suspended for an indefinite period—until the second triumvirate 123 years later. Romans abhorred direct taxation to a point where Augustus only had to threaten the Senate with it to have his programme of excise taxes approved.[7]

Subjugating neighbouring nations thus allowed resources to flow into the official treasury chest while mostly exempting citizens. As wars and plunder brought more riches to the Romans, the process became a self–sustaining process for as long as Roman weapons enjoyed unrivalled superiority. At the same time, potential demographic imbalances between the citizenry and the conquered nations were addressed by extending citizenship to a significant number of foreign cities, foreign elites and manumitted slaves. The Roman Republic proved a ruthless resource extractor, to the point where many subject nations were effectively exhausted and the Roman name execrated.

> Our tributes [*vectigalia*] and our provinces constitute, in a sense, our nation's landed estates [*praedia populi Romani*] (…).[8]

> All the treasure that Roman ships have brought down the rich Hiberus, all that Rome has displayed in her triumphs over Sicily, and also any booty from the Libyan shore that she has stored up—all this shall fall to your swords, with no casting of lots. Take home with you all the spoil that you get by the sword; I, your general, seek no fame from riches. It will be for your benefit, that the Dardan robbers have for centuries past conquered and pillaged the world."[9]

> Such was the awful fate that befell the Romans and Italians throughout the province of Asia, men, women, and children, their freedmen and slaves, all who were of Italian blood; by which it was made very plain that it was quite as much hatred of the Romans as fear of Mithridates that impelled the Asiatics to commit these atrocities.[10]

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[4] Liv., 4, 59, 11 and 60, 4–6.
[5] Nicolet 2000, 76.
[6] Liv., 39, 7, 5; Val. Max. 7, 6, 1; Liv., 24, 14, 16 and 18, 12.
[7] Dio, 58, 28, 4–6 and 55, 25, 5.
[8] Cic., 2*Ver*., 2, 2, 7 (Trans. Greenwood 1948).
[9] Silius Italicus, *Punica*, 9, 195–201, a speech he attributes to Hannibal on the eve of Cannae (Trans. Duff 2015).
[10] App., *Mith.* 23 (Trans. White, 1912).

> You will gain the glory of having rendered aid to great kings and of having crushed the plunderers of all the nations.[11]

> These wolves that made such ravages upon Italy's liberty will never vanish until we have cut down the forest that harbours them.[12]

> However much wealth Rome received from tribute–bearing Asia,
> Asia will receive three times that much again
> From Rome and will repay her deadly arrogance to her.
> Whatever number from Asia served the house of Italians
> Twenty times that number of Italians will be serfs
> In Asia, in poverty, and they will be liable to pay ten–thousand fold.[13]

> Let Syria, Asia, and the East, which is accustomed to kings, play the slave; there are many still alive in Gaul who were born before tribute [*tributum*] was known. Surely it was not long ago that slavery was driven from Germany by the killing of Quintilius Varus, (…).[14]

> To plunder, butcher, steal, these things they misname empire: they make a desolation and they call it peace.[15]

Julius Caesar marked the beginning of a fundamental change as far as Roman fiscal policies were concerned: the cities of Asia benefitted in 47 BCE from a one–third tax remittance, while the publicans' role in levying provincial tribute was curtailed. This favoured the cities' local elites and paved the way for what would become common practice under the Principate. A little later, Mark Antony could explicitly argue that the populations of Asia had fared better under Rome than under their previous kings.

> Your King Attalus, O Greeks, left you to us in his will, and straightaway we proved better to you than Attalus had been, for we released you from the taxes that you had been paying to him, until the action of popular agitators also among us made these taxes necessary. (…) When the publicans, who farmed these collections by the authority of the Senate, wronged you by demanding more than was due, Gaius Caesar remitted you

[11] Sall., *Ep. Mith*., 22 (Trans. Rolfe 1947).
[12] Vel. Pat., *Hist*. 2, 27, 2, a speech attributed to the Samnite leader Telesinus during the last stages of the Marian struggle against Sulla (Trans. Shipley 1924).
[13] *Sib. Or.* 3, 350–355 (Trans. Collins 1983, 370).
[14] Tac., *Hist.* 4, 17 (Trans. Moore 1931).
[15] Tac., *Agricola* 30, 4, the reconstructed speech of Calcagus, a Briton chieftain (Trans.: Hutton, revised by Ogilvie 1970).

> one–third of what you had paid to them and put an end to their outrages: for he turned over to you the collection of the taxes from the cultivators of the soil.[16]

We meet with similar claims under Tiberius regarding Cappadocia, Cilicia and Commagene as they moved from being allied kingdoms to provincial status:

> (…) to encourage hope in the mildness of Roman sway, a certain number of the royal tributes were diminished.[17]

> (…) where the majority of men desired a Roman governor, and a minority a monarch.[18]

Tax happiness was not universal though, as displayed by Syria and Judea in the same passage of Tacitus's *Annals*:

> The provinces, too, of Syria and Judea, exhausted by their burdens, were pressing for a diminution of their tribute.

In Egypt, the only truly documented case, it has been convincingly demonstrated that the Roman tax regime was considerably more favourable to private landowners than the Ptolemies' practice.[19] These contrasting reactions to Roman taxation—revolt in North–West Europe, quiet or even glad acceptance in some areas of the East—may be the consequences of a dual phenomenon. First of all, Roman tax practice was not universal. Some areas experienced proportional taxation at various rates while others had to provide fixed amounts.[20]

> In some provinces they (the landowners) pay a definite proportion of the produce, some one fifth, others one seventh; others pay cash, and this is based on an evaluation of the land.[21]

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[16] App., *BC* 5, 1, 4 (Trans. White 1955). Similar information is to be found in Plut., *Caes.* 48, 1 and Dio, 42, 6, 3.
[17] Tac., *Ann*., 2, 56 (Trans. Jackson 1931), about Cappadocia.
[18] Tac., Ann., 2, 42 (Trans. Jackson 1931), about Commagene and Cilicia.
[19] Monson 2015, 186–187 and 197–202 ; 2012, 159–208 and 249–274.
[20] Cic., 2*Ver*., 3, 6, 12; Fl. Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 14, 10, 132–136.
[21] Hyginus 2 205L (Trans. Campbell 2000, 160).

Then again, provincials reacted according to their own fiscal traditions. Centralized taxation by a distant capital was unknown to Gaul, Britain and Germany, while the East had experienced established, structured states, kingdoms and empires for centuries, if not millennia. Anyhow, as advocated by W. Scheidel, it seems likely that a combination of political stability and slow but sustained demographic and economic growth allowed the overall taxation rate to decrease during the first 150 years of the Roman Empire.[22]

At the same time, Roman imperial propaganda aimed at showing that its rule had brought peace, which in turn justified taxation.

> the senate voted to consecrate the altar of August Peace in the field of Mars for my return, (…) peace had been secured through victory. (…) I restored peace to the sea from pirates. (…) I restored peace to the provinces of Gaul and Spain, likewise Germany, which includes the ocean from Cadiz to the mouth of the river Elbe. I brought peace to the Alps from the region which is near the Adriatic Sea to the Tuscan, with no unjust war waged against any nation.[23]

Moderate taxation became a fair price to pay in order to enjoy political stability and safety, while burdening the provinces excessively came to represent one of the hallmarks of the bad ruler.

> For we cannot survive without soldiers, and men will not serve as soldiers without pay. Therefore let us not be oppressed by the idea that the necessity of raising money belongs only to a monarchy (…).[24]

> To the governors who recommended burdensome taxes for his provinces, he wrote in answer that it was the part of a good shepherd to shear his flock, not to skin it.[25]

> (…) and from the contributions that he (Nero) not only received, but even demanded, he nearly bankrupted the provinces and exhausted the resources of individuals.[26]

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[22] Scheidel 2015, 232 and n. 9.
[23] From Aug., *Res Gestae* 12, 13, 25 and 26 (Trans. Bushnell 1998).
[24] Dio, 52, 28, 1–2, speech attributed to Maecenas advising Augustus (Trans.: Cary 1927).
[25] Suet., *Tib*. 32 (Trans. Rolfe 1914).
[26] Suet., *Ner.* 38, 3 (Trans. Rolfe 1914).

At the same time, Rome took great care at providing a legal framework and public display with respect to its taxation policy. Openness and transparency were the marks of a Republic: Solon had his laws displayed on wooden tablets in the Agora, as were the Roman laws of the Twelve Tables. Laws were customarily inscribed for permanent public display during the late Republic and the Empire, or at least read publicly and posted temporarily, with the exception of senatorial decrees – which at least were formally archived.[27] Hiding the law was a sign of tyranny:

> When taxes of this kind had been proclaimed, but not published in writing, inasmuch as many offences were committed through ignorance of the letter of the law, he (Caligula) at last, on the urgent demand of the people, had the law posted up, but in a very narrow place and in excessively small letters, to prevent the making of a copy.[28]

Assessments were conducted in new provinces, tax regulations issued, properties registered.[29] The age of plunder was over, systematic assessment being supposed to lead to fairness in the way contributions were levied:

> The next step is to provide for any deficiency by levying an assessment upon absolutely all property, which produces any profit for its possessors (…).[30]

> The census form [*forma censualis*] provides that lands should be registered as follows: (…).[31]

Nevertheless, Rome still operated a transfer system that was effectively at the expense of the vanquished nations it had incorporated. Italy, colonies and cities of Roman law, allied nations, and privileged provincials that Rome wished to attach to its cause, all enjoyed various

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[27] Rowe 2014, 299–300. Cicero testifies that new laws were read aloud: Cic. *pro Rab. Post. Or.*, 6, 14.
[28] Suet., *Gaius* 46 (Trans. Rolfe 1914).
[29] The conduct of censuses during the late Republic and early Empire are confirmed by a wide array of epigraphic, legal sources and literary; among the latter: Cic. 2*Ver.*, 2, 3, 120–121; 131–139; *ad Att.* 6, 15 ; *ad. fam*. 3, 8, 5 and *ad Quint.* 1, 1, 8 ; *App*., Pun. 135 ; Livy, *Epit*. 134 and 138–9; Aug., *Res Gestae* 8; Tacitus, *Ann*. 1, 31; 2, 6; 14, 16; Front., *Strateg*. 1, 1, 8; Fl. Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 17, 13 and 18, 1; Plin., *NH* 7, 159; Plin., *Ep.* 10, 79; 112; 114; Dio 53, 17, 7, 22, 5; 59, 22, 2. More generally: Le Teuff 2012.
[30] Dio, 52, 28, 6 (Trans. Cary 1927).
[31] *Dig.* L, 15, 4 *pr*. *de cens.* (Ulpian, Bk 3).

exemptions from direct taxation, while receiving economic transfers from the tributary regions. The city of Rome itself was primarily fed by Sicily, Africa and Egypt. At the same time, provincial taxation did not reflect a single articulated policy, being instead the result of *ad hoc* decisions that depended on the initial conditions under which the conquest had taken place. Various tax regimes coexisted as a result, with multiple pockets of more or less partial exemptions that well–connected provincials and cities could secure, local elites often being in a position to benefit from their role as intermediaries between taxpayers and imperial fiscal requests.[32]

> Whoever has been granted exemption from paying tax on the export or import of certain items by a treaty with the Romans, they shall [not] give [tax to the tax–farmer] for these items.[33]

> I have also received petitions concerning tax exemptions and reductions . . . from persons requesting that these privileges be reaffirmed in accordance with the rescript of divus Claudius to Postumus granting such release. . . . Since, therefore, Balbillus and Vestinus granted these releases, I reaffirm the decisions of both prefects, especially as they are in accord with the grant of divus Claudius; hence they have been released from the charges not yet exacted from them, and in the future certainly the tax exemption and reduction will remain in force for them.[34]

> The tax revenue which you say you were granted by Augustus, I leave unchanged; if you want to add any new taxes you will have to take the matter up with the governor, for I cannot make any determination without hearing the other side of the case.[35]

> The Divine Vespasian made the Caesarienses *coloni* without adding the *ius Italicum*, but remitted the poll–tax; but the Divine Titus decided that the soil had been made immune also.[36]

[32] Brunt 1990, 537.
[33] Roman Customs Laws at Ephesus in 62 CE, l. 83 (Trans. Cottier *et al* 2008).
[34] Extract from the Edict of Tiberius Julius Alexander in 68 CE, *OGIS* 669 (Trans. Lewis and Reinhold 1990, 295–298).
[35] Vespasian's letter to the town councilors of Sabora seeking more imperial tax transfer to the benefits of the city, in 77/78 CE, *ILS* 6092 (Trans. Francese and Scott Smith 2014, #61, 484–485)
[36] *Dig.* L, 15, 8, 7, Paul. 2 *de cens*. (Trans. Isaac 1980–1981, 41–42).

The Empire Morphs into a Community

What distinguished, very early on, Rome from most of the other city–states was its capacity to share the privilege of citizenship with entire communities, on top of selected groups and individuals. This does not mean that other ancient cities never shared citizenship with foreign–born individuals: Greek cities customarily granted it to individuals they wished to honour. But the practice was not elevated as a key political tool aimed at providing these cities with an ever–increasing body of new citizens capable of fighting for it. Rome did not reach that stage without serious internal resistance, and to that extent the period extending from the Gracchan crisis to the Social War—or War of the Allies—represents a defining moment in what allowed Rome to build a sustainable empire. Interestingly, the whole question revolved at that time around the devolution of Italian public lands to Roman citizens, citizenship being initially seen as a way to alleviate Italians' opposition to the Gracchi land scheme. The demographic argument does not seem to have been at the root of this decisive step, although the consul of 125 BCE, Fulvius Flaccus, explicitly invoked the concept of partnership that citizenship would bring to all Italians. At that time, both the Roman *plebs* and the Senate strongly opposed this move for different reasons—the plebeians were hoping to grab more Italian land and the Senate was aiming to preserve a smaller citizenry.

> Some proposed that all the Italians allies, who made the greatest resistance to it, should be admitted to Roman citizenship so that, out of gratitude for the greater favour, they might no longer quarrel about the land.
>
> Fulvius Flaccus in his consulship first and foremost openly excited among the Italians the desire for Roman citizenship, so as to be partners in the empire instead of subjects.[37]

The most strategic aspect of extending Italian citizenship and even Senate membership, providing Rome with a potentially unlimited source of manpower that would translate into military dominance, was not missed by the *imperatores* of the Civil War period, as exemplified by Julius Caesar at the onset of his Gallic war.

> Encouraged by this, he added to the legions which he had received from the state others at his own cost, one actually composed of men of Transalpine Gaul and bearing a Gallic name too (for it was called Alauda),

[37] Appian, *BC*, 1, 3, 21 and 5, 34 (Trans. White 1913).

> which he trained in the Roman tactics and equipped with Roman arms; and later on he gave every man of it citizenship.
>
> With the same disregard of law and precedent he named magistrates for several years to come, bestowed the emblems of consular rank on ten ex–praetors, and admitted to the House men who had been given citizenship, and in some cases half–civilised Gauls.[38]

When the emperor Claudius followed Caesar's footsteps, and worked at extending this policy further, his deep personal interest in Roman history meant he was fully aware of the conflicts these decisions had initially triggered with the Senate. He shrewdly associated political partnership with fiscal acceptance, hence his argument to the senators of his own time:

> What else proved fatal to Lacedaemon and Athens, in spite of their power in arms, but their policy of holding the conquered aloof as alien–born? (…) Now that custom, culture, and the ties of marriage have blended them with ourselves, let them bring among us their gold and their riches instead of retaining them beyond the pale![39]

That the Empire worked at bonding strangers together was famously hailed by Aelius Aristides. Besides the context of praise of Rome delivered to the imperial household in 155 CE, this degree of rhetorical wishful thinking cannot obliterate the fact Rome had been truly pursuing that goal since Augustus, if not Julius Caesar.

> You have divided into two parts all men throughout your empire... everywhere giving citizenship to all those who are more accomplished, noble, and powerful, even as they retain their native–born identities, while the rest you have made subjects and the governed.[40]

The growing bonds that started to unite all the inhabitants of the Roman Empire, helped by frequent citizenship grants, led to better taxation acceptance—as is already clear from Claudius' speech.

> Harvests are not snatched as if from enemy soil to perish in our granaries, carried off from allies who lament in vain; instead, these bring of their own

[38] Suet., *Iul*., 24, 2; 76, 3 (Trans. Rolfe 1914)
[39] Tacitus, *Ann*. 11, 24 (Trans. Jackson 1937). This can be compared with the partial version of Claudius' speech to the Senate as retrieved on a bronze tablet, dated 48 CE, in Lugdunum: *CIL* XIII 1668 = *ILS* 212 = Sherk 1988, #55.
[40] Ael. Ar., *Orat*. 26, 56 (Trans. Behr 1981).

> accord the produce of their soil, (…) Now we have returned the Nile its riches, sent back the corn we received (…).[41]

> (…) many in each city are citizens of yours no less than of their fellow natives, (…). All men pay taxes to you with greater pleasure than some people would collect them from others. (…) Now all the Greek cities flourish under you (…). But now total security, universal and clear to all, has been given to the earth itself and those who inhabit it. (…) Let all the gods and the sons of the gods be invoked, and let them grant that this empire and this city bloom forever (…).[42]

With centuries of internal peace, the number of Roman citizens increased through the army recruitment system, slaves' manumissions and grants being offered to provincial notabilities and, sometimes, entire communities as a way of binding them to Rome. Imperial families originated from increasingly distant provinces. Such an asymmetrical system could not be viable eternally. At some point, pressure for equitable treatment of the provincials was bound to build up, especially in the sensitive area of taxation:

> For it is but just and proper that no individual or district be exempt from these taxes, inasmuch as they are to enjoy the benefits derived from the taxation as much as the rest.[43]

Even such a professional flatterer as Aelius Aristides did not entirely hide the internal tensions between the supposedly harmonious system operated by Rome and the structural heterogeneity involved by a society cut in two unequal halves:

> But you have divided people into Romans and non–Romans.[44]

In that context, a fundamental levelling of all free inhabitants of the Empire's legal status could not be avoided for much longer. It had become a matter of strengthening the Empire's stability and cohesion. Interestingly, the edict that established almost universal citizenship in 212 CE occurred on the eve of the major political, monetary and military crisis that was about to shake the Roman state's foundations and very existence. Decades

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[41] Pliny, *Pan. Traj.*, 29 and 31, dated 100 CE (Trans. Radice 1969).
[42] Ael. Ar., *Orat*. 26, 64; 67; 94; 104 and 109 (Trans. Behr 1981).
[43] Dio, 52, 28, 6. (Trans. Cary 1927).
[44] Ael. Ar., *Orat*. 26, 63 (Trans. Behr 1981).

later, after the Empire's restoration under the Tetrarchy, many different sections of Roman society still appreciated this decision's fundamental nature.

> I can perform a service not unworthy of their majesty, if I make my offerings to the gods in company with the foreigners who at any time have entered the number of my subjects, as well as with my own people. I grant, therefore, to all foreigners throughout the Empire the Roman citizenship, though . . . . are preserved except the *dediticii*. For it is proper that the populace not only should . . . . everything, but also should share in the victory. This edict will enhance [?] the majesty of the Roman people [?] (…)[45]

> All persons throughout the Roman world were made Roman citizens by an edict of the Emperor Antoninus Caracalla.[46]

> This would be particularly true if the welcome and humane step had been taken at once that was taken later, of granting partnership [*societatem acciperent civitatis*] in the state who were subjects of the empire [*ut omnes ad Romanum imperium pertinentes*], so that they were Roman citizens.[47]

> 'Tis she alone who has received the conquered into her bosom and like a mother, not an empress, protected the human race with a common name, summoning those whom she has defeated to share her citizenship and drawing together distant races with bonds of affection.[48]

But citizenship and taxation remained intertwined matters:

> "This was the reason why he made all the people in his empire Roman citizens; nominally he was honouring them, but his real purpose was to increase his revenues by this means, inasmuch as aliens did not have to pay most of these taxes."[49]

Although Dio Cassius, who disliked Caracalla, should not be taken literally, he had a point. Legal equality meant equal taxation. And equal taxation should have implied universal taxation. But Caracalla did not

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[45] *Constitutio Antoniniana*, Johnson, Coleman-Norton, Bourne and Pharr 1961, #277, 225–226.
[46] *Dig*. I, 5, 17 (Ulp., *ad ed*. 22).
[47] Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, 5, 17 (Trans. Green 1963).
[48] Claudian, *de Cons. Stil*., 3, 150–155 (Trans. Platnauer 1922).
[49] Dio, 78, 9, 5. (Trans. Cary 1927).

undertake any major reshuffle of a tax system that had operated mostly unchanged since the time of Augustus. Some regions and cities enjoyed specific tax privileges—Italy, in particular—while others contributed a disproportionate share of the imperial revenues—notably Egypt. This could not provide a stable equilibrium. The third–century crisis unfolded soon after the extinction of the Severan dynasty and threatened the Empire's very existence. With the collapse of its monetary and fiscal machines, any authority capable of restoring imperial order would have to rebuild them from scratch. In a sense, this presented reform–minded military rulers like Aurelian and Diocletian with a unique opportunity.

Later Empire: Tax, Public Interest and Fairness

Diocletian's tax reform represented the most logical outcome to Caracalla's granting of citizenship. Taxation had to become moral, justified by the common good, and had to be perceived, or at least conceived, as an accepted compulsory system based on a fair estimate of all existing resources. At the same time, since any hope of significant conquests and looting was by now mostly out–of–reach for such a logistically overstretched empire surrounded by more powerful nations than before, tax proceeds had to fund a defensive reinforced military structure in a sustainable manner. In a consensually accepted state, the necessary connection between military protection and fairly distributed taxation has been most perfectly captured by this paragraph of the French *Declaration* of 1789:

> Pour l'entretien de la force publique, et pour les dépenses d'administration, une contribution commune est indispensable: elle doit être également répartie entre tous les citoyens, en raison de leurs facultés.[50]

Although the Roman period did not produce anything as synthetic, it came remarkably close. The introduction of the 301 CE Price Edict, here provided through a reference translation in French, incorporates the twin concepts of public interest and fairness:

> La Fortune de notre Empire (…) doit par suite être organisée honnêtement et aménagée convenablement, comme l'exigent le bien public [*honestum publicum*], la dignité et la majesté de Rome.[51]

[50] French Republic: *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen du 26 août 1789*; art. 13.

Fairness, transparency, and moderate fiscal treatment that was proportionate to wealth and income, become pervasive throughout the way late imperial legislation is set out and articulated from the fourth century on.

> (…) it has come about that the levies of the public taxes take place in such a way that some persons are being relieved, while other persons are being overburdened, and they (the emperors) have determined to eradicate this most evil and pernicious practice in their provincials' interest and to give a salutary standard to which the taxes shall conform. Therefore, it is possible for all persons to know the amount levied on each *arura* with respect to the quality of the soil, the amount levied on each head of the rural population, and the minimum and the maximum ages of liability from the published godlike edict and the schedule attached thereto, to which I have prefixed copies of this my edict for public display.[52]

> In the performance of compulsory public services [*in publicis functionibus*] there must be equal consideration [*aequa debet esse inspectio*] with respect to all property and all persons who are living the lives of private citizens.[53]

> (…) the loyal devotion of the rich and the poor alike may the more willingly assist the crisis of the times, since the tax payment has been equalized in just proportions.[54]

At the same time, quite apart from moral considerations, the awareness previously displayed by Tiberius, that excessive tax burdens proved counterproductive for the state, led orators and legislators alike to praise tax remissions and, more generally, moderate taxation.

> Through that remission of 7,000 *capita*, you have given strength to 25,000.[55]

> It is also to the interest of the public welfare that the harassed provinces should not be ruined by extraordinary corrupt solicitations.[56]

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[51] Diocletian, *The Price Edict*, l. 8–11 (Trans. Chastagnol 1991 (1969), #52).
[52] Extract from the tax edict of the Prefect Aristius Optatus in 297 CE (Trans. Johnson, Coleman-Norton, Bourne and Pharr 1961, #298, 235).
[53] *C. Th.* XI, 12, 3, 365 CE (Trans. Pharr 1952).
[54] *Nov. Val.* 10, 4, 441 CE (Trans. Pharr 1952).
[55] Eum., *Pan.* 5, 11, 3, 310 CE (Trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994).
[56] *Nov. Val.* 13, 7, 445 CE (Trans. Pharr 1952).

The Letter and the Spirit of Tax Laws

Taxation in the later Empire involved a dual system of levies taking into account land wealth and the work force. The amount of taxation units, *iuga* and *capita*, for which each taxpayer was responsible, were initially determined through a universal census that took place between *ca*. 290 and 310 CE.[57] At the same time, the partial replacement of former provincial landed elites by a partially salaried bureaucracy was supposed to ensure that old privileges, exemptions and unfair tax distribution would no longer take place.

Assessing the success and actual fairness of the new system remains a very delicate exercise. On the one hand, it succeeded in restoring imperial finances through a functional fiscal machine. But rare are the tax regimes that do not attract criticism. Later Roman sources of all kinds voiced stern concerns and complained forcibly about perceived confiscatory methods. Powerful landowners, with links to the state bureaucracy, carved out new privileges for themselves from within the system. Officials rigged the processes at all levels. A wide gulf opened between fiscal principles and their application on the ground. Those who could not derive power and influence from their position within the imperial power structure often claimed to have fallen routinely victims to extortion. The initial set of censuses itself, though necessary in order to assess wealth, was resented as intrusive.

> But that which gave rise to public and universal calamity, was the tax imposed at once on each province and city. Surveyors [*censitoribus*] having been spread abroad, and occupied in a general and severe scrutiny, horrible scenes were exhibited, like the outrages of victorious enemies, and the wretched state of captives. Each spot of ground was measured, vines and fruit–trees numbered, lists taken of animals of every kind, and a capitation–roll [*hominum capita*] made up; (…) Neither youth, nor old age, nor sickness, afforded any exemption.[58]

Attacks on the new tax system focused mostly from very early on on the degree of collusion that developed between tax officials at all levels and wealthy landowners.

> The komarchs, in collusion with the praepositus, have made levies in the village at their pleasure – a very large number of illegal assessments, in

[57] Carrié 1994.
[58] Lact., *de Mort. Pers.*, 23 (Trans. Vanderspoel).

> excess of three hundred talents; and we do not know into what account these have gone.[59]
>
> What is so just and humane as this? Your decree burdens us with new debts; at least let this indebtedness be shared between us. What can be more unjust or unworthy than that you alone should be free from debt, who are making us all debtors? [60]

Interestingly, a significant number of imperial edicts seem to echo these complaints almost word by word:

> (…) the assessment of each municipality shall be made in accordance with the plans and regulations of the governor, so that the multitude of the lower classes [*multitudo mediocrium*] may not be subject to the wantonness and subordinated to the interests of the more powerful and thus suffer the infliction of grave and iniquitous outrages.[61]
>
> Of course, suitable account must be taken of the powerful persons, whose overseers throughout the provinces disregard the payment of fiscal taxes, while because of terror inspired by their arrogance they are not compelled to payment, (…)[62]

Praising life under barbarian rule vs. fiscal oppression under Roman rule expanded into a true rhetorical *topos*:

> Besides these there were not a few who were expert in following out veins of gold, and who could no longer endure the heavy burden of taxes; they were welcomed [by the Visigoths] with the glad consent of all (…).[63]
>
> Hence all the Romans in that region have but one desire, that they may never have to return to the Roman jurisdiction. It is the unanimous prayer of the Roman people in that district that they may be permitted to continue to lead their present life among the barbarians. [64]
>
> C'est donc depuis ce moment–là, maître [Emperor Justinian], que nous sommes opprimés par ces individus [the provincial bureaucracy] plus que

[59] The petition to the prefect Julius Julianus in *P. Cair. Isid.* 73, 314 CE (Trans. Boak and Youtie 1960).
[60] Salvian., *de gub. Dei*, 5, 7, after 439 CE (Trans. Sanford 1930).
[61] *C. Th.* XI, 16, 3 (324 CE).
[62] *Nov. Maj.* 2.4, 458 CE (Trans. Pharr 1952).
[63] Amm. Marc., 31, 6, 6 (Trans. Rolfe 1939).
[64] Salvian., *de gub. Dei*, 5, 8 (Trans. Sanford 1930).

> si nous nous trouvions sur des terres soumises aux barbares (…) il ne nous reste plus rien, à nous et nos enfants, du produit de nos terres pour nous nourrir.[65]

The situation on the ground was more complex. Various categories were involved with processing tax levies, among them city councillors (curials), appointed officials, senators and powerful local landowners. Some of these categories could overlap to some extent while highlighting fault lines among the elites. Respective roles were adjusted according to local power struggles and imperial policies, and could differ periodically from one province to another.[66] As these notabilities could cooperate or compete, ancient sources provide conflicting testimonies influenced by their authors' political or social inclinations. In practical terms, Lactantius lamented the loss of tax privileges suffered by Rome although the end of tax exemptions should have been viewed as an achievement, Libanius complained about the competition that military authorities presented to the civic elites, while Symmachus claimed that senatorial estates were mishandled by these same civic elites—although he specifically mentioned their most powerful representatives, the *principales*—and finally the Emperor Justinian exposed a global conspiracy against the central government by all of these categories.[67]

> The cause was this: Galerius having resolved by permanent taxes to devour the empire, soared to such extravagance in folly, as not to allow an exemption from that thraldom even to the Roman people. Tax–gatherers therefore were appointed to go to Rome, and make out lists of the citizens.
>
> The kind of protection, however, produces results exactly the reverse. It provides the motive force for injuring others—among them the collectors of taxes, too.[68]
>
> The assessment of extraordinary public services should not be entrusted to chief decurions [*principales*]…[69]
>
> (…) mais on a laissé libres les édiles municipaux [*principales*] et les comptables de dégager les uns de leurs prestations, alors qu'ils assujettissaient les autres à des obligations indues.[70]

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[65] *P. Lond.* V 1674, 567–8 CE (Trans. Fournet forthcoming).
[66] Jones 1986 (1964), 456–458 ; Delmaire 1989, 243–247 ; Grelle 1993.
[67] About curials' privileges and corruption: Hahn 1982.
[68] Lib., *Or*. 47, 7, *ca.* 390 CE (Trans. Norman 1977).
[69] *C. Th.* XI, 16, 4, 328 CE (Trans. Pharr 1952).

> Though they [the officials] sent us grain from there, they would not contribute anything else; the taxpayers all unanimously affirmed that everything was collected from them in full, but the prefects of the country districts [*pagarchae*], the curials, the collectors of taxes [*practores*], and especially the officiating prefects so managed the matter that no one could know anything about it and so that it was profitable to themselves alone.[71]

As summarized by Chris Wickham, "They [the city councillors] constantly complained that they were being bankrupted by the burden of underwriting taxes, while all other taxpayers complained about their tyranny".[72] Some curials who had managed to obtain immunity through bishopric ordination were, after the Council of Ariminum in 359 and the eastern councils that followed, provided with a choice between losing their property or being deposed and losing their immunity. Interestingly, they chose the latter option.[73] Being a curial was, then, not necessarily a bad thing, as long as sufficient wealth allowed council members to handle their tax responsibilities. The significant privileges enjoyed by church officials explained the attraction of ecclesiastic status,[74] without implying that all city councillors necessarily experienced such a pitiful plight. Concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the local aristocracy's upper strata led to other tax privileges. Unpaid taxes led to the accumulation of arrears that benefited the wealthiest landowners as well as some categories of tax officials. The Imperial authorities did aim at curbing these privileges on more than one occasion, but the sheer repetition of such measures and testimonies raises doubts about their efficiency.[75]

> But if relief was granted to a larger amount, such relief should remain undisturbed in the possession of those persons who obtained this special grant of imperial favor up to two hundred taxable units of land or heads, and all the rest shall be restored to the public tax payments.[76]

> Therefore, in the Diocese of your Excellency, we desire you and your staff at the beginning of this twelfth Indiction, with all proper gentleness, to impress upon the cultivator of the soil that he must pay his land–tax and

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[70] Sym., *Ep*. 9, 10, 2, end of the 4th century (Trans. Callu 2002).
[71] *Edict* XIII, 538 CE (Trans. Blume 2009).
[72] Wickham 2005, 68.
[73] Soz., *HE* 4, 24, 15.
[74] About ecclesiastic tax privileges: Elliott 1978, Ziche 2014.
[75] Jones 1986 (1964), 466–467.
[76] *C. Th.* XI, 20, 6, 430 CE (Trans. Pharr 1952).

> end those long arrears, which were introduced not for the assistance of the taxpayer, but for the corrupt profit of the tax–collector.[77]

If ancient sources are to be trusted, extremely unequal distribution of wealth came to characterize later Roman society. Olympiodorus of Thebes claims that Rome's wealthiest families earned 4,000 gold lb. a year, to which one–third in kind had to be added.[78] This is equivalent to almost 400,000 *solidi*. Under Justinian, the imperial budget would have yielded about 4 million *solidi* before its Western conquests.[79] About ten of Rome's richest families would have earned as much as the entire Eastern Empire.

Should such a picture of extreme inequality and fiscal exhaustion be taken at face value? Even the usually apocalyptic Salvianus acknowledges Gallic prosperity, while taxation and administrative rule were not systematically equated with extortion and corruption—although panegyrics and other types of biased testimonies always need to be considered with much caution, while Ostrogothic Italy might have been more prosperous than under the last imperial decades.

> No one questions that the Aquitanians and the Nine Peoples had the very marrow of the Gallic provinces, rich in every sort of fertility, and not in fertility alone, but in qualities sometimes ranked above this, charm, beauty and luxury. Almost all that district is still covered with close–planted vines, flowering meadows, plowed fields, fruit orchards, charming groves, springing fountains, flowing streams or waving grain, so that the owners and masters of the land truly seem to have taken for their own not so much a section of ground as a likeness of paradise.[80]

> Let lands reduced to peace pay rich tribute and barbarian booty fill thy majestic lap.[81]

> The fisc grew and private utility suffered no ruin.[82]

> But through a few officials it is possible to pay attention to many concerns.[83]

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[77] Cass., *Var*. 11, 7 (Trans. Hodgkin 1886).
[78] Olymp., *frag*. 44.
[79] Hendy 1985, 201–203.
[80] Salvian., *de gub. Dei*, 7, 2 (Trans. Sanford 1930).
[81] Rut. Nam., *de red. suo*, 1, 23 (Trans. Duff 1954).
[82] Cass., *Var*. 2, 16, 4 (Trans. Barnish 1992).
[83] Syn., *de Regno* 27 (Trans. Garzya 1989 and Kelly 2004, 190).

> The wealth of the Republic has grown along with private resources.[84]

Archaeology often points to prosperous and monetized regions during the later Empire, especially in the East.[86] At the same time, available figures depict a less wealthy ruling class in Constantinople than in Rome.[87] The eastern emperors were able to mobilize considerable resources on a very large scale, while enjoying seemingly more effective tax mechanisms.[88] That the Eastern Empire thrived financially while its aristocracy does not seem to have reached the same degree of wealth as its western counterpart leads to an intriguing question. Did Constantinople manage to engineer a more effective mobilization of resources based on a structurally less concentrated distribution of private wealth and a more functional bureaucracy?[89] Or, reciprocally, did a more effectively implemented and fairer tax system succeed in preventing such extreme forms of inequality, ultimately benefiting public finances?

Sometimes historians need luck. Among the abundant but generally very fragmented documentation offered by Egyptian papyri, the Justinianic years appear very privileged. Two almost exactly contemporary archives separated by little more than two hundred kilometres offer deep insights into the financial relationships linking state officials, large landowners and villagers between the 520s and the 570s CE.

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[84] Enn., *Pan. Th.* 58 (Trans. Haase 1991; see as well Arnold 2008, 171).

[86] Late Roman and early Byzantine coins are often very well represented on Eastern Mediterranean excavations. In cities like Caesarea, Antioch, Sardis, Pella and Hama, sixth– and early–seventh–century coins represent close to 20% of the retrieved numismatic material over the period 222 BCE–CE 640, just behind the CE 347–498 period and on a par with the CE 193–346 period: Evans 2006, 31, fig. 12. In Antioch in Pisidia, Byzantine coins actually outnumber late–Roman ones: Sancaktar 2014.

[87] Jones 1986 (1964), 538–9, 554–5, 566–71; Hendy 1985, 202–203.

[88] Williams and Frill 2014 (1999), 115–135.

[89] Bureaucrats were partially financed by end–users as they sold their services for a fee. Although this created corruption opportunities and favoured wealthier plaintiffs, the very fact such tariffs were made public indicates a degree of relative transparency and functionality. On official fee structures, see Jones 1986 (1964), 598 and Di Segni, Patrich and Holum 2003; more generally, Kelly 2004. For a more negative assessment of corruption in late–Roman society: McMullen 1988.

Aphrodito and the Apiones in the Sixth Century

The sands of Egypt have preserved, among others, two unique dossiers: on the one hand, several major accounting and registration documents originating from Aphrodito in the *Antaeopolite nome*, completed by the private archive of Dioscorus, a local landowner with official responsibilities;[90] on the other, the hundreds of accounting documents that once belonged to the archives of the Apion family, mainly from the Oxyrhynchite.[91] These two well–known groups of documents overlap chronologically, mostly covering the 525–580 CE period although some of them predate or postdate it. The following section highlights the main tax–related results provided by cross–referencing these two sets of documents. The fully detailed calculations are set out in *Journal of Late Antiquity*.[92]

A) Aphrodito

Aphrodito's tax register, combined with petitions and letters belonging to Dioscurus' archive, allowed Constantine Zuckerman to suggest a reconstruction of the gold tax rates paid on several types of lands—notably arable lands and vineyards—over some years belonging to the 525–568 period.[93] A forthcoming revised edition by Jean-Luc Fournet of some Dioscorus's papyri,[94] combined with few Oxyrhynchite documents and a piece of imperial legislation, leads finally to an even more complete sixth century picture as far as gold tax is concerned. The following table uses traditional Egyptian units of accounting, the gold carat—each *solidus* or *nomisma* weighing 1/72nd of a Roman lb. of *ca*. 324 g divided into 24 carats—and the aroura, about 0.68 acre or 0.28 hectare.

[90] Rémondon 1965; MacCoull 1988; Gascou 1989 and 2008; Zuckerman 2004; Fournet forthcoming.
[91] Mazza 2001; Hickey 2001, 2008 and 2012.
[92] Bransbourg 2016.
[93] Zuckerman 2004, 120–122, 188–189 and 213–216.
[94] Fournet forthcoming.

Approximate period of reference	Tax paid in gold in carats per aroura Arable lands	Vineyards	Main Supporting documents	Location	Year for the source
Earlier sixth century until 536	2	20	*P. Lond.* V 1674 *P. Aphrod. Reg.*	Aphrodito	568 525/6
537/551	3	21.5	*P. Cair. Masp.* III 67287, I 67058, III 67140 *P. Cair. Masp.* I 67057	Aphrodito	537/551 548/551
Late 550s–early 560s	4	23	*P. Lond.* V 1674 *P. Hamb.* I 56	Aphrodito	568 567/8
565/8	6.5	25.5	*P. Cair. Masp.* I 67002 *P. Ross. Georg.* V 62 *P. Lond.* V 1686 *P. Lond.* V 1674 *P. Hamb.* I 56	Aphrodito	566/7 Sixth century 565 568 567–8
570–590s	3	21.5	*Nov. Iust.* 163 *P. Oxy.* XVI 1907	Constantinople Oxyrhynchus	575 574–582
Later sixth century	2	20	*P. Oxy.* XVI 1909	Oxyrhynchus	Late sixth—early seventh century

Table 1: Tax rates and their papyrological sources

Hence, the following tax cycle, once the civilian grain tax (*embole*) is incorporated at a rate of about 1.5 artabas/aroura on arable lands and 7/12th on vineyards,[95] the artaba being a dry volumetric measure of grain usually equated to 4.5 *modii italici*, *i.e.*, 38.8 litres.[96]

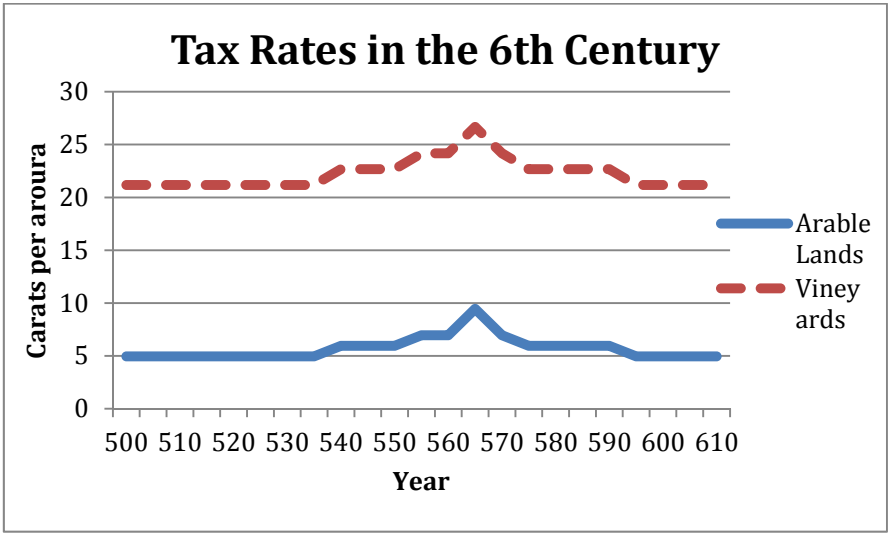

Chart 1

B) The Apiones estate

The following table summarizes the main tax–related figures provided by the Apiones' archives. The *embole* designates the grain tax levied for the supply of Constantinople, the *solidi* follow the Alexandrian standard.[97]

[95] Bagnall 1985. Vineyards' yield from *P. Cair. Masp.* I 67057.
[96] Bagnall 2009, 187, table 8.3 and Bagnall 2001.
[97] The gold standards used in these papyri – public, private and Alexandrian standards – have been interpreted either as the result of using light *solidi* or as a combination of fees, conversion and transportation charges applied to payments accounted in gold but actually delivered in bronze currency. Some of the attested ratios between the Alexandrian and imperial standards are 141/128, 153/145, 93/92, 130/129, 447/444, 16/15, 17/16: see notably *P. Oxy.* I 126, 144 and 154, XVI 1907 and 1908, LV 3804, LVVII 4930 and their editors' comments, as well as Carlà 2009, 220–233 and 367–390.

The Apiones paid tax for their own lands, on behalf of some small landowners whose properties seemed geographically intertwined with the Apiones' lands, and processed as well tax payments on behalf of several villages in the Oxyrhynchite *nome* – called 'Villages' in what follows. The grain tax could be adaerated, or converted, into its gold equivalent in some circumstances.

Papyrus reference	Nature of the information	Date	Number
P. Mich. Inv. 335v	Grain land in the Oxyrhynchite	Mid–fourth century	202,534 arouras
P. Oxy. I 127	*Embole* provided by the Apiones for the Oxyrhynchite	Late sixth century	87,818 artabas
	... for the Cynopolite		52,800 artabas
P. Oxy. XVI 1909	Combined *embole* for both nomes adaerated in gold	Late sixth century – early seventh century	350,000 artabas
	Combined gold tax		24,500 *solidi*
P. Oxy. XVI 1918v	Apiones' gold receivables	540–2	14,325.19 *solidi*
	Apiones' gold tax payment		6917.73 *solidi*
	Villages' tax payment processed by the Apiones		5,685.45 *solidi*
P. Oxy. XVIII 2196v	Apiones' gold receivables	586–7	18,520 *solidi*
	Apiones' gold tax payment		13,541.875 *solidi*
	Villages' tax payment processed by the Apiones		5,527-6,526 *solidi*
	Apiones' grain receipts		108,816.5 artabas
	Villages' *embole*		53,495 artabas

Table 2: Numeric Information from the Apiones' Dossier

Cross–referencing these figures leads to several key results, notably to a confirmation that the *embole* rate stood close to 1.5 artabas per aroura. At the same time, arable lands—or, we should rather say, lands taxed as

arable lands—represented the vast majority of the lands that fell under the Apiones' responsibility as tax gatherers—higher than 95% of the overall assessed lands. Finally, it is likely that the smaller *nome* of Cynopolite was entirely managed by the Apiones for tax purposes.

C) Tax Rates Convergence

Applying the *embole* yield and the gold tax rates available for the same periods in the Antaeopolite/Aphrodito documentation to the tax settled by the Apiones on behalf of the Villages category allows converging results, as both methods point to an area of about 37,500 arouras under that category. This is remarkable, as this result is achieved by combining two independent papyri separated by about 40 years (*P. Oxy.* XVI 1918v and XVIII 2196v), dealing with two different taxes (grain and gold tax), using contemporary rates from a different *nome*. This vindicates the hypothesis that similar grain and gold tax rates tended to be applied to similar land categories across Egypt. An overall stability between 540 and 586 of the Villagers' land supports the conjecture of the existence of a significant "middle–class" of farmers, highlighted in both the Aphrodito register and the almost contemporary Temseu Skordon tax register.[98]

Progressing further and, in particular, by cross–referencing the *embole* figures from *P. Oxy*. I 127 and *P. Oxy.* XVIII 2196v with *P. Oxy.* XVI 1918v gold tax payments, the area under direct Apiones management would have grown by a little over 30% between the early 540s and the mid–580s. This is broadly consistent with the growth of their gold income between both dates, further reinforcing previous results and the identity between the tax rates used in the Antaeopolite and the Oxyrhynchite during the same period.

Finally, the gold tax paid by the Apiones on their own properties surged from 6,917.73 to 13,451.875 *solidi*, a staggering 96% increase, implying an unexplained increase of *ca*. 60% once a 30–35% organic growth for the estate is factored in. Since the gold tax paid on behalf of the Villages remained about stable, the most likely conclusion is that a proportion of the grain tax (*embole*) had been paid in gold (*adaeratio*). A one–third *adaeratio* stands as the most arithmetically–compatible solution. This is consistent with the attested tendency on the part of the imperial authorities to sell grain for gold,[99] while a tax receipt like *P. Oxy.* XVI 1909 testifies a complete adaeratio situation at some slightly later date.

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[98] Bagnall, Keenan, and MacCoull 2011.
[99] Joh. Nik., *Chr*. 95.

The convergence and numerical compatibility of the areas under management in two different periods—early 540s and mid–580s—obtained by using the corresponding tax rates from Aphrodito/Antaeopolite, applied to the tax payments available from the Oxyrhynchite, leads to a potentially far–reaching conclusion: the small tenants complaining in Dioscorus's petitions and a family of senatorial rank like the Apiones would have been subjected to very similar tax rates.

Conclusion

Through a journey of eight centuries among the citizens of Rome expressing their fiscal views, we have highlighted an aspiration for fairness that kept growing as part of Roman ethics of taxation. In the absence of plain accounting documents, assessing the potentially contradictory complaints of Libanius, Salvianus or Symmachus vs. the official satisfaction displayed by Aristius Optatus, Synesius of Cyrene, Cassiodorus and the ambitious fiscal goals expressed by Justinian leads to frustrating uncertainties. Had the fiscal situation decisively improved in Ostrogothic Italy vs. the Western Empire period? Was the Eastern Empire more efficient than its western counterpart as well, taking advantage of less unequal wealth distribution among its elites and a more functional and dedicated bureaucracy?

Unless new documents are discovered, some of those questions may well never receive a certain answer at global level. We are left once more with what Egypt may offer us. In our case, the combination of the Aphrodito/Antaeopolite evidence with the Apiones dossier from Oxyrhynchus fails to show any significant tax privileges that a senatorial family with administrative responsibilities would have enjoyed compared with mainstream taxpayers. Although we cannot generalize— we have evidence for two sixth–century Egyptian *nomes* only—this speaks in favour of a rather higher degree of efficiency and fairer distribution than expected as far as taxation was concerned.

If such conclusions could be upheld at a more global level for the Eastern Empire, we could argue that a relatively functional tax system may lie at the core of its historical resilience. Its fiscal doctrine remains the most articulated tax philosophy ever produced by the ancient Mediterranean world, and it came to be studied and its principles implemented again at the end of the mediaeval period in the West. In that sense, it deserves to be considered as one of the main legacies of Late Antiquity in the field of political economy.

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CHAPTER SIX

PEASANT AND SLAVE IN LATE ANTIQUE NORTH AFRICA, C. 100-600 CE

NOEL LENSKI

One of the most enduring questions in the study of Late Antiquity is that of labor organization and land tenure. From Marx, to Fustel de Coulanges, to Weber in the nineteenth century, through Rostovtzeff, Mazzarino, Štaerman, and Finley in the mid-twentieth and up to the present with Lo Cascio, Vera, Carrié, Banaji, Wickham, Sarris, Grey, and Harper, the question has preoccupied some of the greatest historical minds.[1] Did Late Antiquity open a new chapter in the organization of labor relations? Or was it simply more of the same? Did it remain a period whose economic organization was characterized by what Marx termed the "slave mode of production" and Finley repackaged in sociological terms under the concept of a "slave society"? Or did it, as both Finley and Marx agree, give way to some form of bound dependency short of enslavement, a condition the mid-twentieth century was content to label "serfdom"? Based primarily on evidence from Egypt, Banaji and Sarris have recently restated the case for the rise of a new mode of tenant labor organization with the rise of great estates populated by tenant laborers working on long-term (essentially permanent) rental contracts known in the sources generically as *coloni*.[2]

Even more recently, however, Harper has taken a very different position and made the case that late Roman society remained a Finleyan "slave

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[1] Weber 1891; Fustel de Coulanges 1894; Rostovtzeff 1910; 1957; Mazzarino 1951; Štaerman 1957; Finley 1973; 1980; Lo Cascio 1997; Vera 1983; 1987; 1992-1993; Carrié 1982; 1983; 1997; Banaji 1997; 2001; Wickham 2005; Sarris 2006; Grey 2011; Harper 2011. I should like to thank Monica Hellstrom for her helpful discussion of this paper as well as Dennis Kehoe and Domenico Vera for their careful readings and useful advice.

[2] Banaji 2001; Sarris 2006.

society" throughout the long fourth century.[3] Engaging in particular with Marxian models that emphasize a transition from slavery to bound tenancy,[4] Harper has asserted that agricultural surplus continued to be produced for the Roman elite primarily through the exploitation of slave labor into the fifth century. In what could be termed a "capitalist model," built on Finleyan assumptions about the importance of markets for the rise and flourish of a "slave society," Harper contends that only with the political collapse of the Roman empire in the fifth century did slavery falter on the shoals of economic stagnation. As the market for the surplus production dried up, the demand for large-scale slave operations shrank and with it went Rome's slave society.

In order to make his case, Harper must sidestep the abundant evidence for agricultural tenancy throughout the imperial period and for its gradual transformation into a more slavelike condition with the binding of *coloni* to the estates on which they were born. Rather than discuss this evidence head on, Harper falls back on the work of Jean-Michel Carrié, who has argued strongly against the existence of the "colonate" as any coherent juridical status, contending instead that it represents a modern "mythe historiographique."[5] Although Carrié's arguments have been reinforced in recent work by Grey, the thesis remains controversial. Thus Harper's contention that reference to Carrie's work suffices to replace serious engagement with the detailed and abundant source pool on tenancy leaves his argument open to question.[6]

In this brief study I return to the question with a focus on just one geographical area, the North African Maghreb, a region of central importance to Harper's thesis because of the rich storehouse of circumstantial material on agricultural production available in the corpus of Augustine. My goal is to reopen the question of agricultural labor in this territory and particularly to weigh the evidence for the relative importance of free, bound, and slave labor in generating surplus for the regional and imperial

[3] Harper 2011, 144-200, 497-509.
[4] Especially the work of Vera and Giardina; cf. Giliberti 1999; Rosafio 2002.
[5] Carrié 1982; 1983; 1997.
[6] Harper 2011, 153–55: "Suffice it to say that Carrié's initial critique forever undermined the idea that the colonate was a 'replacement' of the slave system or that it created an intermediate serf–like status between slavery and freedom." See also Harper 2012, 169: "Second, one of the central components of the narrative of transition from ancient slavery to medieval serfdom has disappeared, at least in anything like its classic form: the colonate... Indeed, just as the colonate is a 'historiographical myth,' so too the conquest thesis is an 'economic myth'."

elite. I explore the question over the longue durée, for only thus can we hope to determine whether there was in fact a transformation in labor relations during Late Antiquity, or any other period for that matter. To anticipate my conclusions, I will argue based on what should represent a fairly comprehensive examination of available sources that, even if there may have been a "slave society" elsewhere in the Roman Empire in the fourth century, there is no solid evidence that this was the case for North Africa at any period between the first and sixth centuries CE. Indeed, while plenty of evidence for agricultural labor in the region exists, most of it points to the use of tenants for the generation of surplus on the estates of the emperor and the political and economic elite in all periods of antiquity with the possible exception of the second and fifth centuries—the later only in the post-Roman period of Vandal occupation. Second, I hope to demonstrate that, although tenancy remained a prevailing—usually the prevailing—mode of rural labor organization, it did in fact shift in Late Antiquity with the rise of the bound colonate. The net effect was a marked reduction in the freedom of farm laborers, who had formerly been given considerable sway in the management of their tenancies but lost this to a welter of state regulation. This alteration to traditional forms, well attested in the writings of Augustine, then saw further shifts with the arrival of the Vandals, who appear to have relied much more heavily on slaves. With the East Roman reconquest of North Africa, the imperial fiscal administration made a half-hearted effort to reimpose a bound colonate but essentially faltered in the grip of the centripetal forces that always made the binding of tenants difficult, and particularly in a region where longstanding local custom had favored freer forms of tenancy since the early empire. In this sense, Late Antiquity did indeed witness a period of transformation in the organization of agricultural labor, but not one that was unidirectional. The heavy, if hardly predominant, reliance on slave agricultural labor in the second century gave way to the much more intensive use of bound tenant labor under the dirigiste state of the fourth century, and in turn to the opportunistic exploitation of slavery in the fifth, only to revert to patterns of bound tenancy, albeit with limited success, in the sixth. Insofar as this is true, a Finleyan "slave society" is not to be found in any period of Roman rule in North Africa, least of all in the long fourth century.[7]

[7] Vera 1988 already reaches similar conclusions to those presented here. So too Lassère 2015, 205-6, 261-280; Whittaker 1978; 1980; Garnsey 1998, 473: "North Africa was a slaveowning rather than a slave society."

Natural parameters—land and water, large estates and small-scale competition

There were certain fixed factors that governed the organization of agriculture and land tenure in most of North Africa throughout the Roman period. Chief among these was geography and its relationship to climate and water supply. Roman North Africa essentially corresponded to the territory known with the Arabic designation Maghreb ("West"), stretching along the south-western coast of the Mediterranean between Tingis (Tangiers) in Mauretania and Lepcis Magna (Lebda) in Libya. This was a landscape dominated by the long ridges of the Atlas and Aurès Mountains, paralleling the coast from south–west to north–east between modern Morocco and Tunisia. These ridges, whose heights were located between 200 and 400 km inland, simultaneously captured precipitation and fragmented the geography into a series of fertile valleys (suitable for cereal agriculture), surrounded by hillsides (whose lower slopes supported fruit and olive production). Along the central north coast, in what is today Tunisia and eastern Algeria, for a distance of between 200 and 300 km inland, average rainfall exceeded 400 mm annually, making cultivation possible without irrigation. Here ceraliculture flourished already in pre–Roman times. It was given further impetus by Roman centuriation in the fertile valleys of the seaward flowing watersheds, which resulted in the creation of orderly plots that were parceled out to Roman colonists, primarily in the first centuries BCE and CE. For another 100–200 km southward an isohyet of 200 mm of annual rainfall allows for irrigated agriculture, which gradually took off under the stable security situation provided by the Romans, reaching an apex in the third century CE. This more marginal steppic land, as for example in the territory of western Byzacena, tended to favor oleiculture rather than grain production, although olives as well as fruits (figs, dates, and wine grapes) were produced all across the Maghreb, particularly at the edges of arable tracts. Beyond this to the south was desert, accessible only to pastoralist nomads, who were themselves very much a part of the region's economy as they entered and exited arable territory, interacting with the agriculturalist neighbors as occasional laborers, traders, and raiders.[8]

Agriculturalists have tended to cluster their habitations around rivers, wadis, and springs and have always worked to harness and husband

[8] More on the landscape of North Africa and its effects on habitation and agriculture at Lassère 2015, 21–26, 201–43.

precious supplies of water using dams, reservoirs, and conduits. This hydrological situation has favored those who were able to concentrate capital, even as it also fostered competition for control of limited water and limited parcels of land with access to it. Closer to the desert steppe, it has increased interaction with nomads, further conditioning the agglomeration of populations into compact settlements for purposes of defense.[9] Already in pre-Roman times this nexus of geographic and climatological factors gave impetus to the growth of large estates, which could concentrate and control water resources and provide security against nomadic indigenes.[10] Such *latifundia* retained their importance in the period of Roman imperial rule, when large landholdings are alluded to in a famous passage of Pliny the Elder claiming that, "*latifundia* have destroyed Italy, but also the provinces; six estate-holders owned half of Africa when Nero murdered them."[11] A similar situation is described in the early fifth-century surveyor Agennius Urbicus:

> But they [i.e., disputes between private landholders and civic communities] often occur in the provinces, especially in Africa, where private individuals have estates no less extensive than the territory belonging to a civic community (*res publicae territoria*); indeed, many estates are far bigger than territories. Moreover, private individuals have on their estates a not insubstantial population from the lower orders (*populum plebeium*), and villages (*vici*) scattered around their country house rather like towns (*municipia*).[12]

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[9] Whittaker 1978. On tensions between nomads and sedentarists over territorial control, see *CIL* 8: 8369 = *ILS* 5961with Kolendo 1991, 32. See Mattingly et al. 2013 for a survey of fortified farms and villages in Africa.

[10] The Numidian *vicus Phosphorianus* at Aïn Melouk near Thibilis controlled some 4425 ha, cf. Desanges 1989. Shaw 1992, 92 argues that at Lamasba (Ain Merwâna), also in Numidia, a dozen families controlled 72% of the land recorded at *CIL* 8: 4440 = 18587 = *ILS* 5793 (220s). For archaeological evidence of large–scale property concentration in the Segermes Valley, see Dietz et al. 1995,

[11] Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 18.6.35: *latifundia perdidere Italiam, iam vero et provincias; sex domini semissem Africae possidebant, cum interfecit eos Nero*; cf. Sen. *Ep*. 19.5[114].26.

[12] Agennius Urbicus, *De controversiis agrorum*: *Inter res p. et privatos non facile tales in Italia controversiae moventur, sed frequenter in provinciis, praecipue in Africa, ubi saltus non minores habent privati quam res p. territoria; quin immo multi saltus longe maiores sunt territoriis: habent autem in saltibus privati[s] non exiguum populum plebeium et vicos circa villam in modum municipiorum* (Campbell 2000, 42–43 with 349–50 n. 56). On the date of Agennius Urbicus, see Campbell 2000, xxxi–xxxiii.

In Africa, then, private estates were often as extensive as neighboring towns and even stood in competition with these as centers of territorial and political autonomy.[13] Moreover, as the Pliny passage implies, Africa was notorious for its especially high concentration of imperially owned properties. Using the quite precise figures mentioned for cultivable estates in Africa Proconsularis and Byzacena in a law of 422 CE, Claude Lepelley has estimated with some precision that the imperial *res privata* controlled approximately 1/6 of the cultivable land of both provinces in this period, and the same is likely to have been true in earlier centuries as well.[14]

It is important to note that the archaeological and epigraphic evidence adds considerable subtlety and complexity to the monolithic impression of outsized estates left by the texts.[15] Particularly in those areas that could support wet farming, we have evidence for extensive centuriation into smaller plots and epigraphic as well as archaeological testimonia to a vast multiplicity of individually named farms, both private and imperial.[16] Even in more marginal landscapes, archaeological survey has indicated the regular recurrence of tessellation into relatively compact estates which competed with one another for access to resources and to maximize surplus output through the investment of capital and labor into improvements like olive presses and grain storage silos. It remains a subject of ongoing debate whether these opposing indications (of large and small scale operations) in the source pools point to a shift over time (as Africa went from a labor deficit in the early empire to a labor surplus by the early third century)[17] or perhaps simply two versions of the same story (large–scale landholders co–existing alongside smaller free–holders and maintaining control over holdings scattered across a dispersed landscape).[18]

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[13] See also *Vita Melaniae Latina* 21 (Laurence pp. 194-95): *quae possessio maior etiam erat civitatis ipsius* (speaking of the estate of the Valerii near Thagaste).

[14] *CTh* 11.28.13 with Lepelley 1967. See also Crawford 1976, 57-59 for a provisional list of known imperial estates.

[15] Fentress et al. 2004, passim, esp. 160: "In spite of a tendency to agglomerate, the African countryside remained marked by a highly differentiated settlement pattern, with villages, small farms and towns surviving beside the villas of the urban elite." On a micro-regional level, Leveau 1984, 281–397 explores the variety of productive strategies and their correspondence with landscape and labor in the area around Caesarea. Invaluable is the survey of North African archaeology at Mattingly and Hitchner 1995.

[16] For a sampling, see Lengrand 1996, 112–16.

[17] So Lassère 1977, 647–62.

[18] Picard 1959, 64, 373; cf. Lassère 2015, 20–22.

These competing narratives are in many ways emblematic of a broader story of competition between labor and management that played itself out continuously from the first through sixth centuries CE. Small freeholders and tenant farmers struggled to assert control over the land they and their families had been farming for generations and the surplus product it produced, even as larger landowners (private and imperial) struggled to maximize control over the land and water resources to which they laid claim, resources developed and farmed for them by slaves, tenants, free wage laborers, and even small freeholders leasing land from larger estates. In other words, the simultaneous impression of land and resource concentration and fragmentation may be an artefact of an ongoing tug–of–war between freeholders, landlords, and tenants, each with competing claims to resources and output. The net result was what Domenico Vera has referred to as a jigsaw-puzzle of arrangements on imperial as well as private holdings consisting of a variety of types of land under a variety of types of cultivation by a variety of laborers and for a variety of owners.[19]

When it comes to describing the labor pool in the region, there is evidence for a similar degree of variability. Nevertheless, where good documentation for the labor regime on rural estates is available, it indicates that this was overwhelmingly free, whether this meant free landowners on small privately held farms, free tenants renting parcels from mid-sized landholders, or free *coloni* operating on larger estates. This is certainly true of the evidence for imperial estates, which are reasonably well documented epigraphically for the high empire, and the sources we have for labor on private estates from the later Empire also point to a general tendency toward the use of free, albeit legally bound, *coloni*. This is not to deny that other forms of land tenure and labor organization existed across this variegated landscape. In the steppe zones on the desert edge, animal husbandry and nomadic pastoralism were common, both among non-Romanized Berbers and among subjects of the Roman Empire. Here, however, the personal status of such herders is difficult to determine, and there is no evidence that herding generated a significant surplus for the landholding elite. We also have evidence for free seasonal laborers, most famously the "Mower of Mactar," whose self-congratulatory epitaph stands as a pointed reminder that free wage and contract labor constituted an important component of the overall economy in a region where

[19] Vera 1988, 986. Similarly for other parts of the empire, cf. Hickey 2007; 2012, 62–89.

seasonality played a central role in the agricultural labor cycle.[20] Finally, there is, as we shall see, irrefutable evidence for the use of slave labor in the first six centuries CE. Although it is never as high-resolution and abundant as the evidence for tenancy—in large part because of the widespread tendency of all source types to underrepresent slaves—it should serve as a reminder that labor relations were as variegated as landholding in the region. What we do not have, however, is any clear indication that slave laborers were central to the production of agricultural surplus for the elite. Instead, the overwhelming majority of the evidence indicates that long–term dependent or semi–dependent tenants were the primary cultivators of the medium and large-scale estates from which landholding aristocrats extracted their wealth in North Africa.

First and second centuries

Already in the Carthaginian period, agricultural labor was organized around fortlets (*castella*) using large–scale tenancy arrangements. These were simply carried forward with the rise of Roman hegemony. By the first century CE both the emperor and Roman senatorial aristocrats controlled huge amounts of North African land which, perforce, they managed as absentees through *conductores*—management level lessees who took five–year contracts on extensive farmsteads that consisted of numerous holdings parceled out to individual tenant–farmers (*coloni*) expected to pay rents in kind directly to the *conductor*, who generally also controlled a *pars dominica* that he exploited directly. Local landholders appear to have followed a similar model, exploiting their estates through tenants or sometimes slaves whom they managed either through *conductores* or more directly through *procuratores, actores* or *vilici* (managers, some of them slaves, to whom they entrusted estates for supervision).[21] Absenteeism was the norm, requiring the availability not just of an adequate labor pool but also of reliable supervisors operating with equally reliable tenure arrangements to maximize efficiencey and, above all, minimize risk.

In the second century CE, we have excellent evidence for such arrangements in a series of six inscriptions discovered in the Bagrada

[20] *CIL* 8: 11824 = *CLE* 1238; cf. Shaw 2013, 48–92, with bibliography and further references. Banaji 2001, 190–212 makes a case for the centrality of wage labor in early Byzantine Egypt, but see now the critique of Freu 2013.
[21] Whittaker 1978, 335–41.

(Medjerda) River Valley in the province of Africa Proconsularis.[22] All are related to the management of imperial estates, although there is reason to believe that the arrangements they describe were characteristic of the region more broadly. The earliest and most detailed, dating from late in the reign of Trajan (c. 117 CE), relates to a landholding called the Villa Magna Variana at the modern site of Henchir Mettich (HM).[23] Its text makes it clear that contractual relations between *conductores* and *coloni* on this estate were regulated by a normative code termed the Lex Manciana. Ever since the work of D. Flach and D. Kehoe in the 1970s–1980s, scholars have generally accepted that this was originally a private law arrangement which came to be applied to estates of the fisc that the emperor had acquired and continued to manage under its provisions.[24] The HM inscription represents a response to a petition lodged by the *coloni* of the Villa Magna asking for clarification on rental rates or shares (*partes*) and the management of fallow marginal land (*subseciva*) that had been brought under cultivation by the tenants. By the terms of the inscription, **rental rates** were to be regulated at one–third shares for most crops, one–quarter for some others, to be paid in kind to the *conductor*. In addition, tenants were required annually to perform six days-worth of labor service (*operae*) on the *pars dominica* under the direct control of the *conductor*. Some have speculated that *conductores* generally cultivated these direct concerns using slave laborers, although there are no clear indications of this in the epigraphic record, and the six days of corvée labor required of the various *coloni* probably would have minimized the need for much additional labor input, depending of course on their size.[25] Less speculatively, and more important for the overall productivity of the estate, the HM inscription provides that *coloni* who succeeded in bringing **marginal land** under cultivation would gain an ownership claim in the

[22] See Flach 1978 and Kehoe 1984a; 1985; 1988, 28–70 for a complete set of editions and translations; cf. Flach 1982 and Kehoe 1988 passim for analysis. Kolendo 1991[1976], 34-45 remains useful; and see Hobson 2015, 54-61.

[23] I follow the text established at Kehoe 1984a, 198–201; 1988, 29–38. See also Flach 1978, 476–84. Kehoe's reading now supersedes *CIL* 8:25902 = Riccobono *FIRA*^{2} no. 100.

[24] Kehoe 1984a, 202–3; 1984b; 1988, 48–55; Flach 1982, 447–46; De Ligt 1998–1999, 219–20.

[25] For the likelihood of slave laborers on the domanial estates, see already Schulten 1896, 88-91; cf. Vera 1992, 473; Wickham 2005, 273-74. Slaves are mentioned in the final lines of column IV of the Henchir Mettich inscription as guardians, but the inscription breaks off before further details can be gleaned.

lease rights (*usus proprius*) to that newly productive soil which gave them an exclusive claim to cultivate it and to pass these rights on to their successors through inheritance. It even gave *coloni* a grace period of five years (for vines) and ten (for olives) to bring such new plantations to full productivity before they owed rent on them.[26]

This second proviso obviously encouraged the development of marginal land and thus increased the overall productivity of an estate. It also encouraged entrepreneurialism among *coloni*, who gained quasi-ownership rights from their labors and were thus incentivized to collude with the imperial fisc—the ultimate owner of the land—in increasing output. With the HM inscription and indeed all of the Bagrada Valley texts, the emperor seemed to be further supporting this relationship by circumscribing the rights of his middleman lessees (*conductores*) to usurp the profits of the *coloni* or otherwise abuse them. By preventing the more powerful agent in this binary rental arrangement from gaining the upper hand, the emperor was fostering primary producers and encouraging the full exploitation of estates that were far too distant and numerous for him to manage personally.[27] This sort of savvy management strategy is only thinkable in a free labor environment, a fact that must have incentivized reliance on tenants rather than slaves, who could only be acquired and maintained with significant capital outlays and whose labor productivity could only have been increased with coercive strategies that degraded their physical capacity and compromised their reproductivity.[28]

A major question that remains with regard to the Bagrada Valley inscriptions is whether both of the main spheres of regulation—that concerning **rental rates** and that encouraging the cultivation of **marginal**

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[26] Schubert 2008 offers a radical new reading of the Henchir Mettich inscription that assumes the provisions on marginal land deal with the sedentarization of nomads and that the related inscriptions (discussed below) then show an evolution as these sedentarized tenants faced increasing abuse in subsequent generations. The thesis is worthy of consideration, but I remain more convinced by Flach's and Kehoe's interpretations.

[27] This is outlined brilliantly at Kehoe 1988, esp. at 71–153.

[28] Pace Harper 2011, 159–60: "Tenancy inherently discouraged capital investment, partly because tenants had little reason to invest in long–term improvements and because the principal cash crops of the Roman empire, grapes and olives, take so long to mature." In a general way, Harper's model is based on the unproven assumption that Roman landholders' primary goal was to maximize return on investment, but much better attested were strategies that minimized risk while guaranteeing steady returns, see Kehoe 1997; cf. Vera 1983.

land (*subseciva*)—were part of the original lex Manciana, or whether the lex Manciana only regulated the first and the provision for the cultivation of *subseciva* in the HM inscription was a new addition to this protocol first introduced by the very text recorded there. Luuk De Ligt has argued convincingly that both provisos were part of the original law, which simultaneously set (relatively low) rental rates on land cultivated by *coloni* and encouraged the entrepreneurial exploitation of marginal land and its long-term maintenance as quasi-property by tenant–farmers.[29]

The process of bringing unused land into production with cereals, fruit trees, and olives was then further encouraged by a "law of Hadrian on uncultivated lands" (*lex Hadriana de rudibus agris*) which broadened the schedule of lands eligible for new cultivation to include centuriated territory which had been abandoned. We have long known of its promulgation in Africa through two further inscriptions from the Bagrada Valley at Aïn-Djemala and Aïn-Wassel.[30] The first was issued under Hadrian, but the second dates to the reign of Septimius Severus, indicating that the order was generalized across time. A third epigraphic attestation, published in 2000 from Lella Drebblia near ancient Thugga, confirms that the *lex Hadriana de rudibus agris* was truly widespread in its application across the region.[31] Indeed, it has been argued that the *lex Hadriana* was not limited to Africa but was implemented more broadly across the empire.[32] The African inscriptions attesting to it seem then to have grafted its provisions into the pre-existing matrix of Mancian tenure arrangements customary in the region in order to create a system that was extremely generous in distributing possessory rights to ambitious planters and thus encouraging cultivation. The combination of *lex Manciana* and *lex Hadriana de rudibus agris* thus pioneered and propagated an ingenious way simultaneously to dampen the power of *conductores* and increase the productivity of *coloni*. Not only did they set reasonable rental rates, but they also granted perpetual proprietary claims for new plantations of vines, fruits, and olives that encouraged the expansion of market agriculture by small-scale tenants.[33] Moreover, as written protocols, both could be and

[29] De Ligt 1998–1999.
[30] Kehoe 1984b, 159–62; 1988, 55–59; cf. Flach 1978, 484–89. Kehoe's reading supersedes *CIL* 8: 25943; 26416 = Riccobono *FIRA*^{2} no. 101–102.
[31] *AE* 2001, 2083 = De Vos 2000, 35.
[32] Lassère 1977, 298-99; cf. Scholl and Schubert 2004.
[33] For the variety of fruits cultivated in the Maghreb under Roman rule, see Lassère 2015, 212–16, with earlier bibliography.

apparently were cross–applied throughout North Africa, where they apparently governed both imperial and private holdings.[34]

The enduring impact of this framework is confirmed by the fact that the general terms of the *lex Manciana* and the *lex Hadriana de rudibus agris* formed the regulatory basis for tenancy arrangements mentioned in a series of petitions to the emperor Commodus in the 180s. The most extensive of these comes from the *Saltus Burunitanus* (Suk el-Khmis), 50 km west of the Villa Magna Variana. It records a petition from the *coloni* of this estate complaining that their rent shares and corvée labor obligations had been arbitrarily increased by a *procurator* who had gone so far as to unleash soldiers to arrest and even beat some of the tenants—some of them Roman citizens. In his rescript, Commodus upheld the claims of the *coloni* and forbade further abuse, to what effect we can no longer say.[35] Two further petitions to Commodus, both extremely fragmentary, point to similar tensions between managers and *coloni.* One at Aïn Zaga preserves only the heading of the petition, but the second, from Gasr Mezuar, preserves enough syntax to identify further complaints about radically increased corvée obligations as well as increases in rent shares on fruit trees.[36]

This collection of late third century material indicates a growing tension between *colonus* and manager, a situation that would continue to escalate to the disadvantage of the *colonus*. Still in the 180s, however, the emperor strove to uphold the inherited claims of his tenants to limitations on their rent and labor obligations and to impose an interdict on the arbitrary abuse of their persons. As we shall see in the next section, this tendency of the emperor to defend primary producers in the face of *procuratores* and *conductores* appears to have endured into the early fourth century, after which the emperor began using the force of law increasingly to the advantage of managers (imperial and private) over against the interests of free tenants. Even so, the lex Manciana played a role in guaranteeing rights to land tenure as late as the fifth–century, when the Albertini Tablets, found some 200 km south of the Bagrada River (and thus in a very different agricultural context and, moreover, in a private

[34] Schubert 2008, 253-54.
[35] Kehoe 1988, 64-69; cf. Flach 1978, 489-92. Kehoe supersedes *CIL* 10570; 14464 = Riccobono *FIRA*^{2} no. 103.
[36] *CIL* 8: 14428 = *ILTun* 1220 (Gasr Mezuar). *CIL* 8: 14451 (Aïn Zaga).

tenancy arrangement) continue to record the claims of tenants to the cultivation of their fields under the *lex Manciana*.[37]

None of this is to deny that there is good evidence of the presence of slaves in the region and their use in agriculture.[38] Slave-like figures appear regularly on mosaics of the second through fourth centuries in both domestic and agricultural roles, even if it is extremely difficult to determine in any given instance whether a particular image represented a slave rather than a free dependent laborer.[39] Indications of slaves in agriculture are also present in the *Apology* of Apuleius. When describing the Tripolitanian estates of his wife Aemilia Pudentilla, he reports that she controlled "extremely fertile lands and a great and richly decorated house as well as a huge amount of wheat, barley, wine, olives, and other fruits, and also scarcely less than 400 slaves, and even more herd animals."[40] Although the passage does not confirm that these slaves worked the land, this conclusion seems inevitable given the numbers at Pudentilla's disposal. Indeed, earlier in the same text Apuleius fends off his brother–in–law's ridicule at the low number of slaves he himself possessed by pointing out that, while some Africans deployed slaves on their farms, others used free laborers[41]—a confirmation of the overall picture presented here that slaves were *a choice*, not *the choice* for agricultural labor on the part of elite proprietors.

In fact, in many instances where slaves can be found in rural North African settings, they can be set alongside free tenants, who tend to outnumber them quantitatively and qualitatively as the primary producers of agricultural surplus. Thus Stéphane Gsell assembled some 30 epigraphic attestations for the use of slaves in managerial positions on

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[37] See below n. 106. Hobson 2015, 57-61, 146, 157-60 is less convinced of the general applicability of the Lex Manciana outside the Bagrada Valley but has difficulty explaining its regular appearance in the Albertini Tablets.

[38] Leveau 1984, 20-22, 82-83, 98-100, 149-53 has shown how the epigraphic record of Caesarea (Cherchel) indicates a relatively high percentage of slaves in this urban environment in the first century BCE through third century CE, although he cautions against assuming this picture applied to the countryside.

[39] Blazquez 1998.

[40] Apul. *Apol*. 93.3–5: *fructuosissimos agros et grandem domum opulente ornatam magnamque uim tritici et ordei et uini et oliui ceterorumque fructuum, seruos quoque haud minus CCCC, pecora amplius neque pauca neque abiecti pretii donaret.*

[41] Apul. *Apol*. 17: *Ego adeo servosne tu habeas ad agrum colendum an ipse mutuarias operas cum vicinis tuis cambies, neque scio neque laboro.*

rural estates, but these are far outnumbered by the 66 inscriptions assembled by Klaus-Peter Johne, Jens Köhn and Volker Weber that attest to the presence of *coloni* on North African farmsteads.[42] The disparity in numbers is unlikely to be representative of the relative differences of these two groups in the North African countryside, but it does foreclose any argument that North Africa of the high empire was a "slave society," i.e. a society in which members of the elite looked to slave labor as the primary or even exclusive manpower pool for generating income. Similarly, one of our best testimonia to the use of slaves in North African agriculture comes in a passage from the second–century jurist Scaevola where he describes a woman who left a legacy of her African farm "outfitted with all its effects and with its slaves and the rents outstanding from its *coloni.*"[43] The passage is striking for its implication that the estate was as reliant on free tenants as it was on slaves for its workforce. Indeed, one wonders if we are not dealing here with a private law instance of precisely the sort of land tenure structures observed in epigraphic attestations of the Mancian law, with slaves tending a domanial home-farm while *coloni* cultivate the surrounding tenancies. Whether or not this is the case, Scaevola's testimony reinforces the impression that slaves and tenants operated side by side in African agriculture.

Slaves were thus by no means the only, nor even the primary, producers of agricultural surplus in the high empire. In fact, when we examine the most circumstantially detailed sources from the period—the Bagrada Valley inscriptions—we cannot escape the impression that tenants predominated as the generators of agricultural wealth for large-scale landholders. While these inscriptions are directly relevant only to imperial estates, there are strong indications that they reflect a pattern of estate management characteristic of private estates as well. Large landholders benefitted from the flexibility of part slave / part free work forces, each with its own drawbacks but—given the ingenious equilibrium struck by the Mancian tenure custom—each likely to have been effective at guaranteeing steady profits in a region characterized by topographical and climatological variability.

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[42] Gsell 1932, 402-8; Johne, Köhn and Weber 1983, 372-410. Carlsen 1991 also concludes that the epigraphic attestations of *vilici* and *actores* indicate a heavier reliance on tenants than slaves in the High Empire.

[43] *D* 33.7.27.1: "*Fundum Cornelianum Titio ita ut est instructus cum omnibus rebus et mancipiis et reliquis colonorum dari volo.*" For a similar mix of tenants and slaves see Aug. *Civ. Dei* 22.8, discussed below at n. 88.

Third century

The coexistence of multiple labor strategies in the North African countryside and the development of tenancy arrangements that simultaneously balanced the interests of laborers, lessees, and landowners created an economic boom in the Maghreb that is well attested archaeologically. Interestingly, it is precisely the sorts of crops most encouraged by the *Lex Manciana* that enjoyed the most dramatic growth, especially the olive. Mattingly has argued that by the third century, the province of Byzacena, and particularly the semiarid Sahel inland from Hadrumetum as far upland as Thelepte (Feriana), must have had a minimum of 10 million olive trees which would have produced some 40,000 metric tons of oil per year by the fourth century.[44] The intensive field survey of the western Sahel around ancient Sbeitla (Suffetula) and Kasserine (Cillium) has been able to pinpoint the period of greatest expansion of oleiculture in this westerly region to the third century, when stone-construction production facilities with purpose-built oil presses were first installed in great numbers.[45] Olive cultivation in this region thus witnessed a massive growth that must have been encouraged by the liberal land-tenure policies promoted on imperial and probably also private estates through the spread of tenancy arrangements based on the lex Manciana.

The economic and cultural power exerted by the agricultural and demographic growth of producers has been emphasized in a number of recent studies, especially in Dossey's monograph *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa*. Leslie Dossey argues that the fourth century evidence for a restive peasantry is not reflexive of resistance to oppression (as had previously been assumed) but rather of a newfound independence fostered by economic prosperity and growing self–reliance.[46] The same spirit can be found in the passage of Agennius Urbicus quoted above

[44] Mattingly 1988. Matttingly 1985 argues for similarly high figures (18,000 metric tons / year) for Tripolitanian oil production by the third century. Mattingly, Stone, Stirling and Ben Lazreg 2001 shows how the coastal city of Leptiminus became a trading center, manufacturing goods for the export of oil and garum (amphorae) as well as for agricultural use inland in the Sahel (metalwares). The regional economic boom, which continued deep into the sixth century, was thus an urban as well as a rural phenomenon.

[45] Addyman 1962, 60–77; Hitchner 1988. Mattingly and Hitchner 1995, 195 argue that some sort of tenancy arrangement, probably based on the Lex Manciana, factored into the growth of North African oleiculture in this region at this time.

[46] Dossey 2010, passim, esp. 193–203.

which asserts that the tenants of private estates were often cohesive enough to be regarded as a "plebeian populace" (*populum plebeium*) unto themselves.[47] The establishment of political solidarity around common adherence to a large private estate is well attested in the epigraphic record as well. One thinks for example of the *vicani vici Annaei*, who dedicated a structure near the Municipium Semta (Ksour-Dzemda) in Proconsularis using money provided them by Q. Geminius Arnensis Sabinus, a highly decorated centurion under Trajan and, presumably, the owner of their estate.[48] Epigraphic examples can be multiplied. On the island of Zambrah, near Carthage, the *plebs fundi [3]itani* dedicated an enclosure to the goddess Ceres, again attesting to estate tenants claiming quasi-civic status.[49] The "Vesatenses", who made a dedication in the 220s on their estate at Bouraoui Belhadef (in Proconsularis) to their landlord, the Roman senator C. Annius Anullinus Geminus Percennianus, show a similar sense of group identity.[50] Another dedication to Anullinus Percennianus was made at Sidi Bou Skikine by a manager (*actor*) named Maximus, surely a slave.[51] This combination of slave manager and free tenants would seem to offer an early example of a phenomenon much better attested in the fourth through sixth centuries, when slaves were frequently used in high-level managerial positions to supervise farms populated by *coloni*.[52] But perhaps the best example of this sort of "synoecism" of farm tenants in North Africa comes in the Civitas Faustianensis in Byzacena, where the tenant population of a private estate owned by a Q. Anicius Faustus succeeded in achieving the status of a fully independent city in the early fourth century.[53] The strength of tenant communities is thus well attested not just at an economic but also at a political level.

The archaeological record only confirms an impression of ongoing and even expanding economic prosperity in this third–century period, very

[47] Above n. 12.
[48] *ILTun* 778–779.
[49] *CIL* 8: 23022.
[50] *CIL* 8: 27953 = *ILAlg* 1: 3636; cf. PIR^2 A 633. Anullinus Percennianus is probably the father or grandfather of PLRE I C. Annius Anullinus 3, who is regularly attested as Proconsul Africae in Christian martyr acts of the Great Persecution.
[51] *CIL* 8: 27943 = *ILAlg* 1: 3625.
[52] See Vera 1992.
[53] M'Charek 2003 with Lepelley 1994.

much in contrast with traditional models of third–century collapse.[54] Peyras has surveyed the North Tunisian farmstead at Bou Assid, known from a dedicatory inscription to have been called the *fundus Aufidianus* (or, by its local name, Biha Belta), and there found ongoing vitality under labor and managerial relations like those seen in the second–century inscriptions from the Bagrada Valley. The estate, which comprised almost 6,400 iugera (1,600 ha), was located in a region that received 550-600 mm of annual rainfall and was thus rich in arable land. It was broken into fifteen habitations: twelve small farms and three larger hamlets. The farms appear to have averaged c. 200 iugera (50ha), about ten times the amount of land necessary to sustain an average family with enough food to survive year to year while paying rent and taxes. The inscription was dedicated by the wife of a *conductor* whose name is now lost but whose achievements included using grafts to bring a number of sterile wild olive trees into production, digging a well, establishing an orchard, and planting new vines.[55] This was, in other words, precisely the sort of entrepreneurial activity encouraged by the *lex Manciana*, undertaken on what appears to have been a private estate, albeit by a *conductor* rather than his *coloni*. Similar success stories can be told from the epitaphs of other North African *coloni,* an indication that the growth in prosperity so evident in the archaeology reached all the way down to the level of tenant farmers.[56] This evidence, combined with what we can know about the size of individual tenancies, paints a picture of tremendous prosperity and profitability in what has usually been regarded as a period of economic crisis.

A further indication of the ongoing preference for free tenancy in the region can be found in testimonia for the North African uprising that eventually vaulted the Gordiani onto the throne. When Maximinus Thrax's overzealous procurator of imperial estates in Africa attempted to extort excessive tax and debt payments from the Carthaginian nobility, these mustered their *coloni* from the countryside to form a peasant army, overthrow the procurator, and eventually proclaim Marcus Antonius Gordianus emperor at Thysdrus. Writing shortly after these events,

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[54] See Witschel 1999, 285–306 on the third century as a period of economic flourish in North Africa.

[55] *AE* 1975.883 with Peyras 1975; 1983.

[56] See the verse epitaph of *Locustius colonicus* from Mactaris, *CIL* 8: 23427 = *CLE* 1870; cf. *ILTun* 243, the epitaph of Dion, a Christian, who lived 80 years and boasted of having planted 4,000 olive trees—although he is not certain to have been a *colonus*.

Herodian describes the rebel band as consisting of "those cultivating the land" (τὴν γῆν γεωργοῦντας) and "the mass of domestics" (τὸ μὲν πλῆθος τῶν οἰκετῶν), by which he seems to mean the tenants of the large estates whose owners coordinated the rebellion. This was certainly the understanding of the late fourth-century author of the *Historia Augusta* who reports that the rebel army consisted of "farmers or Africans" (*rusticos vel Afros*) and was "a plebs both urban and rural" (*apud plebem vel urbanam vel rusticanam*).[57] This was not, in other words, a slave revolt but a peasant uprising, coordinated by Carthaginian landlords using their tenants to muster an army, for, as Herodian reports "Africa is by nature a heavily populated country with many farmworkers on the land."[58] The same preference for free tenants on private estates is also hinted at in a letter of Cyprian indicating that he conceived of the dependents of powerful North African *patresfamilias* as tenants (*inquilini et coloni*) rather than slaves.[59] This is not to deny that Cyprian's extensive corpus presents evidence for the ongoing presence of chattel slaves in Proconsularis, but nowhere does he attest to their use in agriculture.[60]

Finally, the power of *coloni* to thrive and assert their claims to authority over against the middlemen under whose authority they operated on imperial estates is attested by a rescript of Constantine posted in Carthage on March 9, 319 – *CJ* 11.63.1. This law is best grouped with the third-century evidence because it predates Constantine's law of 332 (discussed in the next section) which first attests to the binding of *coloni* to their natal soil. As such it would seem to represent a continuation of older traditions as yet unaltered by the harsher normative regime that would shift the dynamic between landlord and tenant in the course of the fourth century. *CJ* 11.63.1 was directed to *emphyteuticarii*, holders of life-long leases on imperial land that were themselves heritable. By the late third or early fourth century, this sort of very–long–term imperial lease had come to replace the five–year leases that governed the *conductores* of the second century, and it left a new breed of middle–men in a position of quasi–ownership akin to that of the *coloni* themselves. The emphyteutic

[57] Herod. 7.4.2–5; cf. Ioh. Ant. *Hist*. frg. 224 (Roberto) and *SHA Gord.* 7.2–4.
[58] Herod. 7.4.4: φύσει γὰρ πολυάνθρωπος οὖσα ἡ Λιβύη πολλοὺς εἶχε τοὺς τὴν γῆν γεωργοῦντας.
[59] Cypr. *Ep*. 55.13.2 (CCSL 3B.270–71): *ille qui inquilinos uel amicos suos ad facinus conpulit et qui inquilinis et colonis pepercit*.
[60] For chattel slaves in Cyprian see *Ad Demetrianum* 8 (CCSL 3A.39); *De bono patientiae* 6 (CCSL 3A.121); *De lapsis* 25 (CCSL 3A.234); *De mortalitate* 16 (CCSL 3A.25); *Ep*. 11.1.2–3 (CCSL 3B.57).

relationship might well have strengthened the position of these leaseholders vis à vis the *coloni* by guaranteeing their rights to extended control of imperial estates, yet the rescript itself indicates that the tenants were very much still holding their own:

> Some *coloni* have been doing harm to *emphyteuticarii* insofar as, contrary to custom (*praeter consuetudinem*), they take over lands which they have not developed by bringing into cultivation, although the tradition (*sollemnitas*) has permitted these to work whatever has been planted up either in olive trees or vines by their own labor. But they are also attempting to use the flowing water from springs whose output is credited to the *emphyteuticarii* alone. Therefore, we have decided that from now on the right and power over these waters should remain with the *emphyteuticarii* and that only so much may be used from it by the *coloni* as is shown to be necessary for the farming of their own lands, which they themselves cultivate. But insofar as there is surplus flow, which they might use above and beyond their own crops, they should offer shares and access points to it to the emphyteutic possessors.[61]

Several impressions emerge from this law. First, the provision of the lex Manciana permitting *coloni* to gain quasi–ownership rights in the vines and olives which they themselves had planted remained in force into the early fourth century. Second, *coloni* felt sufficiently empowered in their leaseholds to challenge the emphyteutic leaseholders, who technically oversaw them, for control of arable land and water resources that should rightly have been reserved to the *emphyteuticarii*.[62] Third, still as late as 319, the emperor continued to benefit from the rivalry he had been fostering since at least the early second century between his lessees (*conductores*, and later *emphyteuticarii*) and the tenants they oversaw (the *coloni*). By setting himself up as the mediator between his tenant–managers and tenant-farmers, he succeeded once again in encouraging both groups to compete with one another in devising strategies to maximize their personal profits and in the process maximized his own returns.

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[61] *CJ* 11.63.1 (my translation). In my analysis, I follow Vera 1988, 967–71; cf. Courtois et al. 1952, 114–16; Wessel 2003, 111-13.

[62] Vera 1988, 978–79 is surely right to emphasize that the lifetime leases of the *emphyteuticarii* put them in a much stronger negotiating position vis à vis their tenants than the second–century *conductores*, who generally took five–year leases. Even so, both sorts of long–term leaseholders found their tenants to be a serious match for their authority.

Fourth century

Of course, Constantine's rescript was issued shortly before his famous law of 332 (*CTh* 5.17.1) that represents our first firm evidence of what has been termed the "bound colonate." This is a subject of profound importance over which disputes have raged for centuries. At present scholarly opinion is starkly divided over whether "the colonate" in Late Antiquity represented a definable juridical status or simply a fiscal category meant to register tenants on tax rolls that has been overblown into an imagined quasi-serfdom, little more than a "mythe historiographique." Without being able to enter into the details of this still unresolved debate in this study, I state up front that I hold with more traditionalist interpretations that regard the *ius colonatus* as a new juridical status that, although it was developed only over the course of a century and although it could never be implemented uniformly in a world that was crumbling into a variety of political jurisdictions even as it came into being, nevertheless represented a de facto third legal class of persons halfway between free and slave.[63]

Regardless of where one stands on the question, Constantine's law of 332 remains important for this investigation as a watershed in relations between tenants and landowners. Whether or not the imperial government was effectively creating a new personal status, it demonstrably was attempting to limit the personal mobility of *coloni* to the estate on which they were born, and this would begin to have profound consequences on the personal freedom and economic potential of late antique tenants.[64] Of itself the effort to hold tenants on the land of their *origo* represented an important shift from earlier patterns, for where attachment to landed estates had previously been encouraged through the grant of perpetual *usus proprius* over any newly developed marginal land, there had been no requirement that *coloni* or their offspring remain on the land of their birth

[63] For the traditionalist view, see Vera 1987; 1992–1993; Mirkovic 1997; Banaji 1997; Giliberti 1999; Sirks 2008. Kehoe 2008, 163–91 takes a middle ground, accepting the overwhelming weight of evidence for legal restrictions on movement by *coloni* and emphasizing its negative impact on agricultural performance, but not treating the colonate as an effective new status. For the argument that the colonate is a mythe historiographique, see Carrié 1982; 1983; 1997; Grey 2007; 2011, also discussed above at n. 5.

[64] We should not lose sight of the fact that there are indications that some aspects of this policy appear already to have been in place as early as 319, cf. *CTh* 11.7.2 (Nov. 20, 319); *CJ* 11.68.1 (Oct. 7, 325).

(*origo*) in perpetuity. Naturally, the aspirations of the state to lock tenants to their *origo* often faltered in the face of real–world complexities. The source record makes it clear that both the state and private landowners were regularly stymied in their efforts to restrict the mobility as well as the personal, social, and economic freedom of *coloni*.[65] In response to these complications, however, the imperial government did not abandon its efforts to build out a failsafe legal framework for the restriction of *coloni* but rather redoubled them, refining the principle of binding tenants in at least three ways:

- First, it responded to problems that arose from attempts to circumvent the binding of *coloni* to their estate of origin by forbidding the sale or transfer of land without its *coloni* (*CTh* 13.10.3 = *CJ* 11.48.2 [a. 357]) and by forbidding the division of an estate in order to redistribute its *coloni* in ways that effectively detached them from their *origo* (*CJ* 11.48.7 [a. 367/75]: cf. *CTh* 11.1.26 [Jun. 19, 399]).
- Second, it gradually took steps throughout the course of the fourth century to extend the principle of binding *coloni* into those provinces where this had not yet been the practice (Illyricum = *CJ* 11.53.1 [Jun. 29, 371]; Palestine = *CJ* 11.51.1, cf. *CTh* 5.17.2 = *CJ* 11.64.2 [Oct. 25, 386]).
- Third, it began assimilating the status of bound tenants to that of slaves. In some ways this move was a linguistic sleight-of-hand, as seems to be most clearly attested in a famous law of 393 (*CJ* 11.52.1; cf. *CTh* 13.11.4) which proclaims that *coloni* shall be bound by the law of their origin (*originario iure*) so that, although they appear to be of free condition, "they shall be considered as slaves of the soil on which they were born" (*servi terrae ipsius cui nati sunt aestimentur*). While it has been argued that this statement is more a metaphorical analogy than a legal principle, the logical slippage it represents had practical effects. The assimilation of bound *coloni* to slaves had quite real consequences for the tenant which included at least seven impediments to personal freedom not imposed on other free persons:
  1. Marriages between freedmen (*liberti/ae*) and imperial *coloni/ae* were restricted (*CJ* 6.4.2 [a. 367])

[65] A fact emphasized throughout the fine study of Grey 2011.

2. The status of *colonus* became heritable across generations (*CJ* 11.52.1 [a. 371]; cf. *CJ* 11.48.13; *CTh* 5.18.1; *Nov. Val*. 31.5-6)
3. Any property acquired and owned by a *colonus* was treated as a precarious grant of his or her landlord under the title of *peculium* (slave property) (*CTh* 5.19.1 [a. 365]; cf. *CTh* 5.19.2; 5.18.1)
4. Landlords were permitted to distrain upon the person of their *colonus* (*CTh* 5.17.1 [a. 332]; cf. *CJ* 11.53.1; *CTh* 14.18.1; 16.5.52.4; 16.5.54.8)
5. Like fugitive slaves, *coloni* who fled their home estate were to be captured and forcibly returned (*CTh* 5.17.1[a. 332]; *CJ* 11.48.8; 11.53.1; *CTh* 5.17.2–3).
6. Criminal or undesirable behavior on the part of free men could result in subjection to the colonate as a judicial penalty—much like enslavement for crimes (*servitus poenae*) (*CTh* 14.18.1 [a. 382])
7. Mechanisms were created for the liberation of *coloni* from their status based in late antique provisions allowing for the acquisition of freedom by slaves through long-term prescription (*CTh* 5.18.1 [a. 419]; cf. *Nov. Val*. 27; 31; 35.18–19; *CJ* 11.48.16).

Thus, regardless of where one stands on the question of whether the agglomeration of impediments imposed on late Roman *coloni* amounted to a discreet and coherently defined new personal status, there can be no doubt that the social and economic power of *coloni* came to be severely impaired by the imposition of new state regulations.

We have very little evidence with which to pinpoint the status or even just the activities of *coloni* in North Africa during the fourth century, when this shift in the status of farm tenants was occurring. We also have almost nothing with which to determine the relative importance of slaves versus *coloni* in the North African agricultural labor pool during this century. Thus, while the mid-fourth century *Expositio totius mundi* claims that Mauretania was a net exporter of slaves, this report says nothing of whether these slaves derived from local estates (which would likely indicate the widespread use of agricultural slavery) or from captive Africans, whether Berber or sub–Saharan. Given that the captivity and sale of black Africans is well documented from at least the second century onward, this latter is the most likely explanation, which makes the

Expositio useless as a source for agricultural slavery in the Maghreb.[66] In a famous passage of Optatus describing unrest connected with the Donatist controversy in the mid-340s, we learn that in central Numidia in the mid–340s during the uprising of Axido and Fasir masters were afraid to travel public roads since they feared being set upon by their slaves, who seized their carriages and made them run alongside in servile fashion. The passage does not clarify, however, whether these were domestic or agricultural slaves, and a strong argument has even been made that Optatus is most likely describing debt slavery among impoverished tenants rather than chattel slavery as such.[67] Finally, the only letter of Symmachus firmly attesting to his ownership of an estate in Mauretania Caesariensis says nothing of its labor force. If, however, the evidence from Symmachus's Italian estates is any indicator of his preferences regarding the organization of his agricultural workforce, these are likely to have been *coloni* rather than slaves.[68]

Apart from the law of Constantine of 319 mentioned above (*CJ* 11.63.1), a law that precedes the first solid evidence for the bound colonate by some thirteen years, we have only one fourth-century normative regulation relating to farm tenancy in North Africa specifically: a fragment of a constitution of Valentinian I issued in 366 to the governor of Tripolitania which orders estate holders (*domini*) to accept tax payments from their peasants (*rustici*) in kind and not demand cash (*CJ* 11.48.5). We do, course, have an abundance of laws on the colonate (only a sampling of them is listed above), but most cannot be linked to any specific region. One factor of interest here is that the assimilation of *coloni* to slaves attested more broadly in the normative sources appears to have played itself out at the ground level by making both types of laborer seem

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[66] *Expositio totius mundi* 60 (SCh 124.200). For captive African slaves, see *CIL* 8: 21486 = *ILS* 4495; *CIL* 8: 4508 = 18643; Aug. *Ep*. 199.46 (CSEL 57.284–5).

[67] Optat. 3.4 (CSEL 26.82): *itinera non poterant esse tutissima, quod domini de vehiculis suis excussi ante mancipia sua dominorum locis sedentia serviliter cucurrerunt. Illorum iudicio et imperio inter dominos et servos condicio mutabatur*. See Shaw 2011, 781–2: "The whole context, which speaks of nothing else, excites the strongest suspicion that these slaves were not chattel slaves (persons owned as property) as is normally thought, but rather debt–slaves who were seeking freedom from the unjust treatment imposed on them by the terms of debt–bondage.... it is most probable that the documents, the *tabulae*, that were being destroyed were records of debts owed by peasant workers to landlords."

[68] Symmachus *Ep*. 7.66. Vera 1986, 258–59 shows beyond doubt that Symmachus's Italian labor force consisted largely of *coloni.*

interchangeable on imperial estates. Thus a law of 383 addressed to an eastern Praetorian Prefect forbids older *coloni* from being kicked off of their imperial tenancies and replaced with slaves or new *coloni*.[69] Thus the emperor in the fourth century continued to intervene in support of the rights of his tenant farmers, much as he had done in the second and third centuries. Ironically, however, in this instance, it was imperial policy itself which had created the circumstances that weakened the position of tenants vis à vis their middleman managers by limiting their freedom of movement and assimilating them ever more to the slaves by whom they were at times replaced. The law cautions against any monolithic assumptions about the exclusive use of *coloni* rather than slaves to farm imperial estates.

Overall, then, the meager harvest of materials for the fourth century rural labor pool in North Africa indicates that not only were slaves by no means the only source of rural labor in the Maghreb, they were likely to have been considerably outnumbered by tenants.[70]

Early fifth century

The effects of imperial policies binding *coloni* to the estates of their *origo* in North African agriculture become fully apparent in the textual and documentary sources for the early fifth century. Both source pools reveal the outcome of three quarters of a century's worth of laws that gradually subordinated a formerly self-assertive and surprisingly independent body of tenant farmers to slaves. On the normative side, this shift is clearest in a set of three laws connected with the Donatist controversy. Beginning in 405 the emperor Honorius began to take a decidedly harsher stance against adherents of this schismatic sect. At the heart of his discomfort with Donatists was their (heretical) sacramental praxis of re-baptizing new adherents. In his zeal to occlude this abomination, Honorius took advantage of the subordination characteristic of fifth–century *coloni* to insist that any estate owners who forced "slaves or personnel subject to their power" (*servos vel homines iuri proprio subditos*) into rebaptism were to have their estates confiscated, and any managers (*conductores* and *procuratores*) who did so without the owner's knowledge were to be

[69] *CJ* 11.63.3.

[70] So also Vera 1987. On the empire as a whole, see Vera 2012, aimed directly at Harper's broader thesis. On Italy, see already Vera 1992-1993; cf. Wickham 2005, 259-302.

beaten with lead–tipped whips (*CTh* 16.6.4). The law not only confirms the ongoing use of slaves alongside agricultural tenants in this period but also points to the degree to which the slave/*colonus* equivalency had turned *coloni* into pawns of their masters and managers in the larger sphere of religious politics. The two remaining laws on fifth–century African *coloni* date to 412 and 414 respectively and were introduced in order to enforce the findings of the Council of Carthage in 411 at which it was ordered that all Donatists must reunite with the Catholic church. An elaborate series of fines was established graded according to rank; on this scale, slaves and *coloni* were set on a par and ordered to be converted either through admonitions or, when necessary, regular whippings by their masters.[71] The 414 law changed tack only slightly by ordering smaller but more frequent fines for free men who persisted in their Donatism, but continued to insist on beatings for slaves and *coloni* and confiscations for those latter who refused to cooperate.[72] Here again, the laws indicate that slaves and *coloni* worked alongside one another on rural estates; that the two were considered rough equivalents; and that as such both were subject to harsh corporal punishment at the hands of landowners and/or managers.

The corpus of Augustine offers confirmation of the manner in which the fifth-century landowner was enlisted as a vehicle to carry out the religious agenda of the Roman church and its secular advocate, the emperor. The circumstantial details Augustine provides also help fill out our understanding of the functioning of land tenure and rural labor organization in the period. His *Letter* 58 of 401 was written to the Roman senator Pammachius to congratulate him on enforcing the adherence of his *coloni* to Catholicism. Not only does this inform us of the collusion between landlord and bishop in the enforcement of Catholic orthodoxy among tenants, it also reconfirms the involvement of Italian elites in North African agriculture and points to a preference for tenant laborers (*coloni*) over slaves on the part of Pammachius.[73] A letter of c. 400 to Crispinus,

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[71] *CTh* 16.5.52, esp. 4: *Servos etiam dominorum admonitio vel colonos verberum crebrior ictus a prava religione revocabit, ni malunt ipsi ad praedicta dispendia, etiam si sunt catholici, retineri*.

[72] *CTh* 16.5.54, esp. 8: *Servos vero et colonos cohercitio ab huiusmodi ausibus severissima vindicabit. Ac si coloni verberibus coacti in proposito perduraverint, tunc tertia peculii sui parte multentur*. More on these laws at Vera 1992, 465-67.

[73] Aug. *Ep*. 58.1 (CSEL 34.217): *...non tibi tam dilecta catholica unitas foret nec colonos tuos Afros eo terrarum, unde donatistarum furor exortus est, hoc est in media Consulari Numidia constitutos tali admoneres adloquio*. See also Aug. *Ep*. 112.3 (CSEL 34.659), where Augustine encourages another senatorial landlord

the Donatist bishop of Calama, presents the same case from the other side. In it Augustine upbraids his addressee for re-baptizing the farm laborers on an estate called Mappalia over which he had recently acquired possession. Augustine provides further information about the same issue in his treatise *Against the Letter of Petilian* which reports that what Crispinus had actually purchased was not the estate itself but rather the emphyteutic rights to an imperial estate populated by c. 80 *coloni*. From the combination of the two sources a picture emerges of a Donatist bishop's attempts to enforce his own version of Christian religion on an estate he controlled—one technically owned by a Catholic emperor—through the forced rebaptism of its labor force. The letters also make it clear that said labor force consisted entirely of *coloni*.[74] Crispinus's Mappalia was thus on the same scale as the third century *fundus Aufidianus* mentioned above with its fifteen habitations each of which could support a farmer and his family of approximately five individuals.[75] Land tenure and labor organization had thus changed very little between the first and fifth century, even if the status and privileges of the tenant farmers who cultivated it most certainly had.

Augustine's letters also confirm that the manipulation of late antique *coloni* did not stop with religious politics. Good old–fashioned fraud and chicanery were also abundantly on show. A striking example of this can be found in letter 247 to a certain Romulus, a landholder in the territory of Hippo Regius, whose agent (*actor*) had collected twice the rent he was actually owed from his *coloni*. Augustine asked that Romulus pity these "wretched and impoverished people" (*miseri et egeni homines*) and return what they did not owe, but his plea appears to have fallen on deaf ears.[76] Augustine's *New Letter* 10* reconfirms the level of poverty to which *coloni* were often reduced when it describes a *colonus* who felt the need to

named Donatus, the former *proconsul Africae*, to enforce the conversion to Catholicism of his dependents (*tuos omnes*)—presumably *coloni*.

[74] Aug. *Ep*. 66.1–2 (CSEL 34.235) with *C. litt. Petil*. 2.83[184] (CSEL 52.114).

[75] Compare Gregory the Great's effort to manipulate pagan tenants on the ecclesiastical estates in Sardinia to convert by arbitrarily increasing their rent until they agreed to comply, Greg. Mag. *Ep*. 4.26 (CCSL 140.244). Gregory used similar tricks in Sicily, where he ordered his deacon Cyprian to offer reduced rents to those Manichaeans and Jews who agreed to convert, Greg. Mag. *Ep*. 5.7 (CCSL 140.273).

[76] Aug. *Ep*. 247.1–3 (CSEL 57.586–8); cf. PCBE I Romulus 2. On this letter, see Cracco Ruggini 1987.

sell his own wife to slave dealers.[77] Similarly, *New Letter* 24* poses a series of questions about the legal implications of a law of Constantine's permitting fathers to sell their children into slavery, or rather long term servitude[78]: if a *colonus* did so, did this trump the claims of the landlord to the child's labor? Could female *colonae* also sell their children? Could landlords sell the children of their *coloni*? Of course, all of this confirms the co-existence of slaves alongside *coloni*, but Augustine's concerns in the letter seem to be that the sale of *colonus* children would extract them from the rural labor force of their landlord altogether. Indeed, the whole import of the *New Letter* 10* is that many of Hippo's peasants had been precipitously captured or bought by Galatian slave traders (*mangones*) for export out of Africa. African *coloni* were not, then, being recycled to serve as slaves on other local estates. Rather an African labor force consisting primarily of *coloni* was being enslaved for resale in other regions.

A slightly more sanguine picture emerges from *New Letter* 20* which describes how the *coloni* on the *fundus Thogonoetensis*, yet another African estate under the ownership of an absentee senatorial landholder, exercised at least some power over their own destiny by threatening to flee en masse if they were assigned the infamous swindler Antoninus of Fussala as their bishop.[79] Here again, we have confirmation that tenancy remained the primary mode for organizing agricultural labor on large estates in North Africa, and we catch at least a glimpse of the same self-assertiveness we witnessed in tenants of an earlier age.

Even so, as *New Letters* 10* and 24* indicate, the line between slave and *colonus* had become quite blurred. There is confirmation for the same from a letter composed by a middling aristocrat from the town of Matar (modern Mateur) in Proconsularis and preserved in manuscripts of Orosius.[80] This text reveals that its anonymous author had an ongoing dispute with a certain Salvius, an advocate, who laid claim to all or some of the *coloni* on the author's estate, the *fundus Volusianus*. These lived in mortal fear of being separated from their natal soil in a pending court case, leading the letter writer to plead with Salvius to settle the dispute

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[77] Aug. *Ep*. 10*.6 (CSEL 88.46–51). See also Cass. *Var*. 8.33 (CCSL 96.340–1) which describes a rural fair in Lucania where *rusticani* were known to have sold their children into slavery.

[78] Aug. *Ep*. 24*.1 (CSEL 88.126) with Lepelley 1983. Constantine first permits child sale with *CTh* 5.10.1 and *CJ* 4.43.2 (a. 329).

[79] Aug. *Ep*. 20*.9–21 (CSEL 88.100–106). See also *Ep*. 20*.29 (CSEL 88.110) which confirms that Antoninus also used rental tenancy for the land he managed.

[80] Lepelley 1989.

amicably. Here we have yet another detailed source confirming the picture supplied by Augustine of a fundamental reliance on a tenant labor force that was, nevertheless, so tightly bound to their *origo* that they could be forcibly relocated as the result of a judicial ruling.

Finally, as if we needed further evidence of the same pattern, in his description of the Donatist Crispinus of Calama's attack on his rival Catholic bishop Possidius at the *fundus Olivetensis*, Augustine makes it clear that this estate was also populated with *coloni*.[81] So too, in his discussions of the ecclesiastical estate of Hippo he describes at *Ep*. 35 and of a Numidian farm called the *fundus Strabonianensis* mentioned at *Ep*. 65, Augustine mentions only free tenant farmers.[82]

When we arrive at the detailed information for rural labor management provided by the corpus of Augustine and other early fifth century sources, the conclusion is thus inescapable that the prevailing form of labor organization was tenancy. Fundamentally, then, *coloni* rather than slaves worked North African agricultural estates in the age of Augustine. To be sure, when subsistence crises or cash scarcity necessitated, the abundant supply of *coloni* could be capitalized as human chattel—as the *New Letters* reveal—but the demographic basis of rural labor consisted of bound tenants.

To say this is not to deny that slaves were still used in fifth–century African agriculture. In the laws on Donatism described above, we have seen that the emperor and his agents conceived of slaves and *coloni* as equally probable laborers on North African agricultural estates.[83] In several narrative passages, Augustine himself also assumes that both slaves and *coloni* could be used to cultivate farmsteads.[84] Thus, in a sermon defending two of his newly appointed sub-deacons for having heretofore failed to liquidate their landed property despite ordination, Augustine mentions that both had slaves (*mancipia*) who, we can assume, were used to cultivate that property. Indeed, Jerzy Kolendo has argued that small to medium-sized landholders regularly used their moderate *familiae*

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[81] Aug. *Ep*. 105.4 (CSEL 34.598): *nisi tertio suppositas flammas coloni eiusdem fundi propter periculum suae salutis extinguerent*; cf. *Cresc*. 3.46[50] (CSEL 52.458).

[82] Aug. *Ep*. 35.4 (CSEL 34.30–31). For the *fundus Strabonianensis*, see *Ep*. 65.1 (CSEL 34.323–33).

[83] See above nn. 71-73.

[84] See E.g. Aug. *En. in Ps*. 34(1).12 (CCSL 38.308): *si possessionum es amator, desideraturus es totam terram, ut omnes qui nascuntur, coloni tui aut serui tui sint*; Aug. *C. Adim*. 15 (CSEL 25.159); *En. in Ps*. 80.9 (CCSL 39.1125).

for cultivation in addition to the variety of domestic tasks assigned them.[85] There are also the oft repeated passages from the Latin *Life of Melania the Younger* reporting how this super–rich heiress and her blue–blooded husband Pinianus sought to liquidate their worldly wealth, including estates in Numidia, Mauretania, and Africa Proconsularis, along with their slaves. The astronomically high number of slaves the early fifth-century writer Palladius claims Melania manumitted (8,000) does not, however, appear to have come substantially from her African estates. Instead, the author of her Latin *Vita* reports, she and Pinianus settled the slaves they freed from North African estates in a monastery they founded in Thagaste, where they numbered 130 women and 80 men. If these figures represent the total from their slaveholdings in the region, as seems to be the author's implication, this would have represented a relatively small workforce – enough to populate two *latifundia,* or perhaps more likely, the domestic staff from a larger number of estates whose primary agricultural workforces consisted of *coloni*.[86]

The overall impression we get from the flood of early fifth-century material, and particularly from Augustine's extensive and circumstantially detailed corpus, is that *coloni* were considerably more important than slaves as agricultural workers by this point in the history of the region. In fact, in every instance but one in which Augustine describes in any detail the labor force of an actual early fifth-century North African estate, agricultural manpower appears to have consisted entirely of *coloni*.[87] To be sure, Augustine takes great delight in discussing slaves and slavery in his many exegetical descriptions of scripture, and these often build on metaphors and parables involving agricultural slavery that had been knitted into the fabric of Christian scripture and exegesis since the

[85] Aug. *Serm*. 356.3 (PL 39.1575–76) with Kolendo 1991, 43; cf. Génelle 2005, 426–29.

[86] *Vita Melaniae Latina* 20-22 (Laurence pp. 190-96); cf. *Gerontius Vita Melaniae Graeca* 20-22 (SCh 90.168-72). For the report of 8,000 manumissions, see Pall. *Hist. Laus*. 61 (Butler 156).

[87] Aug. *Civ. Dei* 22.8 speaks of a *fundus Zubedi* that appears to have been populated with both slaves and tenants. It is not clear, however, that slaves worked the fields there rather than performing domestic services. In fact, *En. In Ps*. 79.10 (CCSL 39.1116) would seem to imply that a slave was inclined to function as an estate messenger while *coloni* did the agricultural work. Harper 2011, 184 quotes *En. In Ps*. 103(3).9 (*CCSL* 40.1506–7) as an example of agricultural slavery, but the passage seems rather to treat household slavery in an urban dwelling (*domus*).

composition of the Gospels.[88] But in descriptions focusing on the circumstantial details of real North African estates—the nuts and bolts cases with which Augustine regularly dealt in his pastoral and juridical capacities—tenancy appears to have been the predominant model, albeit the tenancy of *coloni* whose status had been reduced to little more than slavery. This is important because much of Harper's argument for the ongoing survival of Rome's "slave society" in the late antique West is built on evidence from the corpus of Augustine. However, not only is direct testimony of the use of slaves in agriculture relatively thin in Augustine, the evidence for the primary reliance on *coloni* as farm workers is frankly overwhelming. It is only Harper's choice not to examine this evidence that has led him to argue otherwise.

Vandalic period

The Vandalic takeover of North Africa in the 430s by all means ushered in a shift in political structures, but the question has long remained, did this have any measureable effect on economic and social relations. Current scholarly opinion tends to emphasize continuities with the Roman past, and these are certainly evident in the sources.[89] There is some indication, however, that at least in terms of land tenure and labor management, significant changes occurred. At a minimum, there is almost no way for scholars to deny the ample testimony that the Vandals expropriated property from a large number of elite land–holders.[90] Moreover, there is abundant evidence that the Vandals enslaved many Roman residents of North Africa in the period of their conquest. To be sure, most of our sources on the matter point to the enslavement of members of the elite, but there are also indications that captive taking and enslavement occurred on a more generalized level.[91] In the years following, enslavement was used

[88] For a full list of Augustine's repeated references to slaves and slavery, the vast majority metaphorical, see Klein 1988.
[89] Merrills, and Miles 2010; Conant 2012; Modéran 2014.
[90] Modéran 2002.
[91] Captivity of elites: Vict. Vit. *Hist*. 1.13–14; Procop. *Bell*. 3.5.11; Prosp. Tiro *Chron*. 1339 (s.a. 439) (MGH AA 9.477). General captivity: *Nov. Val*. 13.14; Possidius *Vita Augustini* 28; 30.3–14; Quodvultdeus *De tempore barbarico* 2.1.1–3, 5.2–23 (CCSL 60.473, 476–77); Salvian. *Gub*. 6.12.69–70 (CSEL 8.144–45). Geiseric also enslaved captives seized after Aspar's failed expedition against his kingdom in 434, Procop. *Bell*. 3.4.2–3; Evag. Schol. *HE* 2.1 (Bidez and Parmentier pp. 37–38).

by the Vandals as a standard form of punishment;[92] slaves were also imported through trade;[93] and, above all the Vandals engaged in regular raids on the coasts of Sicily, Lucania, Bruttium, Campania, Illyricum, the Peloponnessus, and the Aegean islands, which netted not just plunder but also large numbers of captives.[94] Most notorious among their targets was of course Rome, whose capture in 455 yielded not only massive amounts of plunder but also "many thousands of captives" including the empress Eudoxia.[95] Victor of Vita records that these Roman captives were transported by sea back to Carthage, where they proved to be so numerous that two sizable basilicas were set aside as corrals to manage them until they could be redistributed to slaveowners.[96] Some of these wound up on Mediterranean slave markets. We know, for example, of a western aristocrat named Maria who was sold together with her handmaid to merchants that eventually resold her in Syria.[97] Other victims of Vandal raiding expeditions, however, were likely deployed in North African agriculture.

The evidence for the use of agricultural slaves by the Vandals is, like the evidence for the Vandal kingdom more broadly, tenuous. Victor of Vita does report that, as part of his general persecution of Nicenes, Huneric enslaved Catholics working in his court and sent them to Utica to labor in the fields.[98] He is also said to have punished a certain Gamuth, brother of Heldica, by sending him to the countryside to cut sod and plant vines, probably as a slave.[99] More tellingly, Procopius reports that in the

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[92] Vict. Vit. *Hist.* 1.43–46; 2.10–11; 2.15–16; cf. 3.62.

[93] Fulg. Rusp. *Ep*. 11–12 (CCSL 91.360–63); cf. Procop. *Bell*. 3.10.25–34.

[94] For raids reported explicitly as having netted captives, see Procop. *Bell*. 3.5.22–23; Malchus *Hist*. fr. 5 (Blockley = *Exc de Leg. Rom*. 3); Gelasius *Ep*. 17 (Thiel 381); Priscus *Exc*. 30.3 (Carolla = Blockley 39.1 = *Exc. De Leg. Gent*. 14).

[95] Prosp. Tiro *Chron*. 1375 (s.a. 455) (MGH.AA 9.484): *multaque milia captivorum, prout quique aut aetate aut arte placuerunt, cum regina et filiabus eius Cartaginem abducta sunt*; Victor Tun. *Chron*. 15 (CCSL 173A.7–8).

[96] Vict. Vit. *Hist*. 1.24–27; cf. 1.30–38.

[97] Theod. *Ep. Sirm*. 70 (SCh 98.152–4), datable to 443/448. During his persecution of Nicenes, Huneric also traded away catholic monks and nuns as slaves to the Mauri, *Passio Beatissimorum martyrum qui apud Carthaginem passi sunt sub rege Hunirico* 2 (Lancel 2002, 213–14). He also sold Manichaean heretics as slaves in order to buy ships, Vict. Vit. *Hist*. 2.1.

[98] Vict. Vit. *Hist*. 2.10.

[99] Vict. Vit. *Hist*. 2.15–16. Conant 2012: 102–3 interprets these as incidents of mere exile, but the aspect of forced labor makes it clear that some form of penal slavery was involved.

second year after the East Roman reconquest of the Vandalic kingdom, a revolt arose in large part because Roman soldiers stationed in North Africa had married Vandalic women who were then asserting their claims over the land their families had once farmed; this occasioned trouble when Justinian's general Solomon reported his willingness to grant them control of these women's money and slaves but not the land, which he ordered to be surrendered to the emperor.[100] The implication seems to be that the farms were cultivated for their Vandal owners by slaves. In the passage that follows, Procopius reports that the resultant uprising, led by the native general Stotzas, was bolstered by the participation of many of these slaves in the armies of their former masters.[101] It would seem, then, that this period of intensive slaving on the part of the Vandals led to an intensification in the use of slave labor in regional agriculture. If so this would be entirely in keeping with historical patterns—ancient and modern—that have witnessed the intensification of slave labor in periods that saw quantum leaps in captive taking.

Despite this turn to slave labor, the Vandals also surely maintained tenancy as an established method for exploiting the estates which they had taken over from their Roman predecessors. We have one piece of textual evidence that confirms this, a passage in Victor of Vita reporting that Huneric punished Catholic clergy who had attempted to placate him by swearing an oath of loyalty—contrary to the Gospel prohibition against swearing at Matt 5:13—by condemning them to serve as *coloni* in the fields of North Africa. Interestingly, those who refused the oath were punished with exile to Corsica, where they served as penal slaves cutting timber.[102] Huneric's persecutions also led to the enactment of a decree to punish *procuratores* and *conductores* on royal estates (*regalia praedia*) with a doubling of their rent payments, an indication that farm management had changed little on estates belonging to the crown, even if we cannot confirm whether the laborers on these farmsteads were slave or free.[103]

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[100] Procop. *Bell*. 4.14.8–10.

[101] Procop. *Bell*. 4.15.3-4. Fulgent. Rusp. *Serm*. 1.1-3 (CCSL 91A.889-90) also points to the use of agricultural slavery in Vandalic Africa, but in an exegetical passage that cannot be firmly associated with a particular estate.

[102] Vict. Vit. *Hist*. 3.19–20. The Corsican exiles appear to have numbered just 46 if these are to be associated with the catalog in the *Notitia Provinciarum et Civitatum Africae*, Lancel 2002, 252–72.

[103] Vict. Vit. *Hist*. 3.11.

There are, however, clearer indications of the ongoing importance of tenancy in the fascinating documents known as the Albertini Tablets, discovered in 1928 not far from Tebessa in eastern Algeria. These record purchase transactions from a variety of tenants on the *fundus Tuletianos* in the 490s. One actually attests to the acquisition of a six–year–old slave boy,[104] but most record the sale of small parcels of land together with their fruit trees—primarily olives, but also vines, pistachios, and almonds. One document seems to confirm that the tenants involved continued to pay rent shares.[105] Interestingly, the tenants generally refer to themselves as citizens (*civis*, or more commonly *cibis*) of the *fundus Tuletianos,* very much in keeping with earlier testimonies to the assumption of a quasi-civic status based on attachment to a farmstead that we witnessed in Agennius Urbicus and various epigraphic testimonia. An even more striking point of continuity can be found in the fact that in some 13 of the total of 34 tablets the tenants refer to their holdings as "Mancian cultivations."[106] This curious survival makes it clear that, well into the Vandalic period, tenants not only continued to operate as producers on rural estates but also clung to earlier Roman normative regulations that guaranteed their ownership rights over the *usus proprius* of the plantations they or their ancestors initiated.

The Vandals may then have intensified the employment of slaves in their century of rule in North Africa, but tenancy clearly remained a major method of organizing rural labor. Insofar as this is true, any model that assumes the strength of the Roman economy was the primary driver of intensification in the use of agricultural slavery must be revised. The violence inherent in the Vandal takeover of Africa is well attested, and despite Vandalic efforts to maintain political and economic continuities with their Roman predecessors, it surely led to a temporary increase in the percentage of slaves in the North African population. While it is unlikely these overtook tenants as the primary producers of surplus for the elite, we at least have stronger indications in this direction than for previous

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[104] *Tab. Albertini* 2 (Jun. 5, 494) at Courtois et al 1952, 216–17.

[105] *Tab. Albertini* 26, at Courtois et al 1952, 288*: ita placuit ut secundum quod est in condi/tionem quod in polepticos clarit fici arbores quindecim annos quinque / et olibe arbores quindecim ut exsudet pensionem s(oluat).*

[106] *Ex culturis suis mancianis*: *Tab. Albertini* 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24. More on the tablets at Dossey 2010, 119–20; Conant 2012, 281–83, with earlier bibliography. Already in the late second century we have attestations to tenants making express claims to Mancian tenancy, *ILTun* 629 = *AE* 1938, 72: *C(aius) Aufidius Utilis Manciane cultor*.

centuries after one discounts for the paucity of information about Vandal North Africa.

Sixth century

With the Roman reconquest of North Africa in 533–534, we witness an effort on the part of the eastern court to reestablish the bound colonate as the dominant mode of agricultural production in the region. One can already get an inkling of this preference of the Roman government for the structuring of rural labor around tenancy rather than slavery in two fascinating documents from the reign of Valentinian III. Both were designed to restore fiscal stability and repopulate imperial estates in the provinces of Mauretania Sitifensis, Mauretania Caesariensis, and Numidia Constantina after these had been retroceded to the imperial government by the Vandals in a treaty of 442. In the first, *Novel* 13 of 445, Valentinian radically cut tribute rates in these provinces by seven–eighths and offered a variety of further indulgences to recalibrate tax and service burdens, including strictly forbidding the ordination or military enlistment of tenants because of the current "scarcity of *coloni*" (13.8: *raritate colonorum*). More tellingly still, in his *Novel* 34 of 451, Valentinian ordered:

> And in the province of Sitifensis and Caesariensis, estates under emphyteutic law and those belonging to the imperial fisc which had fallen to neighboring dwellers after the destruction by the Vandals and are today possessed by various people, I decree should be taken away from these same and under that form of apportionment by which they are now held (*sub eo pensitationis modo, quo nunc tenentur*), and with any imperial rescripts being held in abeyance, they should be rented to *honorati* from the provinces of Proconsularis and Byzacena, whom we know to have been expelled from their own homes when their properties, which were confiscated, were taken away by the barbarians.[107]

Valentinian was thus struggling to re-impose upon imperial holdings as quickly as possible the age old system of long-term tenancies, presumably under the *lex Manciana*. He believed he could implement this goal using elite landholders who had been displaced from what had now become the heart of the new Vandal kingdom in Proconsularis and Byzacena. In other

[107] *Nov. Val*. 34.3 (a. 451); cf. Vict. Vit. *Hist*. 1.14 on the exile of bishops, *clari* and *honorati* by the Vandals.

words, the western emperor wished to revive the system of elite management of his imperial estates by transplanting *conductores* and *emphyteuticarii* from Proconsularis to Mauretania where they could continue the time-tested pattern of overseeing tenancies populated by share-cropping *coloni*.

Much the same occurred in the aftermath of the Justinianic reconquest of the sixth century. By this point the extent of the disruption to traditional patterns created by a century of Vandalic rule in Proconsularis and Byzacena was much clearer. This we learn from two *Novels* of Justinian, the first of which is dated to 552 and addressed to the Praetorian Prefect of Africa Paulus. Paulus is informed that those *coloni* who had escaped from their status while under the Vandals were not to be recalled to their estates, but that those who had merely moved from one estate to another were to be recalled to their original holdings.[108] A second law, dated to 558, reaffirms the first principle, which landowners had been attempting to circumvent, by restating that all those held as *coloni* who had gained their freedom or been ordained clerics before the arrival of Justinian's armies were to remain in freedom.[109] These provisions would seem to confirm the theory elaborated above that the Vandals neglected the complex normative rules governing tenancy—rules that had been further complicated with the introduction of the bound colonate—in favor of alternative modes of labor organization, especially slavery. Where tenancy could still continue on its own momentum, as on the *fundus Tuletianos*, whose tenants still benefitted from the advantages offered by the ongoing maintenance of their Mancian leases, it did so. But the complexities of the bound colonate and the restrictions it placed on the freedom of tenants had been furnishing an incentive to flight already for a century when the Vandals arrived, and the much looser fiscal and normative apparatus that the Vandals then introduced had opened the door to a mass exodus of *coloni* from their bound tenancies.

The efforts by Justinian to prop up this system were thus unlikely to have enjoyed much success. A law of Justin II dated to 570 shows evidence of the ongoing struggle to hold together a system of fiscal registration that had largely collapsed.[110] It contends that African estates had been deserted of their owners because of a law granting freeborn

[108] *Nov. Just.* App. 6 (Schöll / Kroll p. 799).
[109] *Nov. Just.* App. 9 (Schöll / Kroll p. 803).
[110] *Nov. Post. Just. Coll.* 1 No. 6 (570, Mar. 1) (Zachariä von Lingenthal ed., at Zepos and Zepos 1: 10–11).

status to any children born of a freeborn woman and a male *adscripticius* (registered *colonus*). The law attempts to correct this problem by permitting such children to remain free of *colonus* status but insisting that they still abide as laborers on the farms on which they had been born. This new solution would obviously have had limited effect, a fact confirmed by the issuance of a rescript by Maurice Tiberius in 582 reasserting the old principle that the children of a free woman and a male *colonus* were to be born *coloni*.[111] The bound colonate had thus unraveled into chaos, even if the east Roman state continued to struggle mightily to hold it together.[112] Meanwhile evidence for the use of slaves in this period is nowhere to be found. The source record for Byzantine North Africa is thin enough that this should not be taken as an indication of the absence of slaves. Nevertheless, it does reconfirm the impression made abundantly clear throughout this study that slavery always played a secondary role behind tenancy in agricultural production in Roman North Africa.

Conclusion

Beyond this series of sixth–century legal pronouncements we can no longer say precisely what became of a system that was clearly straining under its own weight. Whether the bound colonate and its attendant fiscal structures survived to the eve of the Arab conquest remains unknown. What is certain is that the penchant toward peasant tenancy rather than slave labor had a long and enduring history in North Africa. In only two of the six centuries covered in this study do we have relatively abundant evidence for the use of agricultural slavery, the second and the later fifth–early sixth. Even in these periods, however, tenancy is well attested in solid documentary sources that make it clear that it certainly competed both demographically and economically with slavery as a reliable generator of surplus.

Nowhere is the heavy reliance on tenancy more apparent than in the early fifth century world of Augustine, precisely the context Harper has singled out as a bellwether of a thriving "slave society" in the late antique West. Augustine's high resolution details on the personnel of numerous early fifth-century farmsteads leaves no room for doubt that tenancy far

[111] *Nov. Post. Just. Coll*. 1 No. 13 (582, Aug. 11) (Zachariä von Lingenthal ed., at Zepos and Zepos 1: 24).

[112] Fentress et al. 2004 note a general decline in archaeological evidence for settlement in North African in the sixth century.

outpaced slavery as the primary mode of labor organization in this context. The fact that Augustine was operating in an environment in which the bound colonate was already fully fledged allows us, however, to catch a glimpse of the strains this new system of fiscal registration and personal limitation was putting on social and economic relations. The arrival of the Vandals, who appear to have relied more heavily on slave labor than their Roman predecessors, further pointed to cracks in a system so complex and restrictive that it could only survive in an environment with tight state control. Thus, when the Roman state regained western North Africa in the mid fifth century and central North Africa in the mid sixth, it worked to impose a reversion to the old model of bound tenancy, but the complications and weaknesses of the late Roman colonate remain evident in our limited source record. Some version of bound tenancy would of course continue to be maintained in the Byzantine East down to the fifteenth century, but North African is more likely gradually to have settled back into the less restrictive—but also more productive—forms of tenancy developed already in the first and second centuries CE that had helped foster the economic boom of the second through fifth centuries.

Ultimately, Africa remained throughout its history a land of agricultural tenancy with relatively self-assertive peasant laborers. The Romans appear not only to have accepted this reality but also to have fostered it, for the liberal land tenure arrangements developed through the *lex Manciana* made tenancy more adaptable and productive than slavery in the Maghreb's highly varied landscape with its limited water resources. While some landholders certainly deployed slaves on their estates, they appear never to have attempted to shift the economy toward productive strategies that relied predominantly on slave labor. Instead, tenancy is attested over and over again as the primary mode of organizing farm labor, while there is essentially no evidence that Roman North Africa was ever a "slave society" in anything like the sense described by Finley.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

WHAT IS GEO–ECCLESIOLOGY: DEFINING ELEMENTS APPLIED TO LATE ANTIQUITY (FOURTH–SIXTH CENTURIES)*

PHILIPPE BLAUDEAU

When I was working on my thesis twenty years ago, encouraged by my supervisor, Prof. Jean-Michel Carrié, I began to ask some new questions on the subject of the relations between the sees of Alexandria and Constantinople from 451 to 491. This very early Christian period has a particularly complex history, and the subject was a major challenge. Though it had been much studied and the problem itself much discussed, despite the quality of the research conducted in the modern era, from the *Magdeburg Centuries* on, or perhaps because of *how* it was treated, it did not seem to me to account for the exact nature of the conflict. I also wanted to develop a new working concept, geo–ecclesiology, which would give a better idea of the importance and significance of this quarrel. At the time I defined it as follows:

> The clash concerns rival systems, and it has three features: the doctrine of the imperial Church, time and space (Empire). Also, to better study the characteristics and functioning of these competing models, we propose the following process of interpretation: it is to distinguish the territorial logics and strategies implemented in order to gain pre-eminence in the imperial Church. The categories of systemic geography, geopolitics mainly, make such a study possible.[1] If it provides useful descriptive concepts such as foreland and hinterland, orbit, sphere of influence, or hot spot, this discipline invites us especially to study by analogy geographical spaces of permanent or durable presence, and areas of intervention. In short, it serves

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[1] Our thinking was first stimulated by reading Dollfuss and Knafou 1990.

to delineate the territorial priorities developed by each of the protagonists. Their respective capacity to build and maintain a space of intercommunion actually depends on their credibility and hence the interest that they are able to gain from the emperor or, better still, his possible support.

The comparison with geopolitics is also an incentive to bear in mind the establishment of information and propaganda networks. Applied to our subject, it obliges us to investigate how the Alexandrians and Constantinopolitans were seeking to ensure the success of their ideology. We should therefore pay particular attention to the mediations that allowed them to address the sovereign or to mobilize the crowds. They usually performed liturgical ceremonies or ritualized devotions, which reached dramatic intensity during the *adventus*. Their doctrinal statements were translated into speeches, slogans, songs, nicknames and images, showing how the occupation of the spaces of communication was of crucial importance. Similarly, the protagonists attached great significance to spreading their written exhortations, warnings, apologies and controversies, and recording hardships encountered and successes. And so the battle raged in the publishing field too.

However, the geo-ecclesiological approach that we want to develop cannot be reduced to the simple transposition of investigative methods from another discipline, nor to the discovery of imperialist designs, including the means of action based solely on lobbying, use of duress, or coercion. It implies recognition of the special nature of relations in a specific institution, the Church, which, nourished by Pauline teachings, organized itself without ceasing to assert its spiritual sense identified with the body of Christ.[2] Therefore, we must insist on a common standard with which the hierarchs agree. It is the establishment of a true communion, respectful, at least in theory, of the constitutive collegial structure of the Church. Under these conditions, the outbreak of hostilities cannot be considered as an option, as the policy's objective could only be the search for supremacy. The breaking of the bonds of brotherhood between communities is a particularly serious act, which, in principle, no protagonist can choose lightly. Hence we must reaffirm that the primary reason for the controversy is Christological.[3]

Since then, in a series of publications, articles and contributions,[4] I have aimed to deepen our sense of geo–ecclesiology and show how much

[2] Paul himself introduced this idea in his first letter to the Corinthians (see I Cor. 12. 21–31) to bring out the diversity of all members united in Christ. The deutero-Pauline Epistles (see especially Eph. 1.22–23, 5. 23; Col. 1.18–24) develop the thought, but with a new inflection. They spread a corporate, personal conception of the Church as the Body of Christ (in the words of Brown, 1990. 77 and 85) that quickly became a crucial reference for all subsequent ecclesiological thoughts.

[3] Blaudeau 2006, 6–8.

[4] Complete bibliography:

it can offer in dealing with the work of other actors, starting with the See of Rome, which was the subject of a second monograph on a longer period (448–536).[5] This set of proposals gradually attracted the attention of some colleagues, and the two books received fifteen reviews.[6] The content of these gives me the opportunity to update and clarify the purpose of my approach. In short, I have the chance of engaging in a kind of *retractatio*, in the Augustinian sense of the term. My aim in these new thoughts is to eliminate some misunderstanding, perhaps answer some criticisms, but, first and foremost, to try and supplement the definition of the concept of geo–ecclesiology, especially as applied to Late Antiquity, though it is not limited to just that period. It seems that, as has been said, knowledge advances less by accumulation of new data than by inventing new systems, a new matrix for placing the data.[7] Having decided to use the periodization so brilliantly proposed by Henri-Irénée Marrou, which marks the paradigmatic specificity of Late Antiquity, I follow him in the view that there was a new religious feeling between the fourth and seventh century,[8] in which Christianity prevailed as a cohesive force. Soon there was a real difference between developments in the West[9] and the East, as the latter saw the final flourishing of Antiquity in the age of Theopolis, after the civilizations of πόλις and παιδεία.[10] It is in this context that geo–ecclesiology is a fruitful way of understanding events.

As Raymond Aron said of the theory of international relations,[11] geo–ecclesiology was first conceived, not as a metaphor[12] but as a toolbox for the professional historian. It is designed primarily for those who are

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[on http://philippe.blaudeau.alwaysdata.net/publications.html]

[5] See especially Blaudeau 2012.

[6] On Blaudeau 2006 see the reviews by Bruckmann 2006; Van Nuffelen 2007; Wickham 2007; Pouchet 2007; Destephen 2007; Dagron 2007; Todt 2008; Camplani 2008; Meier 2009; Rist 2009; Fatti 2010, as quoted in [http://philippe.blaudeau.alwaysdata.net/media/Philippe_Blaudeau_CV_fr.pdf], 13, n.1; on Blaudeau 2012, see the reviews by Ronzani 2013; Tanner 2013; Hillner 2014; Kontouma 2014; Levillayer 2014; Dulaey 2015; Destephen 2015, as quoted in [http://philippe.blaudeau.alwaysdata.net/media/Philippe_Blaudeau_CV_fr.pdf], 13, n. 2.

[7] As suggested by Bradshaw 1995, 231 and then relayed by Gabriel 2013, 2.

[8] Which also covers various phenomena from astrology to repugnant magic practices, not without introducing cultural elements drawn from various religious universes. See Marrou 1963, 307–308, Marrou 1968, 392.

[9] See Marrou 1977, 126–149.

[10] See Blaudeau forthcoming.

[11] See Aron 1967, 851; Battistella 2014[4], 39.

[12] In spite of Dagron 2007, 973.

specialized in the study of the end of Antiquity and who have a keen awareness of the fact that Late Antiquity borrows its vocabulary and grammar from the previous period to formulate its innovations. Consequently, the work to be done requires real familiarity with the entire Hellenistic-Roman period to understand the very conditions for the development of a civilization and, further, to acquire a closer understanding of an Empire in which a new religion was born and developed, confident in the expressive powers offered by the cultural output of the time.

It is therefore partly by pursuing as fraternal a dialogue as possible with the late-antique Christian clerics and laymen whose hopes for the Church had changed profoundly after the Constantinian shift that we can get a better sense of this difficult and surprising time of theological controversies.[13] Let us note at the outset that, designed in this way, geo–ecclesiological study maintains a dialectical relationship with the late–antique past, since it deliberately raises queries based on the categories it has not specified. At the same time, it rejects any effect of immediacy and aims to protect itself from the ever–present danger of anachronism. In our times, which insist on the duty of memory but find it hard to accept the architectural work necessary to give sense to history, it is tackling the serious issue of the pursuit of tradition and origins, whether with regard to Chalcedon or even Nicaea, while seeking to avoid the trap of identity claims. So, placing this type of research in the field of historical studies does not mean discrediting other disciplines that contribute to its development (theology, geography, geopolitics), but, on the contrary, it takes scrupulous account of their input and orders it chronologically, while paying particular attention to the pair of opposites, permanence/mutations, so dear to the historian.

But there is more. If geo–ecclesiology is an intimate part of the discipline of history, it is in some ways conditioned by its intellectual parentage. Just as the specialist in International Relations engages in long, fruitful discussion with Thucydides, because he was the first and he proposed major generalizations about power and imperialism that could lead to a theoretical approach in this regard,[14] so the geo–ecclesiologist is in constant dialogue with the authors of ecclesiastical history, and with Eusebius of Caesarea in particular. Based on extensive original documentation, this remarkable output is indeed a discourse on the Church itself, that is to say, etymologically an ecclesiology with a strong

[13] On this historical conception that we share, see Marrou 1975[6], 93.
[14] See Martres 2003, 50.

awareness of time, which we know mattered deeply to Eusebius.[15] He intended, indeed, to designate the *vera Ecclesia Christi* through the facts and problems encountered or through the thoughts expressed by the masters, the better to show how the divine plan is applied in the history of men until the advent of the end of times and the Second Coming. So, to him, the true Church is historically guaranteed by the ethics of its members, and by their commitment to their faith to the point of martyrdom.[16] It is still manifested demonstratively and effectively by the communion of the four sees distinguished by apostolic tradition (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem), which is also, incidentally, in fundamental agreement with canons 6 and 7 of Nicaea. Eusebius discovered and used a network of information flows, actors and emissaries —already to be found in the correspondence of Dionysius of Alexandria (247/248–264/265)—,[17] deploying representation, quasi–mapping and Christian dynamics in the Empire, and attesting the evolution of the definition of orthodoxy from deserved glorification to the entire truth (which was guaranteed by the conciliar body).[18] In this way he indicated the priority of geo–analytical ecclesiological criteria, even if they were describing an inchoate situation.

Does this mean, then, that geo–ecclesiological investigation could start from the third century and the epistolary corpus of Dionysius of Alexandria, or at least from the moment of the legalization of Christianity? I have long considered that such an enquiry supposed it was studying a time when the ecclesial devices had reached critical mass, at a time when the convergence already discerned by Eusebius between general confession of the One God and obedience to the imperial monarchy had been completed. Everything therefore suggested that geo–ecclesiology could actually be applied only from the Theodosian era. But it is clear, as Federico Fatti observed, that if one does not over-focus on exceptional personalities (such as Athanasius and his opponent Eusebius of Nicomedia) to understand the controversial issues (as the question of the site of Constantinople already was), then the fourth century, especially the period of the Arian controversy (318–381), also lends itself to this kind of enquiry, although individual initiative seemed stronger then (one thinks of Hilary of Poitiers, for example).[19] Let us add that the evolution of

[15] Blaudeau 2006, 493–499; on Eusebius' chronistic works, cf. Burgess and Kulikowski 2013, 119–126 especially.
[16] See Blaudeau 2006 and Camplani 2008, 580.
[17] In this respect, see Klug 2014, 78–95.
[18] On this shift of sense, see Arjakovsky 2013, 241–340.
[19] Fatti 2010, 281.

historiographical genre itself reveals the same enhancement of the geo–ecclesiological perspective, through the introduction of monastic and missionary figures (starting with the history of Rufinus of Concordia). These very unevenly organized forms of asceticism can be gradually integrated in the action of major archbishops, although such a development does not exclude attitudes of rejection, resistance, or even open opposition.

If geo–ecclesiological study starts with the time of Constantine, other players in the game (Antioch, Jerusalem or even second–class sees, such as Ephesus, Thessalonica[20] or Carthage)[21] may be included insofar as their ability and sustainable action and information are sufficient. This may be because this kind of study focuses more on a comprehensive (or interpretative) design than an explanatory one, in that it considers the meaning actors give their behaviour.[22] This does not mean that this model of interpretation ignores structural causes, which could remain hidden to the protagonists of the period.[23] Thus, for some researchers at least, geo–ecclesiology, as a component of the historian's heuristic arsenal, provides us with new understanding. In particular, it makes more intelligible the intertwining of initiatives, projects, forces and confrontations so characteristic of the post–Chalcedonian period. For example, it clarifies our understanding of controversial figures like Timothy Aelurus or Peter Mongus.[24] For instance, it encourages a new understanding of the Alexandrian project, which was centred on the preservation of Nicaea, a conservative Christology (teaching Nicene and Athanasius, Theophilus

[20] Occasionally, a dramatic event shines quite a harsh light on the intentions of certain players in this second class. One example is the bloody episode of Thessaloniki (519), whose responsibility is attributed to its Archbishop Dorothy by Roman texts in the *Collectio Avellana*. See Blaudeau 2012, 274–278.

[21] See Markus 1979, 278–287 or Blaudeau 2010, 543–565.

[22] Hence, perhaps, Fatti's assumption that I would express some proximity to the Alexandrian positions in the 2006 book ("*la malcelata simpatia dell'A. per una delle parti in causa*" (Fatti 2010, 280). My intention was to address each position with the empathy required, but it seems to have been perceived as more pronounced in this case. Even before starting my own geo–ecclesiological enquiry, I particularly wished to take the precaution of studying historiographically concepts and notions previously used to account for the Christological controversy and to locate my approach (Blaudeau 2006, 25–114; Blaudeau 2012, 4–8), knowing that history is inseparable from the historian (see Marrou 1975[6], 47–63) and that, as such, a historian must examine his own questions and his principles of explanation.

[23] See Battistella 2014[4], 41.

[24] Camplani 2008, 580.

and Cyril's doctrine), and a sacred foundation, which the Roman Empire cannot claim by itself. Geo–ecclesiology also revokes the false myth of an Egyptian Christianity that had already been identified with its Coptic origins in 451, the better to declare itself anti–Roman and anti–imperial. Geo–ecclesiology still allows us to chart the strong, dominant or weak influence of spaces, and point to the importance of Ephesus in the Alexandrian view, which was intended to counter the influence of Constantinople.[25] Finally, careful examination of Zachariah Rhetor's *Ecclesiastical History*, which borrows its narrative and documentary tradition from Alexandrian miaphysite trends without being reducible to them, allows us to trace the historiographical project once organized by St. Mark's See, in accordance with the hypothesis that new discoveries in Ethiopian manuscripts have recently confirmed and added to.[26]

Conversely, the Constantinople model cannot easily claim a constitutive or apostolic service or an unwavering orthodoxy, so it revolves around the consistency of a pattern of imperial centralization and more readily acknowledges political power of divine origin. In this way, it extended its effective control over a territory called on to consolidate itself as a patriarchate early in Justinian's reign.[27] As for the Roman project, exceptionally well documented but significantly less ductile to former historiographical mediations, it was powerfully shaped by Petrinological discourse, which did not prevent it from breaking with the Alexandrian Christology alliance in 449 (with the Tome of Leo). Notable for its marked gap between theory and practice, this Roman model was permanently exposed to the difficulty of giving a major role to the Constantinopolitan See, whose indispensable contribution is evident from its absence during the Acacian schism. This complicated and often tense relationship also explains why the exercise of authority over Illyria continued to be a major challenge for Rome, while its influence in the East remained, overall, uneven.[28]

With these teachings, geo–ecclesiological interpretation sheds a new light on the idea of pentarchy designed by Justinian and his entourage, whether in terms of hierarchy, territorial distribution of skills, and the spatial coverage (even though it remained incomplete) of patriarchy. It is not until the events and issues stirring up Christian Africa, which returned under Roman authority in 533, and in the context of the controversy of the Three Chapters, that resistance to Justinian's ecclesiastical policy is more

[25] Blaudeau 2006, 314–316
[26] See Camplani 2015, 92–102.
[27] Blaudeau 2006, 381–460.
[28] See Blaudeau 2012.

easily understood. Indeed, geo–ecclesiological analysis helps explain the intense expression or, rather, flowering, of Latin works directly connected to the story and composed by clerics from *Africa Proconsularis* or *Byzacena* (Facundus of Hermiane especially, but also Liberatus of Carthage, or Victor of Tonnona) in a short period between 550 and 568[29] before this specific African Latin voice disappeared forever.

If so, the geo–ecclesiological approach seems to be a real contribution to historical knowledge. But it does not claim, obviously, to provide a total system of interpretation, since, as Wickham noted, it cannot embrace all the social motivations that interacted in triggering the controversy and keeping it alive.[30] It seeks rather to understand the theological conflicts so characteristic of Late Antiquity, not only the doctrinal debates but also the ecclesiological ideas that are inseparably associated with them.[31]

Despite the attempts at clarification, ecclesiologists did not always understand this hermeneutic stance. From the Catholic ranks, two converging criticisms were made of our approach. Referring to a fairly old representation of the diversity of approaches and ecclesial designs, both late-antique and contemporary,, Jean-Robert Pouchet, in a review of my book *Alexandrie et Constantinople*, asserts that "l'Eglise, en son institution comme en son parcours salvifique dans le temps, est à la fois divine et humaine, et […] on ne peut la soumettre, sous peine d'erreur, à une étude réductrice, qui serait purement phénoménale".[32] Similarly, in his account of *Le siège de Rome et l'Orient*, N. Tanner says: "However, to speak of papal aggrandizement as a conscious aim may be mistaking means for ends. Not that Blaudeau is guilty in this respect, but the impression is hard to avoid in a work that focuses principally on political effects rather than doctrinal or religious content."[33]

These are important objections that suggest that geo–ecclesiology may undermine what is for believers the institution of salvation. Is it impossible for a historian and a Christian, like myself, to study the Church, respecting the epistemology of the historical discipline with regard to its object, seeking to understand, and considering what the Church says of itself, both in its historical essence and its eschatological horizon, without at once subscribing to a religious epistemology? Must academic discourse about it

[29] Even till 575 in the case of Victor.
[30] Wickham 2007, 732.
[31] As has been demonstrated by Van Nuffelen 2007, 231.
[32] Pouchet 2007, 521.
[33] Tanner 2013, 759.

subscribe to the rule of faith in its divine/human identity, the recognition of which would then be required from all who read about geo–ecclesiology? In other words, must ecclesiology and, therefore, what geo–ecclesiology takes over from it, belong to a confessional discipline? I don't think so, as long as the levels are clearly distinguished and we remember that, in terms of geo–ecclesiology, the possibility of considering the Church as theologically discredited does not exist.

Thus, doctrine is never seen as a pretext, a subterfuge or an ideological weapon, but as part of the history of thought and a major subject of controversy,[34] without its being separated from the Church building in which it was developed and promoted. We should recall that, between the fourth and seventh centuries CE, the social practice of the Church, as today, was one of *agape*.[35] Its officers, though they may appear partisan to us, sought in the name of their conviction and their ministry, to develop a specific governance, the pastorate.[36] This is why the history of the Church cannot be examined under the axiology of geopolitics. It required a special approach, and, in my opinion, that is why the term geo-ecclesiology was coined, a neologism that was easily transposed into other languages. Therefore, while trying conscientiously to be loyal to the Church that I recognize as a believer, I demand, with others, the freedom to study it in the ambit of the Social Sciences, which are a remarkable and unique model of organization of society, an original way of articulating the individual and the community, and deepening our understanding of both.

Never, perhaps, more than in Late Antiquity, did the theological and ecclesiological help shape the social. We know the formula: "Ask that you exchange money, we will speak of the Begotten and Unbegotten; ask about the price of bread, one will reply that the Father is greater and the Son is lower. Find out if the bath is ready, some will say that the Son was created out of nothing [...]."[37] Though we may have misused this passage from Gregory of Nyssa, or tried to draw too much from it, as it is likely to

[34] The fear of seeing Christology ultimately being driven in a discredited form by this kind of study, in that the players would be less animated by the desire to tell the truth than to assert their power, seems unfounded: Bruckmann 2006, 218. Geo–ecclesiology serves precisely to highlight the conditions of training and information of the doctrinal statement, but also its distribution, reception, rejection or re-composition.

[35] Gagey and Souletie 2001, 181.

[36] Senellart 2013, 4–5; Chevallier 2013, 3, 5–6.

[37] Greg. Niss., *De deitate filii et spiritus sancti et in Abraham,* in Gregorii Nysseni *Opera.* X.2. ed. Rhein E., Leyde 1996, 121.

raise the topic of the world turned upside down or to refer to a very specific context,[38] it is still reasonable to regard it as a particularly memorable and significant indication of this force at work.

But it is in this kind of communication that a most important phenomenon occurs, which informs and illuminates another aspect of the concept of geo–ecclesiology. The contents of Trinitarian and Christological doctrines, clear but bounded as they are, define the ecclesial system, to which is attached a symbolic space (as a delimitation of membership and affiliation).[39] In such a way, it comes to have a close correspondence with the territories that can be determined according to different scales, depending on the different degrees of presence and control of prescriptive authority. But this topological dimension of the controversy is combined with another feature of the Church, stimulatingly demonstrated in the long-distance debate between Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson. Their disagreement concerned the mimetic relationship between the sovereignty of Church and State (which reaches as far as the Empire at the period that interests us), as has been highlighted by Bernard Bourdin.[40] It led them to consider antagonistically the identification of the *katechon* (for Peterson, the Church / for Schmitt, the State[41]). This is not the place to enter further into the debate. Let us simply note that the historian who converted to Catholicism, Peterson, believed he could see the invalidity of the model of political theology designed by Eusebius. He thought that this ideology was liquidated by the dogma of the Trinity (un-transposable in terms of legitimizing the imperial monarchy) and by Augustine's rejection of any possibility of identification between the City of God and the Christianised Roman Empire or any other political construction.[42] Rightly criticized on historical grounds,[43] Peterson's position does not yield to Schmitt's own view. Moreover, it was recently proposed to reverse the most famous of Peterson's *formulae* by saying that "all the pregnant concepts of the dogmatic theology of the Church are theologized political concepts".[44] In short, we should consider that there is a specific, reciprocal influence that suggests analogies between geo–politics and geo–ecclesiology, since we

[38] See Perrin 2001, 189.
[39] On the connection between theology and topology, see Iogna-Prat, 2013, 13.
[40] Bourdin 2007, 20.
[41] Bourdin 2007, 20–21.
[42] Peterson 2007 (1935), 119–125. We know that Peterson intended to explode the theology of the Third Reich, as he wrote to Fr. Dessauer in an undated letter cited by Nichtweiss 2007, 210.
[43] See Fatti 2005, 85–95.
[44] Bourdin 2007, 21.

have emphasized its irreducibility. Let us add here that we believe geo–politics is definitely free of any ideological taint long associated with its German history (if one thinks of Friedrich Ratzel or Karl Haushofer).[45]

Indeed, in Late Antiquity there is a real difficulty in putting the principal sees in order of precedence on the supra–metropolitan level. This obviously contributed to hardening quarrels. The Church therefore differed from the political structure that is contemporary with it: relations between the main ecclesiastical actors were of a horizontal type, while the imperial regime had a vertical structure.[46] Therefore, the situation thus created on the ecclesial level encourages us to suggest a comparison for the Church with what remains the starting point of geopolitics–anarchy, in the sense that no central authority existed capable of imposing itself indisputably above the states. Of course, here we must remember that the ideal geo–ecclesial relation is to ensure, protect and preserve the order of the Christian communion, according to the bonds of brotherhood. It is therefore important not to project onto them uncritically some of the workings of the international system, whether Hobbesian (the protagonists designing each other as enemies) or Lockean (as rivals). Probably the Kantian mode (where they see themselves as friends) can be more easily invoked as a principle.[47] With equal rigour, we should try to discern the key players and to work on individuals and functions, in order to clarify the roles of personal initiative and the heritage. This means giving attention to the nature of the relationship between sees, whether they were marked by persuasion, trickery, force or norms (canonical or disciplinary–one thinks of the Roman addition to the sixth canon of Nicea),[48] depending on what the sources can show us. It is still possible to use operational concepts from the analysis of international relations too, while questioning their relevance (power, domination, hegemony, peace, order, stability, security) or evaluating their criteria of efficiency. These are obviously not military —which is not to say that violence is absolutely forbidden as an expression of authority, including the orchestrated events that aim to occupy ecclesial or urban space, or deemed appropriate (at the councils of Ephesus or elsewhere). Economics, on the other hand, constitutes a

[45] Let us recall that the first history of geo–politics was strongly associated with the German school, and had been associated, on the French side, with a thirst for power and Nazi expansion through war.
[46] On this structural difference, cf. Battistella 2014[4], 20.
[47] On these three possibilities, see Battistella 2014[4], 351.
[48] *Ecclesia romana semper habuit primatus/primatum.* On the historical context of the appearance of this formula, see Blaudeau 2012, 24–25.

suitable category of evaluation (especially if one considers relationships of patronage or the circulation of money).[49]

But the key is of another order, and appears partially equivalent to the forms of soft power so dear to Joseph Nye. Indeed, if they imply a technical dimension (literary, archival and linguistic, for example),[50] the influence of specific registers of geo–ecclesiology are firstly intellectual (the development of exegetical and theological discourse expressed in rational terms). There are also cultic, cultural and media influences (the diffusion of written documents–publication of treaties, *Publizistische Sammlungen*,[51] church histories ...—and oral evidence—slogans and chants—culminating in the audio–visual device of the liturgy with the diptychs in particular). If we consider the debates on international relations between those with "realistic" and "trans-nationalist" views,[52] for example, it may suggest that geo–ecclesiology was primarily interested in inter–ecclesial relations, but was also open to trans–ecclesial relations to the extent that non–institutional actors (whose role was not justified by a major ordination) could significantly change the balance. Examples

[49] Taking greater account of this aspect, Wickham 2007, 732, invites us not to ignore the economic–financial component of episcopal relations. However, he stays more in the "hinterland", within archiepiscopal or metropolitan areas of competence. And he alludes to the priced transaction that regulated relations between lower and upper hierarchies, ordained and ordinators.

[50] About this capacity of the major sees, see Blaudeau 2012, 13–133, Magi 1972, 16–28, Moreau 2014, 235–262, and Wipszycka 2008, 94–105.

[51] It was Schwartz who gave this genre its name (culminating in his *Publizistische Sammlungen zum acacianischen Schisma*, Munich 1934). The philologist even specifies in a note at the very opening of the volume (*Vorbemerkung*) that the *Veronensis* and *Berolinensis* collections, which constitute its main material, had no place following the *Sangermanensis* in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* (*ACO* II.5). Indeed, the importance of historical explanation, which must necessarily accompany them, could not comply with the normal conventions of introductions to ACO volumes. Sources of this kind deserved specific examination (with consideration of when they were written and what were the aims of their disclosure (*Publizistische Sammlungen*, 271–274 and 285–287)). The term, therefore, refers to the editorial design of circulating selected parts of ecclesiastical documents for demonstrative purposes during the various phases of reconsidering the conciliar and post–conciliar legacy in the light of renewed controversy (i.e. in the post-Chalcedonian case, the Acacian schism, the Laurentian schism, the case of the Scythian monks, the Theopaschite Edict, and especially the controversy of the Three Chapters). Schwartz wanted the instruments of *Publizistiche Sammlungen* to be not only informative but performative (see Blaudeau, 2012, 15–23). They therefore fall within what he saw as *Kirchenpolitik* (see also note 62).

[52] Battistella 2014, 105–110.

include the Sleepless Ones (*Akoimetoi*), who were active propagandists of a strict Chalcedonian line between the late fifth century and the beginning of the reign of Justinian.[53] Even the teachings of the pioneers of constructivism can present a real invitation to deeper thinking. One example is Martha Finnemore, who tried to think about world politics less in terms of objective structures of power relations than of the cognitive structure of ideas, beliefs, or values and standards inter–subjectively shared by the actors.[54] May it even be possible to imagine in the future a dialogue between geo–politics and geo–ecclesiology?

If geo–ecclesiology seems to highlight the precise dynamics of ecclesial issues better than the concept of *Kirchenpolitik* so popular among German scholars impressed by the Prussian structure, like the great Eduard Schwartz (1858-1940),[55] it does not claim to hegemony in the study of the great confrontations that have marked the history of Christianity during the late-antique period. Geo–ecclesiology has to face the problem of its relationship to politics and its sacredness, or its ability to reconfigure the space of communion. But geo–ecclesiology is also challenged by Weber's dialectic between charisma and institution. This is certainly one of its limitations: it cannot easily translate the importance of the phenomenon of spiritual guidance exerted by famous ascetics unless they deliberately acted as part of a defined institutional line (like, for example, Symeon the Stylite after Chalcedon).[56] So geo–ecclesiological studies must not harden

[53] Blaudeau 2006, 481-488.

[54] Finnemore 1996, 2: "In [this book] I develop a systemic approach to understanding state interests and state behavior by investigating an international structure, not of power, but of meaning and social value."

[55] As Meier 2011, 129, has underlined in a section on understanding the ancient councils that were soon developed by the publisher of their *acta*: "The explanations Schwartz presents his readers [...] reflect a very special significance of the Empire and the late-antique Church as an extremely political conciliar history, in which the protagonists—whether on the imperial or ecclesiastical side—only fought for power, influence and advancement while theological questions played no role or rather were manipulated only as a pretext for the real political interests (Schwartz willingly employs the mask metaphor) whatever the reigns, Constantine's, Constance's II, Theodosius I's, Theodosius II's or Justinian's." Hillner 2014, 355, insists on a difference of approaches between *geo-ecclésiologie* and *Kirchenpolitik* as well. Let us quote her: "[…] an introduction laying down these parameters, which gives a breath-taking overview of previous scholarship all the way back to the Reformation and decidedly refutes Roman bishops' 'Prussian–style' pursuit of power [...]."

[56] Blaudeau 2006, 157.

the *realia* or modelize them too much. In this regard, let us recall in particular that the late–antique terms used for the evolution of the spatial organization of the Church refer primarily to persons qualified to exercise these skills rather than the territories to which they correspond.[57]

At the end of this brief attempt at an updated definition, let us add that, if the period between the fourth and seventh century is suitable for developing a study of this nature, other later periods may have sufficient common characteristics, assuming a certain intensity of contacts, to support such an enquiry. Moreover, certain institutional forms developed so precisely, were so tailored to this perspective, that we can hardly describe them as other than geo–ecclesial. One of the most achieved examples of this may be the creation of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in 1622.[58] Formed in the context of the Unianist project and intended to take its place, its purpose as part of the Counter-Reformation was to bring together in an ordained scheme populations from different sides, such as Orthodox, non-Chalcedonians, but also Protestants or even pagans, and integrate them into the Catholic fold. In short, if the concept of geo–ecclesiology was hatched in a specific historiological environment, it does not have to be confined to it. On the contrary, it has to be tested—and this is starting to happen—according to other times and spaces, provided that what balances it remains safe. For it is constitutive to its aim: if geography (or, to be precise, geo–politics) serves to make war, as Yves Lacoste has provocatively and usefully recalled,[59] we may expect geo–ecclesiology, in turn, to serve better for understanding old conflicts and identities that are still alive.

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[57] Note that, in order to denounce this strong incarnation when it is perceived as the face of adversity, invective sometimes borrows directly from the theological–political thesaurus. One of the best examples of this trend (if not temptation) is thus to accuse the Archbishop of Alexandria, Theophilus or Dioscorus, of being a new pharaoh, referring especially to the book of Exodus and to the associated territorial memory. See Blaudeau, 2006, 57, 286–287; Blaudeau 2011, 94–95.

[58] See Arjakovski 2013, 386, and also, even if we do not share his epistemology, Thual 2004, 71–72.

[59] Lacoste 1976; the first occurrence of this formula was to be found previously in his newly created Periodical, *Hérodote*, 1, the same year.

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HISTORIOGRAPHY 2

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HISTORICAL PATH OF "LATE ANTIQUITY": FROM TRANSFORMATION TO RUPTURE

JEAN-MICHEL CARRIÉ*

The expression "Late Antiquity", which appeared at a relatively recent date, has fulfilled two purposes, namely to rehabilitate a previously disparaged period and to unearth the original features of the era to show its positive aspects. The theme of decline, sustained through face-value readings of ancient accounts and itself at play in modern ideological conflicts, had long made the Late Roman Empire[1] the archetype of all "ends of the world". In this way, even today, the media, ignorant politicians, and the man in the street talk about "the fall of the Roman Empire", propagating false similarities with current issues, such as the relinquishment of the sound principles that made western nations great, immigration leading to diminishing national identity, the loss of dominant economic positions, the scourge of corruption, the abandonment of ideals, and so forth. These are, in fact, the themes that historians complacently developed in the past. Fortunately, it is no longer possible today to put forth such interpretations of the period.[2] To reach this result, two obstacles had to be overcome: anachronism and value judgements on different periods of the past.

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[1] Translator's note: The name used in French, "*Bas-Empire*" ("Low Empire"), reinforces the negative connotations.

[2] Nonetheless, academic research in the field of ancient history is never immune to retrogressions favoured by the development of institutions and academic careers, a poorer command of ancient languages, linguistic imperialism or isolationism, and an increase in insufficiently checked publications.

"*Crisis: What Crisis?*" is the iconoclastic title[3] that has become, in a more or less defiant way, the rallying cry in recent years for an ever-growing number of specialists who have set out to revise judgements on the third century, which was previously portrayed as the prologue to the end of the classical world. It was indeed long considered to be a "century of crisis" and even the century of "The Crisis": the century that, by changing the nature, spirit, and operations of the imperial structure, sooner or later determined its fate.

Historians studying Rome long based their knowledge and judgements on literary sources, first and foremost on ancient historians, who focused exclusively on political and military aspects. As a result, it was through these same lenses that the theme of the "crisis" was passed on to modern generations. It is remarkable that in the nineteenth century, the period of so-called military anarchy was thought to begin with the civil war between 193 and 195 and to end only with the Illyrian emperors saving the Empire "from immediate dissolution" resulting from the recklessness of Gallienus. The Severan dynasty, described as despotic, was included in that decadent phase through a moral judgement based on the liberal and anti-autocratic values of the Enlightenment.

Closer to our time, Michael Rostovtzeff boxed the third century into a hypothesis as grandiose as it was arbitrary. He believed that he had identified signs of a "social revolution" established on the State's alliance with the peasantry against the urban bourgeoisie, achieved through the proletarianisation of the army, and leading to "a gradual absorption of the higher classes by the lower, accompanied by a gradual levelling down of standards".[4] To avert the chaotic situation thus created, a "totalitarian" Empire was set up in the fourth century, marking the transition from "Rome" to "Byzantium".[5] This risky thesis, however, was not just a flight of ideological fancy; rather, it was based on analyses and theories that were completely common at the time, some dating back to Eduard Meyer and Max Weber.[6] This thesis was handed down to the following generation through historians such as Friedrich Oertel,[7] and one can often catch glimpses of its vision of the Late Roman world when reading between the lines in the work of Moses Finley,[8] despite everything that would logically oppose them. Telling history as a grand narrative, together

[3] Patterson 1987, 115–146; Raynaud 1996, 189–212.
[4] Rostovtzeff 1957 (1926), 534. More generally, see Chap. 12 (502–541).
[5] A theory that I analyse in Carrié 2008, 253–270.
[6] In particular, Weber 1976.
[7] Oertel 1939.
[8] Finley 1985 (1973).

with reducing the historical complexity to ideal types, resulted in presenting an artificially unified image of the late Empire, constructing a bridge of continuity over regional diversities and chronological oscillations; in short, reducing the period to a schematic model even more effectively than the terms "decline", "decadence", and "fall" had done. More than for any other period of ancient history, all the conditions were therefore present to prompt an extensive reassessment of modern historiography relating to Late Antiquity. This research was masterfully conducted by, among others, Santo Mazzarino[9] and Luciano Canfora.[10] Similarly, the time is now ripe for a less emotive approach to the period. At the end of the 1970s, Arnaldo Momigliano observed a diminished interest in the causes of the fall of Rome and attributed it to "the impression, which I believe to be widely shared, that our problems are incommensurable in quality and quantity with those of Rome in decline".[11] We can perhaps hope that the Late Empire will no longer be held up as a mirror to the psychoses of the century.

The discourse of contemporaries, unwisely taken for factual historical accounts, has provided significant fodder for the decadence thesis. It should come as no surprise that memories of the third century, which was fraught with dramatic events, have come down to us with an extra dose of dramatisation. Through politico-religious propaganda, an unwitting conspiracy between pagans and Christians ended up shaping the whole period from the mid-third century to the Tetrarchy into a doomsday narrative. The popular memory of Gallienus among the Christians, linked to the so-called period of "Peace of the Church", contrasts with the dark legend shrouding the mere mention of the emperor in pro-senatorial pagan historiography, notably in the *Augustan History*. Inversely, the period depicted in apocalyptic colours by the Christians could not be the reign of Gallienus but, inevitably, that of the Tetrarchic persecutors. It was precisely by relying only on Eusebius's account that Edward Gibbon reached the supposition "that war, pestilence, and famine, had consumed, in a few years, the moiety of the human species".[12] Eusebius's perspective, however, was purely eschatological: "And though the human race upon earth is thus ever diminishing and consuming away before their eyes, they do not tremble, as its total disappearance draws nearer and nearer".[13] Gibbon actually had the right interpretive key for this passage. Indeed, in

[9] Mazzarino 1966; Mazzarino 1974 (1960).
[10] Canfora 1980, in particular 236–242 dedicated to Spengler.
[11] "After Gibbon's Decline and Fall" in Momigliano 1980, 274.
[12] Gibbon 1952 (1776), 114.
[13] Eusebius 1932, 183.

Chapter 15, he wrote that "[t]he Christian […] expected [this destruction] with terror and confidence as a certain and approaching event; and […] he considered every disaster that happened to the Empire as an infallible symptom of an expiring world".[14] Instead, however, Gibbon focused on what he thought to be an exceptional reference in the same text to an authentic document, an "exact register" kept at Alexandria of those who received distributions of wheat, leading him to believe that the estimation of Pope Dionysius of Alexandria was an incontestable fact. It should be said that Eusebius, for good measure, strung together a Dionysian sequence of persecutions, civil war, and pestilence in rapid succession; this too "perfect" catalogue of calamites forewarning the end of the world and the day of redemption should have aroused suspicion earlier.

In addition to the myopia that, in any era, characterises contemporary perceptions of the march of history, the third century, marked by a decisive rise in conversions to Christianity and by the emperors' increasingly drastic attempts to curb the movement, showed particularly active forms of ideological manipulation. Fourth-century historians retrospectively made the evils that, in their view, would ultimately cause the demise of Roman power—namely, the absolutism of imperial authority, the abandonment of tutelary deities, and the decline in military discipline—begin as early as during the Severan dynasty. In this connection, it should be noted that such sources concentrated exclusively on political and moral factors, while disregarding economic, demographic, and material data. Nor should we lose from sight their rhetorical nature and reuse of an unchanging repertoire of opposing *topoi* of despair or exaltation, intended to elicit alternately pity or admiration from the audience; nor the one-upmanship among authors keen to capture the attention of a blasé public, nor even the plagiarism when a model deemed matchless already existed. The description of the epidemic in Alexandria by Pope Dionysius of Alexandria, often mistaken for an authentic account and almost a "report", is in fact a reworking of Pericles' speech on the Athenian plague seven centuries earlier.[15] Today, historical hindsight allows for the perception of events to be separated from the impressions felt by those at the time, impressions all the more distorted in a conformist society informed by hearsay and culturally captive to stereotyped expressions of reality.

Another trend that has been emerging over the past half-century, also in reaction to traditional historiography, is the view of a third century

[14] Gibbon 1952 (1776), 188.

[15] Regarding the worth of another Christian bishop's historical account, see Christol 2006, 455–481.

linked more closely to the past, whose underpinnings it prolongs, than to the future, which it no longer prefigures. A consensus has been reached to limit the "crisis" to the second half of the third century while at the same time joining that period to the Early Roman Empire. The idea is that it was a phase during which the Empire was incapable of transforming itself to respond to the requirements of new internal and external situations. The concept of crisis can be kept on the condition that it is understood as a rupture with prior equilibria at a time when new approaches had not yet been found, those that would guide the major fiscal, monetary, and military reforms between 285 and 330.[16] This view justifies both differentiating three centuries of antiquity as "Late Antiquity" and characterising them as a transformation of the Roman Empire, the price paid for a fresh start and prolongation.

The "Roman" perspective—with Rome as the head of the "Catholic" Church—long upheld a vision of the Roman Empire centred on the West and, more specifically, on Italy, whose state of health was held to be indicative of that of the whole. Italy was, however, undoubtedly the region of the Empire the most affected by the crisis in the third century, at least temporarily. When present-day historians define the period, they now tend to downplay "Roman" references, as in the "Late Roman Empire", in order to reintroduce the broader concepts of "ancient world" and "antiquity" in their later phase. Furthermore, the mobility of the Imperial Court meant that, as early as the third century, Rome was no longer in Rome. As for the fall of the Western Empire in 476, it now tends to be seen as a non-event on account of examples of continuity especially visible in Italy, precisely. The consequences of this terminological shift are extremely significant. Late Antiquity thus ceases to constitute the waning phase of a long historical period (antiquity) in order to reach the rank of a distinct historical period. It ceases to be the transitional phase perceived in the usual view, in order to constitute a new and final experience of the ancient world. Consequently, its chronological delimitation needs to be redefined.[17]

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[16] For an analysis of the respective contributions of Diocletian and Constantin, see Carrié, forthcoming.

[17] The first notable historians to consider that there was continuity before and after 476 include Bury 1958 (1923) (an earlier version of the work, published in 1889, even covered the period from 395 to 800) and Stein 1928. The two volumes of Stein's work in French translation, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, are entitled, respectively, *De l'État romain à l'État byzantin (284–476)* and, significantly, *De la disparition de l'Empire d'Occident à la mort de Justinien (476–565 après J.-C.*). In Jones 1964, the period goes from 284 to 602.

General thoughts on the problems of periodisation

The theory of decline has too easily contrasted an apogee of classical civilisation, a supposed "golden age" (under the mythologised Antonine dynasty), with a period of "decline" or "decadence" that is made to begin, depending on the author, in the mid-third century,[18] during the reign of Commodus,[19] or even, in the case of Montesquieu, during the civil wars at the end of the Republic![20] It is not an accident that the end of antiquity, "post-classical antiquity" as we used to say, was defined as the antechamber to the Middle Ages. Indeed, whatever may have been the severity of judgements passed on Late Antiquity, it was not worse than the judgements long endorsed by European historiography regarding the "Middle Ages" and especially the "Dark Ages",[21] what we now call the "Early Middle Ages". At most, the decadent vision of the end of antiquity, long maintained in French through the negative connotations of the expression "*Bas-Empire*" to designate the Late Roman Empire, resulted in turning that period into the prologue to the "Dark Ages". As a result, on account of classicising prejudice, historians studying antiquity lost interest in the period, abandoning this area of study to the mediaevalists. They, in turn, explained the period not by what preceded it, but by what followed it, projecting onto the institutions, society, and culture of the Late Roman Empire strictly mediaeval themes such as the militarisation of society, feudalism, serfdom, corporatism, the withdrawal of the elites from the city to the countryside, the economic omnipotence of the Church, and antinaturalistic symbolisation in the graphic arts. In this vision, the rupture was placed between the Early Roman Empire and the Late Roman Empire, and there was continuity between the end of antiquity and the Middle Ages. I am suggesting the exact opposite here.

For the same reasons, a good number of technological inventions from the end of antiquity were erroneously attributed to the Middle Ages.[22]

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[18] Lot 1927.
[19] Gibbon (1776) 1952, Chap. IV.
[20] Montesquieu 1965.
[21] *Secoli bui*: the use of this expression, originally introduced by Petrarch to designate the whole mediaeval period, was restricted in the nineteenth century to refer to the Early Middle Ages (as well as being applied to various other historical periods deemed to be eras of decline). Even in this usage, the term is no longer used today.
[22] See Gimpel 1976; Finley 1965. In perfect accordance with the lack of profit motivation that Finley ascribed to antiquity and his reuse of the Polanyian concept

They have now rightly been ascribed to antiquity.[23] In the arts, a single example will suffice to show how much progress was made in the twentieth century in reaction against the "relocation" of Late Antiquity. Bianchi Bandinelli demonstrated that the art of that period, rather than prefiguring mediaeval art, had its roots in provincial traditions pre-existing the imperial unification that universalised Greek academicism.[24]

The example of the Middle Ages, whose delimitation as a historical period is directly related to that of antiquity, is illuminating. Out of convenience, I have used, and shall continue to use, the term "Middle Ages" even if I am tempted to speak, rather, of the passage from antiquity to "what followed". I say "what followed" because I perfectly understand the uneasiness felt by mediaevalists when they see their field defined traditionally not as itself but as an intermediary period—moreover, a "dark" and sinister one—between two eras of "light", namely antiquity at its zenith and the modern world. It is as though the Middle Ages were a long parenthesis after which the torch of antiquity, the "fount of ideas and beauty", was taken up once again. We know to whom we owe this abasement of the Middle Ages: it has come to us through the promotional slogans of Renaissance humanists, who found a winning slogan in "the return to antiquity". It is nowadays easy for us to reveal the spurious nature, the trompe-l'œil, of that supposed "return to antiquity".[25]

Shortly before his death, the late lamented Jacques Le Goff denounced the practice of slicing up history into periods.[26] For the French, a cured sausage is par excellence what is cut into slices; Le Goff was thus affirming that history is not a cured sausage. Firstly, when a cured sausage is good, every slice of it is equally good. In contrast, when history is cut up into segments, the purpose is often to oppose periods of different quality. This was far too long the case regarding the division between the Early Roman Empire and the Late Roman Empire, which in French used to be called the "*Haut Empire*" and the "*Bas Empire*", with all the positive

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of "embedded economy", he denied the ancients any interest in technical or technological innovation.

[23] There is a growing number of archaeological refutations: Greene 1994; Greene 2000; Wikander 2000; Wilson 2002.

[24] Bianchi Bandinelli 1971.

[25] People in the Middle Ages were, however, unaware of a rupture with antiquity, as explained in Freund 1984, 71: "The Middle Ages is characterised by its relegation of historical decline, in other words, the analysis of observable phenomena, to the background in favour of eschatological decline. One simply awaited the end of time to occur in a more or less determined future."

[26] Le Goff 2015.

and negative connotations evoked by the adjectives "*haut*" and "*bas*" ("high" and "low"). On the model of genealogical continuity, which seeks to "*illustrer*"—in the older sense of the word, which is "to ennoble", to make more glorious—a family or an ethnic group through lineage or dynasty, any affirmation of continuity, whether proven or not, aims to elevate a historical period or civilisation in regard to its roots. Restoring the reputation of a historical period that has traditionally been deemed inferior to what followed requires affirming a rupture upstream—or at least a "transformation" and continuity downstream. In this way, Jacques Le Goff showed that a desire to rehabilitate the Middle Ages, which he shared with the mediaevalists of his generation, necessitated the establishment of continuity from the mediaeval world to the modern world, rather than a rupture.

It is obviously with great pleasure that I read under his pen (regarding the Middle Ages): "It was not a period of transition, as is said too unoriginally and too superficially. It was a profound transformation. There have not been many of them in the history of societies and civilisations. There is no better record of it, no better expression of it than images".[27] While the concept of a "transitional period" must be rejected, substituting it with the concept of "transformation", however, runs the risk of presenting the course of universal history as a continuous transformation. The identity problems of the Middle Ages could be resolved only if it were situated in relation to two "transformational" phases: one preceding and one following. In choosing the title *L'Empire en mutation* for my overview book about Late Antiquity until Constantine, my aim was to define the period as a combination of continuity and innovations. To my mind, the transformation then continued well beyond the end of the Western Empire, with which I do not wish to align the end of antiquity because I believe it to be later, marked this time by a deep rupture.[28] Without deciding—I do not have the authority to do so—the moment when what constituted the identity of the Middle Ages disappeared, I think that this disappearance did occur at a specific time. We have no difficulty, it seems to me, in recognising a historical moment when the ancient Mediterranean world was still generally recognisable and a moment when it was not; the same goes for mediaeval Europe. For the in-between period, it is the problem of the glass half full or half empty, and a high degree of subjectivity can be observed in historians' individual choices. Stating that the European West presents, at moment M^1, an image that is no longer recognisable at moment

[27] Le Goff 2007, 62.
[28] Carrié and Rousselle 1999. A second volume, entitled *La fin du monde antique*, is forthcoming.

M^2 does not tell us at what point a human community began to look more like moment M^2 than moment M^1. As I shall explain later, some of the different layers of the historical "puff pastry", as it were, evolve over the long term, others over the short term. History certainly cannot be sliced along a dotted line or a saw cut. Yet should we abandon any notion of successive historical periods, each presenting a specific landscape? The impact of decisive ruptures can be minimised neither by long-term or even very long-term continuities, nor by the relative vagueness of moments of passage into a new world.

Let us change metaphors. Who among us, standing at the source of a river, has not contemplated the idea that the water surging from the earth before our eyes is the same that will flow into a distant sea hundreds or thousands of miles away? The same? Nothing could be less certain. Part of it will be lost on the way; the rest will be mixed with other waters. The identity of the river does not lie in the identity of the water that makes it up, but rather in the unicity of its path from the beginning to the end. Of course, history is not a calm, long river, but the metaphor is not any less instructive. Geographers have no difficulty in distinguishing changes in a river such as modifications in the river regime, changes in slope, differences in the flow rate, varying patterns of erosion and deposition, different uses of the river, whether or not it is navigable, and even the diverse national territories that it crosses. Such data about variations are used to divide up the river, most traditionally into a torrential upper course in the mountains, a middle course, a lower course in flatter areas, and possibly an estuary. Determining the specific place where one section changes into another is not always easy because such points of rupture can vary depending on the criterion used. The same is true for historical periods. Nevertheless, geographers can generally agree on the segmentation of a river and the locations where its course changes.

Just as current historiography no longer considers Greco-Roman Antiquity to be a single historical period with unchanging characteristics through the course of its fifteen centuries, it was also compelled to distinguish an "Early", "High", and "Late Middle Ages". Models according to which slavery-based and feudal production systems directly succeeded one another, or according to which feudalism begin as early as the end of antiquity (it is now made to begin in the eleventh century), by thus masking the originality of Late Antiquity, arose from an idealistic, theoretical, and aprioristic approach to history. The convergence of documentary, structuralist, and comparative approaches has led to an "unpacking" of both antiquity and the Middle Ages, which were previously boxed into two artificial entities.

The originality of Late Antiquity in its continuity with the Roman adventure

Both upstream and downstream, it must be decided whether the period defined as Late Antiquity is a transitional period (continuity at the beginning and the end) or a fully original and independent period bookended on either side by ruptures or, at least, transformations.

The "crisis of the Early Roman Empire" during the middle decades of the third century was followed by a reestablishment of the situation in the fourth century through the creation of a "new empire"—in the words of Timothy Barnes[29]—that was characteristic of Late Antiquity. It was still the Roman Empire, whose foundations had not changed but whose ways of operating had been extensively renewed. Beginning in the Tetrarchy, profound reforms turned several pages of institutional, administrative, military, and monetary history. But that period was also marked, from Constantine to Theodosius I, by the progress of Christianisation. In some respects, it was a religious revolution,[30] even if, in political terms, the imperial power reconciled the new religion with previous methods of sacralising the person of the emperor, and the dominant class overcame its internal clashes, temporarily revived by the brutality of Theodosian politics. The rupture occurred within Christianity itself which, owing to its success, then underwent a veritable recreation by abandoning early Christianity.[31] Lastly, limiting ourselves to the main new aspects of the period, we can observe that new types of contact and relationships developed between the Mediterranean population and peripheral peoples, northern in particular, during Late Antiquity. Germanic individuals were massively admitted into the imperial territory. In the West, empowered barbarian kingdoms were established in response to the Roman political incapacity to integrate populations who were asking for nothing less than their place in the sun. These barbarian kingdoms pledged allegiance, at least formally, to the Roman Empire maintained in the East and they prided themselves on acquiring Roman heritage.

In all these respects, deep transformations can therefore be observed that, except in terms of territory, did not challenge the fundamental principles of the Roman imperial world, in contrast to the image of rupture that was presented from Edward Gibbon until the first half of the twentieth

[29] Barnes 1982.
[30] Particularly well analysed by Guy G. Stroumsa in his various works, especially Stroumsa 1999 and Stroumsa 2005.
[31] Markus 1990.

century: the image of a "*Bas Empire*" turning its back on what had previously made Rome great. Historical research over the last fifty years has largely changed this depiction. I shall limit myself here to the updated vision of late ancient society. It is no longer presented as a caste society frozen in an inescapable inheritance of conditions and professions, placed under house arrest, and imprisoned in the fetters of "state totalitarianism". Practically no one is willing to endorse Michael Rostovtzeff's descriptions recalled above. Did the poor and uncultivated kill classical civilisation out of revenge? The idea is risible when one sees the strengthened aristocratic nature of the political regime and of the dominant society. Did Rome succumb to a military dictatorship, to blind totalitarianism? In all of Roman history, the separation between military careers and civil functions was never as wide as in the fourth century, at the end of the so-called period of the "soldier emperors". The political regime resulting from the Tetrarchy, because of an obsessive fear of military usurpation, placed high command under the emperor's personal control. He was the only point of contact and convergence between the two pillars of the regime, an army and a bureaucracy formally designed on the same model, but with no interference. Power was usually in the hands of the highest representatives of civil society until the fifth century when the *magistri militum* took de facto control of the situation in the West. As for strengthening the bureaucracy, it was the necessary counterweight to the autonomy of the cities, a fundamental principle of the Roman Empire that the central power never considered revoking—if only because it did not have the means to do so.[32]

Until the fall of the Western Empire, the senatorial order was maintained at the summit of the social hierarchy. Its lost authority in institutional and collective terms was largely offset by the individual participation of a minority of its members in political decision-making at the highest level, in the emperor's inner circle (they made up most of the *consilium principis*, later to be called the *consistorium principis*). The political capital attracted senators who had taken on imperial functions. These high-level territorial officials and palatines were cosmopolitan,

[32] Tainter 1988. Using a comparison between the fall of the Maya and Chaco empires and that of the Roman Empire, Tainter developed an explanatory model based on network theory, energy economics, and complexity theory. In his view, the Roman Empire succumbed to a diminution of returns on investments in social complexity when the expense of its organisational complexity became unbearable when confronted with new challenges. The idea is appealing but its pertinence has the same limitations as the fiscal thesis of the fall of Rome, of which it is, however, more than a simple reworking.

international elites offering a broad vision of problems in the Empire. In contrast, the diversification of the Senate, following the massive increase in its numbers, widened internal divides to the point that a hierarchy was created of three ranks of increasing honour: *clarissimus*, *spectabilis*, and *illustris*. In this way, the senatorial order lost its political, moral, ideological, and socio-economic cohesion.

The imperial offices, emptied of the slaves and freedmen who had occupied positions during the first centuries of the Empire, were now places of contact between the upper and subaltern strata of the social elite and, for some individuals, places of passage from one to the other. Studies in law opened the door to the high imperial administration and, consequently, to new channels of upward mobility. Soldiers were another privileged group prospering through imperial favour. The army continued to play the powerful role of social ladder, even if, in the widespread inflation of titles and honours, the senior officers were always a lap behind bureaucrats. Germanisation affected, in addition to the imperial guard, several sectors of the army, including the *auxilia* and *vexillationes palatinae* and some troops in the "mobile" army. Except for their physical appearance and clothing, whose exoticism annoyed the population, these diverse individuals demonstrated a good ability to integrate. As a result, the armies confronting one another in the fifth century, whether fighting for or against Rome, increasingly resembled one another as regards their varied ethnic composition and their weaponry, which had become standardized through mutual borrowing. In terms of tactics, and individual and group training, the superiority remained on the side of Rome. Indeed, the Roman army continued to be the reference point, and leaders of merit, whether Romans or acculturated barbarians, were never lacking.

Recent research has challenged the supposed crisis in the recruitment of municipal senators and the use, to remedy the problem, of members' hereditary ties. It was long argued that the practice was imposed by fourth-century laws, which in fact stated nothing of the kind. Continuity within the same families, even if factual in many cases, was not automatic. The trend towards a concentration of powers and decision-making prerogatives in the hands of a select group of counsellors, the *principales* emerging in the fourth century, does not in itself indicate the death throes of the municipal senates: this heterogeneity among the *curiales* dates back to the Early Roman Empire. In the fourth century this milieu opened up to "new professions" such as provincial bureaucrats, the emperor's operational staff, intendants or stewards of wealthy individuals, and subaltern ecclesiastical personnel in addition to the more traditional figures of rhetoric and grammar teachers, whose social role grew more and more.

These holders of average jobs, placed in strategic positions of social communication, conveyed different values from those of the landed aristocracy.

The tenacious cliché that all workers were enlisted in a vast "corporatist system" that hereditarily put them in the service of an interventionist economy must also be relinquished. An attentive rereading of legislation relating to professional associations during the Late Empire enables us to reject definitively any similarity with mediaeval guilds, as was incorrectly suggested by various historians in the past. No trace can be found of what would later constitute mediaeval corporatism, namely the defence of collective interests, the division of work, vocational training, and the regulation of employer–employee relations.[33]

The conditions of the lower classes, the silent voices of history, can be read mainly between the lines in the discourse of the dominant classes. This is what makes the accounts of Christian authors in the last century of the Western Empire so precious. Their sermons link personal salvation to observing social morals and practices inspired by the Gospels and at variance with the cultural self-justification of the dominant classes. Priests like Orose and bishops such as Ambrose, Zeno of Verona, Gaudentius of Brescia, Maximus of Turin, and, most notably, Augustine were well positioned to understand the brutal reality of class interests, to cut through the cynicism of the powerful, and to deconstruct the sophisms used by the rich to justify their most shameful behaviour, such as demanding rent payment for tenant farmers twice, using rigged measurements, and forcing small independent peasants to transfer ownership of their land plots to them, often to settle unpaid debts. That such practices were rebuked by men of the Church does not prove that they had recently become common. Indeed, they had already been denounced four centuries earlier by Sallust and Cicero. What was new was that the ideology of the large landowners—naturally discreet on the topic—no longer monopolised public speech. The stage now had to be shared with bishops advocating the moralisation of economic life with a view towards Christianising human relations in society. The Church also added its voice to that of the imperial legislation in denouncing speculation on staple foods in the event of a shortage. Instead of blaming the merchants, however, the Church condemned the class of large landowners, previously hidden behind a mystifying discourse idealising agriculture.

In place of the supposed happiness of the peasants, whose sweat provided the wealthy with self-serving satisfaction, profit, and honourability,

[33] Please allow me to refer readers to my study in Carrié 2002.

Ambrose and the Fathers of the Church spoke instead of tiring efforts yielding no return. They tried to restore the dignity of work, even manual and exhausting, in contrast to *otium*—the leisure time of the rich—which had, until then, been placed at the top of the scale of social values by the dominant ideology. Ambrose, in particular, dismantled the ruralist discourse, reformulating it in terms of the social utility of producers, the responsibility of the powerful towards the weak (i.e. being a *patronus* in the best sense of the word), justice in economic dealings, solidarity, and reciprocity.[34] Likewise, when referring to professions, he proclaimed that they were neither moral nor immoral by nature, but rather in the way that they were exercised, thus overturning platitudes in the landed gentry's dominant culture that opposed the innocent honesty of agriculture with the inherent dishonesty of commerce. This doctrinal magisterium coherently excluded all interventionism. While Ambrose urged landowners to open up their granaries to all, to become almsgivers, and to sell at normal prices, he rejected the culture of assistance that could divert its beneficiaries from work. Augustine developed similar ideas on the subjects of land, work, wealth, and poverty.[35]

On top of the pyramidal organisation of Roman society, shaped by a hierarchy of orders defined on legal foundations, a judicial differentiation dividing citizens into *honestiores* and *humiliores* was added in the second century. On the scale of sentences applicable to convicted individuals, there was a minimum and a maximum sentence for each category. The maximum was always more severe than the maximum in the higher category, and the minimum less severe than the one in the lower category. This division of society into two penally distinct classes reflects the existence of a fundamental principle in the Roman social order: double structuration. During the fourth century, the increased severity of state justice reduced the penal advantages of the *honestiores* to a minimum, so much so that the term practically disappeared from legislative language. A sign of the times, it was above all being "powerful" (*potens*) that thenceforth allowed one to avoid the punishments inflicted on the humble (e.g. torture by fire, crucifixion, or forced labour in the mines). The spread of a term such as *potens*, an a priori undefinable notion arising from an individual's relative position of strength, suffices to show that the old criterion of the "rank" or "dignity" of the person, central in a hierarchically conceived society, had become outdated. The concepts of order and status had become increasingly ill-suited to reflect the real

[34] Ambrosius 1933.
[35] See MacCormack 2001.

differences of power within society. The gradual disappearance of the equestrian order in the second half of the fourth century and the internal splintering of the senatorial and curial orders into an assortment of disproportionate levels also support the idea of a society being reconfigured, above or outside orders, into groups whose cohesion and authority were based on socioeconomic realities that shaped social classes.

The authority of the powerful resulted from the accumulation of predominant situations: economic wealth, political prestige, and social authority. Social authority was expressed both through relationships of economic dependence and through the interplay of social strategies. Regarding the former, we cannot really say whether they hardened during the fourth century, given that the *colonatus* mentioned in the legislation of the time is no longer to be understood as a status for individuals somewhere between freedom and slavery. This new legal category, falling entirely under public and not private law, sought above all to make the labour force inseparable from the earth itself, exclusively on large estates. The actual condition of peasants under that regime thus depended primarily on its application by the landowners and, even more often, by their stewards or lessees, farm managers who paid them a set rent. Their circumstances therefore resulted from a locally established ratio of power, with every estate representing a unique case. As regards social strategies, patronage, a manifestation of the clientelistic structure of Roman society, immediately springs to mind. Late Roman laws did not target patronage as such, but rather illegal usages of *patrocinium*, in particular tax avoidance, the headhunting of *coloni*, and the rigging of trials, all of which undermined public authority. The novelty was not so much the practice of patronage but its increased frequency.

Such positions of social authority only heightened the economic power that was in full expansion, patently visible in the *villae* that have since been discovered, where "conspicuous consumption" was given free rein. Wealth was being displayed in an even more brazen manner since the Empire had finished reconstructing its monetary system by basing it on gold. The last decades of the fourth century saw the greatest abundance of gold coinage in world history before the discovery of the Americas. Rent on land was paid in gold, and large private fortunes were counted in *centenaria.*[36] On the other hand, gold, unequally accessible to the various social classes, also raised prices and impoverished small and medium landowners who made up most of the curial order in each city, and in the

[36] A *centenarium* was a unit of 100 pounds (33 kg) of gold.

name of whom the anonymous author speaks in the treaty *De rebus bellicis*.[37] Currency therefore constituted a major factor of social division.

Each of the social developments characterising the end of the ancient world that I have just mentioned illustrates evolution within continuity. This evolution was, however, sufficiently major, compared with the preceding centuries, to justify treating Late Antiquity as a distinct period in ancient history.

In the West, did this continuity survive the fall of the Empire and the establishment of "successor societies"? Does the date 476, often highlighted in past historiography as a turning point, mark a more general rupture to the point of sounding the death knell of antiquity? That periodisation was developed at a time when ignorance about the barbarian societies and their development caused them to be regarded as politically underdeveloped, and the establishment of Germanic kingdoms in place of the Roman Empire as a historical regression. The new "connected history",[38] which jointly studies different societies coexisting during the same historical period, introduces a radically different perspective. The specific case of Roman–barbarian relations arose at a time when knowledge of Germanic societies had just made significant advances. I can do no better here than to cite the excellent explanation given by John Bintliff and Helena Hamerow:

> Rather than waiting for the decline of Rome in some passive, unchanging and relatively primitive form of society (e.g. "Germanic Mode of Production", "Military Democracy", "Tribalism" or otherwise) [...], barbarian societies are now recognised to have been dynamic and to have undergone complex transformations in parallel to the rise and fall of Roman imperial power. [...]. Whichever approach is taken [...] the result has been to encourage us to see the Migration Period as potentially the result of a growing convergence between barbarian communities *increasing* in complexity and a Late Roman society that in many or most provinces is *deconstructing* in complexity.[39]

These convergences, whose importance should not however be overstated, have at least contributed to relativising the role of the barbarisation of the imperial territory in the collapse of the ancient world[40] and to disassociating the two phenomena chronologically. I shall come back to this recent trend in historiography a little later.

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[37] Giardina 1989, Chap. 2.
[38] Douki and Minard 2007.
[39] Bintliff and Hamerow 1995, 1.
[40] On this topic, see the illuminating analysis of Ando 2008, 40–46.

The originality of Late Antiquity in its break with mediaeval reconfiguration

The downstream delimitation of the period called "Late Antiquity" poses a different problem. A trend has recently developed that prolongs Late Antiquity until the Muslim conquest in the East and in North Africa, which broke up the unity of the Mediterranean world, made Byzantium withdraw its vital interests into the East, and forced it to modify its organisation in a way that distanced it from its Roman past. Does such a division enable us to grasp better the continuities and ruptures between antiquity and the Early Middle Ages in the West, and the early Byzantine period in the East?

The concepts of "rupture" and "continuity" can be misleading when they are used in an exclusive way. We should be wary of the optical illusions of history, starting with the continuity perceived today between the end of antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. We have received this illusion of continuity through the distorted accounts of contemporaries. If we look at the elites, the only people who left records about their time, they needed to believe that the world had not radically changed. Roman elites wanted to reassure themselves about the permanence of their living conditions. Symmetrically, Germanic elites were looking for a legitimisation of their political power and social ascendancy that, in the eyes of their subjects, regardless of ethnicity, only the Roman Empire could give them. This desire for legitimacy, which the barbarian kings sought from the Byzantine emperor, the only surviving Roman emperor after the fall of the Western Empire, explains the appearance of a Germanic society with a dual identity, as shown by the tomb[41] of Childeric I, king of the Salian Franks and the father of Clovis. The rich grave goods, indicative of a chieftain's tomb, combine typically barbarian objects with Roman ones, although differentiating the two is often difficult given that Roman workshops produced artefacts (belt buckles, Spangenhelm, etc.) culturally adapted to the federated barbarian officers for whom they were intended, as has been shown in recent studies that reject traditional culturalistic interpretations. The collection includes a scramasax (a typically Germanic, short sword) with garnet cloisonné work; a gold cruciform fibula, traditionally worn by Roman officers; and a gold signet ring decorated with a bust featuring a luxuriant head of hair, typical of the Germanic aristocracy. The ring bears the Latin inscription "*Childirici Regis*" (of

[41] Discovered in Tournai, Belgium, in 1653, unfortunately dispersed and partially lost since then.

Childeric the king), recalling the status of the barbarian king federated to the Empire of his possessor.[42] There was therefore a "discursive coalition" of the Germanic and Roman elements in that mixed society to present the "barbarian" kingdoms as pure and simple continuers of the Roman Empire and thus of the ancient world. At least one specific case, that of Sidonius Apollinaris, has the merit of letting us hear both sides of a contemporary voice that alternated depending on his correspondents and personal political stakes. Displaying his public face, the Gallo-Roman aristocrat, steeped in classical culture and senatorial values, chosen to be bishop and protector by the community of the faithful in Clermont-Ferrand, was forced to hide his opinions and sentiments to keep up appearances for Euric, king of the Visigoths and the new master of Gaul. In private, under the seal of secrecy between trustworthy correspondents, he took no pains to conceal his reaction to the spectacle of irreversible transformations, of which he was perfectly aware, expressing his fears, disgust, and dismay. These secret writings brim with the despair of a Roman traditionalist facing the reality that nothing is how it once was.

Using a phrase become famous, "the noiseless fall of an empire in 476 AD", Arnaldo Momigliano drew attention to a surprising and paradoxical fact: the little resonance, among contemporaries, of a historical event with such significant consequences.[43] At the same time, he urged the academic community not to attach excessive value, in terms of clairvoyance, to that lack of reaction and to fight against using that silence to support the thesis of a historical continuity between the Roman Empire and the Germanic kingdoms, its successors. The target of his comments was the reasoning that said: if contemporaries did not take seriously what we are trying to present nowadays as events that changed the face of the world, it is precisely because nothing had really changed. It can be observed that, nearly forty years after Momigliano's warning, there are still many historians ready to make sacrifices at the altar of continuity. Today, it is more than ever good form to minimise the impact of 476. And yet....

Some epochal ruptures were not recognised partially on account of ideological clashes at the time. For example, in a controversy opposing

[42] In a work that is recent but, it is true, by a mediaevalist, the tomb is commented upon as follows: "Such were the men to whom the emperor abandoned the administration of Gaul. They were kings more than magistrates, barbarians not Romans, 'illiterate semi-nomads', said one good historian [Derville 2000]". The same author demarcates an "Early Middle Ages" going, unsurprisingly, from 500 to 900.

[43] "*La caduta senza rumore di un impero nel 476 d.C.*" in Momigliano 1980, 159–165.

Christians and pagans, the latter blamed the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410—the opening act in the "end of Rome"—on the new religion. The Christians replied that God, their saviour, was much more able than the ancestral gods to protect the city, but in the continuity of the biblical narrative, he was using catastrophes as a weapon to call to order his people who were indulging in sin. Like Orosius, the bishops minimised the terrible suffering endured by the city as evidence of divine mercy in punishment (Augustine). Only Jerome dramatised the effects of the sack of the city, but in order to illustrate the cosmic dimension of the sins that were its cause. From a providential perspective, Salvian justified the conquest of Africa, achieved in 439, and the violence of the new masters by unhesitatingly extolling the purity of Vandal mores, which the Lord had intentionally offered as a lesson to the supposedly depraved Africans, to whom Salvian applied the whole repertoire of old racist anti-Punic clichés.

The unwavering feeling of the Empire's superiority that inhabited both its rulers and populations was such that simply the idea of the end of the Empire seemed inconceivable to all. For the Christians (in the *Chronicon* by Eusebius and Jerome), the Roman Empire, brought into existence by divine providence in order to carry out a plan to save humans through their conversion to Christ, could only be the last one in earthly history. Seven years after Alaric's triumph, the Gallic senator Rutilius Claudius Namatianus revived Virgil's prophecy that Rome would live until the end of earthly time.[44] This was why territorial losses and even the gravest setbacks could be perceived by contemporaries as temporary, which once again was the case in the conquest of Syria and Egypt by the Arabs between 636 and 642. As a matter of fact, Byzantium periodically launched expeditions with the aim of restoring the integrity of the imperial territory, and even partially succeeded under the reign of Justinian (but at what a price!). To the mind of contemporaries, the door of the ancient world was therefore not yet closed.

Let us, however, ask the question again: should we attach any importance to contemporaries' views? Let us leave aside the commonplace observation that, in any past era, public opinion, with the exception of rare individuals, has lacked perspective on the main aspects of historical developments that were being written there and then. Is this not, on a collective scale, the manifestation of a patient's psychoanalytical blindness to him- or herself and the fantasised, imaginary construction of his or her identity? Let us say, which will not lead us very far, that the fall of the Western Empire in 476 did not stop the course of history any more than

[44] Namatianus 1935, 768–775 (Book 1, lines 47–140); see Zarini 1999.

any other event of that size. Relying on objective assessments, however, how can we not see that the takeover of political power by coherent groups of Germanic minorities triggered a Germanisation of the very bases of societal life? The civil and military institutions, social categories, and the typology of relationships between the dominating and the dominated all bear the mark of a substantial Germanisation, under the illusory appearance of a purely nominal continuity maintained principally by the permanence of Latin as the language of international cultural communication.

Experience shows that it is always easier to identify elements of continuity than elements of rupture. I have long suspected that the continuity hypothesis is very often a sign of intellectual laziness because it sidesteps the search for differences, which is by definition more intellectually demanding than the pseudo-assessment of resemblances.

To decide on the moment when the overall image of M^1 can no longer be recognised in M^2, the features specific to each period must be compared. The complexity lies in the fact that, as I have said above, all historical realities do not advance at the same pace. In the "puff pastry" temporarily assembled at any moment in history,[45] one must take into consideration the various layers of economic, social, institutional, religious, linguistic, and cultural historical reality under examination. Among them, some change quickly while others evolve slowly. Depending on these different levels of analysis, the chronology of the rupture can therefore vary considerably.

The linguistic layer moves the most slowly. In that layer, shifting ideas continue to be expressed in the previous language, thus concealing transmutations, even radical ones, which have been occurring in the meantime. A striking example of this phenomenon of linguistic resilience is the place long kept by Arabic and Persian in the Turkish Empire. Only in the 1970s were the last commonly used Arabic words replaced with neologisms formed on Turkish roots. Another example is the fiscal language in the Kingdom of Asturias (718-925), where a "separatist" tax system at variance with Visigothic taxation, more or less inherited from the Romans, was first established in the sixth century but is known to us mostly from later texts dating from the ninth and tenth centuries.[46] These texts highlight the use of terminology in Latin, the language of culture and specialisation, and the lasting prestige of Roman legal thought and administrative texts. This tax system is nevertheless an exemplary case of

[45] I am borrowing here the metaphor of *feuilleté* (puff pastry) from Roland Barthes, who applied it to the different levels of a text; and the idea of "assemblage" from archaeologists describing the coexistence, during a given period, of archaeological artefacts whose appearance and disappearance dates are different.

[46] Menéndez-Bueyes and Carriles García 2011.

applying Latin conceptual categorisation and technical terminology to profoundly different realities from those of the Late Roman Empire.

The stability of Latin as a language of learning, cultivation, and international communication created the illusory appearance of substantial continuity. Latin was used as the usual language of communication until the reign of Charlemagne. As concerns spoken language, the demographic asymmetry between the minority of Germanic speakers and the majority of populations from the former Empire using Latin in its Romance forms, increasingly distinct from erudite Latin, also maintains the appearance of continuity, while not understimating the scope of Germanic contributions. A rupture is nevertheless hidden behind this apparent permanence, simply because the same words no longer designated the same realities. The term *mancipium*, for example, which in classical Latin refers to a slave who was the legal property of a free man, generally described, during the Merovingian era, any dependent individual. The way in which the same terms, the same Latin signifiers, took on new signifieds should therefore be studied on a case-by-case basis.

I must emphasise that my choice to identify different dates of rupture for every level of historical reality does not at all weaken my conviction that the phenomena of rupture win out over the phenomena of continuity. Indeed, the phenomena of rupture affected the preponderant parts of the economic, social, and political structures (e.g. the obliteration of cities that, when they rose again, did so in new forms; the replacement of a society dominated by civil elites with a fundamentally military society). While some layers of the "puff pastry" develop over the long term, others do so over the short term. Notable examples of the second scenario include the typology and legal categorisation of social groups, almost instantly Germanized in the barbarian kingdoms (e.g. the militarisation of elites, the transformation of dependency conditions). In this connection, we can find as early as in the fifth century the traces of what, for Tacitus, in *Germania*, distinguished Germanic slavery from Roman and, more generally, Mediterranean slavery. A seriously conducted study of the systems of ancient Mediterranean slavery and Germanic servitude can only show them to be two very distinct models, whose profound differences are too easily blurred by Latin homonymy.

In the legal arena, did not the new sovereigns seek to make officially adopted Roman law complementary to and compatible with fundamentally Germanic principles such as *Vergeld* (compensatory fines in the event of murder), family law, and property law? Furthermore, how can one not see that the Germanic kingdoms were developing a military society that would lastingly dominate the mediaeval world, in contrast to the civil ideals of

the Roman Empire? How can one not see that, supported by their own interpretation of Christianity, they were also promoting individualism, the polar opposite of the strong pressure exerted by the community on ancient people?[47] The new importance granted to the individual person by Christianity, still barely appearing in late Roman legislation, is moreover a characteristic that cuts across every later century and that differentiates Late Antiquity from pagan antiquity.[48] It was transmitted to the Middle Ages to gain even more ground in modern times.

I can never repeat often enough that I disassociate the end of the Roman Empire from the end of antiquity. As regards the first, while recognising that the Germanic states took on, in varying proportions, the heritage of the Empire, I resolutely do not overestimate the importance of that fact and absolutely do not minimise the turning point of 476. I fully share the idea expressed by Peter Heather, whereby

> The new states that emerged were not mini-Roman Empires. Key institutional differences—the absence of professional armies funded by large-scale taxation amongst others—as well as entirely different cultural patterns in areas such as elite literacy—the Classics—mark them out as entirely different kinds of entity from the Empire which preceded them. This was a highly violent process which both marked the culmination of long-term patterns of development in the periphery of the Empire and set European history off on a new course.[49]

Similarly, I add my voice to the consensus expressed by Peter Heather and Bryan Ward-Perkins regarding the extreme brutality of the process driving the Roman Empire to its fall.[50] Like them, between internal and external causes for the collapse of the Western Empire, I would opt for the latter, attributing to them a triggering role that led to the internal weakening of the imperial structure at every level.

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[47] This characteristic was perfectly brought to light in Fustel de Coulanges 1874.
[48] Cracco Ruggini 2002.
[49] Ward-Perkins and Heather 2005.
[50] Ibid., Heather: "In my view, the roots of collapse have to be sought in the outside world, among the barbarians. I should say that I use 'barbarian' here only in the sense of 'outsider'". Ward-Perkins: "I basically agree with Peter here—neither of us have much time for the theory that the Empire was quietly 'transformed', by the peaceful 'accommodation' into it of some Germanic barbarians. We both believe in invasions that were violent and unpleasant, rather than what I have termed the 'tea party at the Roman vicarage' theory of settlement by invitation." Here are targeted, explicitly, the views of Walter Goffart and, implicitly, it seem to me, the most "politically correct" aspects of Walter Pohl's work, even if he is not mentioned by name.

Nevertheless, I repeat, my subject here is not the end of the Roman Empire, but that of the ancient world, which is not reducible to it. The existence of a universal empire such as the Roman Empire does not constitute the ancient world. The latter experienced many other forms during the long centuries of its existence. Ultimately, the break-up of the Empire into several Germanic kingdoms was, in a sense, a return to the situation in the third century BC, when various concentrated states shared the Mediterranean. Naturally, I do not intend to push the comparison any further: let no one have me say what I do not believe. What I mean, is that the momentary survival of the ancient world beyond the fall of the Western Empire is not intrinsically inconceivable. If further proof were needed, reconquest of the West remained a constant item on the agenda of the emperors of Byzantium. It was finally executed by Justinian, but incompletely, in terms of territory, and at a disproportionate cost, which was undoubtedly fatal to the Eastern Roman Empire and decisive in the transition from its ancient form to its mediaeval form.

In this context, what non-subjective method, based on a sufficiently encompassing criterion, can we put forward to determine the chronology for the transformation of the societal model? We could consider specificities that are political or sociological,[51] religious or cultural.[52] In the wake of Peter Brown's work, the religious factor played a decisive role in the chronological enlargement of Late Antiquity,[53] sparking a polemical response from Andrea Giardina.[54] Another religious criterion, namely the arrival of Islam, led some historians to prolong antiquity until around 750.

Personally, I would like to focus on another consideration with a broader geographical scope. It is today accepted by the whole community of historians who study the Roman Empire that the latter achieved one of the first proto-globalisations in history. The starting point is the concept of "world-economy", which its inventor, Fernand Braudel, defined as "an economically autonomous section of the planet able to provide for most of its own needs, a section to which its internal links and exchanges give a certain organic unity".[55] A world-economy is thus a part of the universe, forming an economic whole and spanning political and linguistic borders. It includes different political and cultural spaces, which it encompasses. Despite this constituent heterogeneity, it has its own system that sets it apart from the outside. Its degree of coherence largely depends on a

[51] Marazzi 2000.
[52] Carrié 2001.
[53] Brown 1971.
[54] Giardina 1999. See also Cameron 2002; Cracco Ruggini 2004.
[55] Braudel 1982, 22. Translator's note: the French term is "*économie-monde*".

circulation network of people, goods, and information.[56] I use the term "world-economy" and not "world system", which in the work of Wallerstein designates, in the strictest sense, a world-economy developed on the scale of the entire Earth, a planetary "world capitalist system"; and certainly not the term "globalisation", or its French equivalent "*mondialisation*", which, applied exclusively to the contemporary world economy and financial system, designates the existence of a unified and integrated market made possible through the very recent advent of technological means of interconnection that have increased interaction and interdependence throughout the world.

That the Roman Empire was the seat of a "world-economy" is so obviously true that the remaining hesitations, reluctance, and even refusals today are surprising.[57] I can only subscribe to the view of Greg Woolf, who deems it "necessary to examine the exchange systems of the Roman Mediterranean, first of all, in terms of its incorporation in a world-empire".[58] An additional step, however, needs to be taken. With apologies to the post-Finleyans, it is legitimate, when referring to the ancient economy at the apex of its development, to speak, if not of a "market economy", at least of an "economy with markets".[59] To be able to speak of a market economy, it is not necessary for the unifying function of the market to operate on a global level. It is enough for partial markets to be interconnected through more or less close integration into a network of markets, and that was indeed the case. Moreover, the concept of "market", although it did not receive the least theoretical treatment in antiquity, existed empirically in the form of "market prices": *pretia in foro rerum venalium*. That the market, without ever having been the subject of theoretical analysis, existed; that economic agents had knowledge and awareness of its existence; and that they speculated on regional and interregional differences in price and demand: these facts are supported by evidence in papyri, the only sources to have preserved business letters for us. The level of information developed throughout the imperial territory in terms of prices, supply and demand is widely attested, constituting the

[56] Braudel never separated what is economic from what is social, cultural, or political. He criticised any vision isolating the economy from these other aspects, arguing that choosing solely an economic perspective amounted to favouring in advance a unilateral and dangerous form of explanation.

[57] Nonetheless, this idea seems to become widespread at a disconcerting pace, not without reintroducing some modernising anachronisms.

[58] Woolf 1990, 53.

[59] Roman and Dalaison 2008, in particular, the contributions by Maurice Picon (191–214) and Jean-Paul Morel (161–189).

basis of a profit-maximising rationale.[60] When public requisitions were refunded, the official reference to *forum rerum venalium* as the arbitrator of exchange, endowed with a natural legitimacy, contrasts radically with the mediaeval and modern ideology of the *iustum pretium*, which was developed in line with Christian moral condemnation of loans at interest and commercial profit. In this respect, the Roman economy was much less restrained than its historical successors. It took centuries to achieve that level of quantitative and qualitative internationalisation once again.

The existence of interconnected regional markets, the role of currency as an integrating force in the market, and technological innovations[61] help us to understand better the incontestable economic development of the imperial Roman world. Our documentary sources oblige us to reassess the quantitative levels reached by production and trade at the end of antiquity. At the end of the republican period, for example, a comparison of production sites and points of sale for earthenware reveals unsuspected strategies to conquer markets, to adapt styles to consumers' tastes, to relocate production, and to set up networks.[62] Similarly, in the textile sector we can see that there was interplay among technical innovations, diversification of increasingly complex products, consumers' immediate attraction to new products, and organisational models for production.[63] The political unification and the cultural uniformisation achieved by the Empire allowed an expanded market to emerge whose requirements could only be satisfied through the professionalisation and concentration of production. A reinterpretation of *P.Oxy.Hels*. 40 (second half of the third century) has prompted us to raise estimations of production volumes, making them comparable to those in mediaeval Europe.[64] Similarly, long-distance trade volumes are currently being re-evaluated.

This construction of a world-economy was achieved through phases, beginning with the conquest of Alexander and the establishment of Hellenistic monarchies on top of the structure of the Greek city-state, whose politico-administrative experience was so decisive for Rome

[60] Examples include the speculative approach to agriculture (Heroninos Archive), wholesale and retail purchasing prices (*P.Oxy.* XXXIV, 2729), and the value of gold coins in a period of nominal inflation (*P.Oxy.* XLVIII, 3401). For an analysis of these texts, see Carrié 2003.

[61] The credit for many technical inventions attributed to the Middle Ages has in recent years been restored to antiquity, especially its later centuries. Cf. Greene 1994.

[62] Morel 2008.

[63] Carrié 2004.

[64] Van Minnen 1986; and my own study, Carrié 2004, mentioned above.

starting in the second century BC. The unification process therefore began well before the creation of the Roman Empire, as a way of organising the *imperium* as the territorial domination of the city-state called Rome; it pre-existed the political system of power organisation that we are in the habit of calling "the Roman Empire".

If we consider that it was in this "world-economy" that lay the fundamental originality of "the Roman Empire"—the final form of the ancient world—then the historical moment when the world-empire disintegrated and disappeared should logically mark the boundary between antiquity and what followed. Chronologically, the answer cannot be the one offered by those who uphold the 476 timeline, nor by those supporting "late late Antiquity".[65] Many advances have been made recently through archaeological data, which provide multiple indications that we should situate between these two eras the breaking-up of the long-distance trade network, the end of the division of work among provinces and among cities, and the shrinking of markets to a micro-local scale. Such major transformations did not coincide with the political death of the Western Empire, nor with the plague under the reign of Justinian, however serious were its effects. The rupture seems to me, rather, to be linked to the Eastern Roman Empire's loss of Syria and Egypt, two provinces that were vital for international trade, in the space of six years (636-642). More than a decrease in commercial exchanges between the East and the West, a fact that Henri Pirenne gave excessive and rightly criticized importance,[66] this territorial reduction resulted in rapidly visible consequences, namely the depopulation of cities, a resulting drop in artisanal production, a wane in interprovincial trade, the withdrawal of the Byzantine Empire into Balkan Europe and Asia Minor, its military weakening, and the concentration of economic production in the hypertrophied capital. These changes affected not only eastern areas, but also the West, where they indirectly reduced economic life to a local level. Unlike in the sixth century, which had justified its hopes of re-establishing the Empire in the West (but at a cost beyond Byzantine capabilities), this time the Mediterranean world definitively turned the page on antiquity. As early as at the end of the seventh century, Byzantium joined the West in abandoning the fundamental principles of the imperial structure. Its society militarised; its cities emptied; its economy became more rural.

Over the last fifteen years, there has been much new research looking at history from very diverse angles and conducted in total independence,

[65] Cameron 2002; Marcone 2008; Liebeschuetz, 2015.
[66] Pirenne 1937; Hodges and Whitehouse 1983. See also Barnish 1989.

but concurring that the passage of the ancient world into a definitively new world took place in the seventh century. Since I cannot go through all of these studies here, I shall mention six significant examples selected from different thematic and geographical areas.

First of all, in the lower Rhône valley, "the end of the depopulation cycle initiated by the Roman conquest occurred much later that was long thought. Indeed, only in the seventh century can one begin to distinguish a threshold marked by an increasing scarcity of vestiges and dwellings and, consequently, by an appreciable decline in farming."[67]

Turning to Calabria (ancient Bruttium), which had overcome a first crisis in its productive structure in the second century AD, we can observe that "the supposed Byzantine redevelopment of the countryside beginning in the second half of the sixth century [...] must have resulted in truly radical changes to settlement and economic patterns because there appears to be not the slightest archaeological trace of later reoccupation of Late Roman sites."[68] "Almost all of them were abandoned at the end of the sixth century or, at the latest, in the first half of the seventh century, and there is no continuity [...] with sites from the period immediately after."[69] The same author situates the separation between the relative prosperity of Late Antiquity and the irremediable crisis of the Early Middle Ages at the time of the Greco-Gothic war.[70]

In the seventh century, both the urban and rural landscapes in the West definitively bore the signs of the "second cultural revolution"[71] that, during the two previous centuries, gradually altered the features that had characterized them since the "first cultural revolution" in the first century, as described by Gregg Woolf.[72] At that point, we can observe the definitive abandonment of classical aesthetic conventions and the elite's

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[67] Raynaud 1996, 210.

[68] Sangineto 2001, 239–240: "l'ipotizzata ristrutturazione bizantina delle campagne a partire dalla seconda metà del VI, [...] deve aver comportato un cambiamento davvero radicale di modello insediativo ed economico, perché di una rioccupazione più tarda nei siti romani tardoantichi non sembra esservi traccia archeologica." It should be noted that this observation contradicts a whole series of pro-continuity positions defended in the 1990s.

[69] Ibid., 242: "Quasi tutti questi ultimi vengono abbandonati alla fine del VI, al più tardi nella prima metà del VII, e non vi è alcuna continuità, [...] con i siti di epoca immediatamente successiva."

[70] Ibid., 234: "Il discrimine fra la tardoantichità relativamente florida e quella che riteniamo essere la crisi irreversibile dell'altomedioevo è da porre nei decenni della guerra greco-gotica."

[71] Lewitt 2003.

[72] Woolf 1997.

outlook on life, which had been universalised through the political unification of the Roman world, and which declined and then disappeared when it was dismembered. The consequences were initially delayed by the attraction that these cultural models exercised on the Germanic elites and by the adoption of Roman frameworks for political and administrative organisation by the sovereigns of "barbarian" kingdoms.

Peter Brown has situated two decisive cultural and religious ruptures in the seventh century also. In the West, "the milieux that had supported the classical tradition throughout the sixth century disappeared rapidly in the seventh". In the East, where the pagan philosophical tradition still dominated intellectual life under the reign of Justinian, his autocratic and centralising policies led to "the collapse of an independent, classical elite [...]: in the late sixth century the culture of the governing class of the Empire finally became indistinguishable from the Christian culture of the average man". At the same time, in "the new style of Christian culture, that had been prepared in the later sixth century [...] a man was defined by his religion alone. He did not owe allegiance to a state; he belonged to a religious community. [...] This was the final victory of the idea of the religious community over the classical idea of the city."[73]

The same chronology can be found in the simultaneous transformation of politico-administrative structures in the East and the West. Pierfrancesco Porena notes that

> between the late sixth century and the early seventh century, while the praetorian prefectures in the West were succumbing to the blows of the Lombards and the Arabs, through an inverse process to the one carried out by Constantine around three centuries earlier, and in a different historical context, exarchs were introduced by Maurice and themes established by Heraclius in areas of the Eastern Roman Empire. [...] With this "rebalancing" of both [civil and military] powers in the person of a sole official, the historical chapter of the praetorian prefecture of Late Antiquity closed, and the mediaeval period of the history of the Byzantine Empire began.[74]

[73] Brown 1971, 176, 180, 186–187.

[74] Porena 2003, 562: "tra la fine del VI e l'inizio del VII, mentre in Occidente le prefetture del pretorio si spegnevano sotto i colpi dei Longobardi e degli Arabi, nei dominii dell'impero d'Oriente, con un processo opposto, a quello realizzato circa trecento anni prima da Costantino, e in un contesto storico diverso, furono introdotti gli esarcati (da Maurizio) e i temi (da Eraclio). [...] Con questa 'ricomposizione' di entrambi i poteri [civili e militari] in un unico funzionario si chiuse la parabola storica della prefettura del pretorio tardoantico e iniziò il periodo medievale della storia dell'Impero bizantino."

John Haldon, looking at the eastern part of the Empire from different angles, in particular through the transformation of the Byzantine military apparatus as regards its logistical and financial support, thus concluded: "there is no doubt that the seventh century marks a major break with the Roman system".[75] This conclusion is all the more interesting because he shortened the period that had gone from 580 to 900, which he had originally linked to "a substantial modification of the structure of the Byzantine state in every respect".[76]

In a similar way—but I shall not be able to develop this last example further here—the seventh century marked a rupture in monetary circulation in the East.[77]

The rupture that I am proposing to situate in the second half of the seventh century holds for the whole Mediterranean world, both eastern and western. In contrast, Byzantinist historiography, under the pretext that Constantinople was founded between 324 and 330, has traditionally tended—and sometimes still tends today—to attribute to Byzantium the invention of institutions that were actually part of Roman realties, in order to prolong the existence of an apparently perfect continuity.[78] Such a situation has arisen from the way in which the field of Byzantine studies was academically cut into a single block, removed from either side in a supposedly homogenous periodisation going from 330 to 1453.[79] The fact that, in universities, Byzantine studies are part of mediaeval history departments even though they act like self-reliant subdivisions, has inevitably led Byzantinists, like other mediaevalists, to situate the rupture between the ancient world and the mediaeval world in the fourth century. I am in agreement with those who, like John Haldon, challenge this traditional division; fortunately, he is not the only Byzantinist to do so.

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[75] Haldon (1990) 1997, 449. More generally, 436–458 (Chap. 12, "Conclusion: The Transformation of a Culture").
[76] Haldon 1999, 90; Haldon 1984.
[77] Morrisson 2001; Metcalf 2001.
[78] This is still the case, for example, with Patlagean 2007, who affirms that there was continuity of a supposed "Constantinian model" until 1453 (375). She concedes, at most, an end to the ancient world, which she situates at times "in the ninth century, which imposed itself as a point of departure, as for the Carolingian West" (374), at times "in the tenth century of the *Basilides* [Macedonian dynasty]" (217), on the sole criterion of relations between public authorities and the "powerful". She disregards all the rest, relativising the Germanic impact on the West and thus ignoring the distinction between "Early" and "High" Middle Ages, perhaps with the aim—undeclared but not implausible—of falling in line with the chronology long put forward by Peter Brown to delimit Late Antiquity.
[79] Regarding this historiographical black mark, see Ando 2008, 33–34.

Indeed, a work such as *The Economic History of Byzantium*,[80] if only in its structure, distinguishes Late Antiquity chapters from chapters that are, more strictly speaking, mediaeval. Now that the expressions "Proto-Byzantine", "Middle Byzantine", and "Late Byzantine" have gained currency by unpacking the Byzantium monolith on the model of "Early Middle Ages", "High Middle Ages", and "Late Middle Ages", one more step has been taken with the first volume of *Le Monde byzantin.* Edited by Cécile Morrisson and published in the Nouvelle Clio collection, it is entitled *L'Empire romain d'Orient 330-641*[81] and completes the series of volumes dedicated to antiquity.[82]

Let it not be said, however, that in the end this chronology matches the one put forward by Henri Pirenne. I justify it for largely different reasons. I find myself in full agreement with Jérôme Belmond, who closed a very critical book review on the occasion of the reedition of *Mahomet et Charlemagne* with the observation that, "while the many debates and critiques sparked by this book, and advances in historical scholarship over the last fifty years, have swept away numerous postulates defended by the author, it is no less true that the current debate about the end of Late Antiquity proves Pirenne quite right",[83] in particular as regards chronology. In the view that I am defending, the establishment of the Carolingian Empire is to be seen not as the rupture that pushed antiquity

[80] Laiou 2002.

[81] Morrisson (2004) 2012. In the foreword, she writes: "This first volume in a series of three covering the history of the Eastern Empire until its fall in 1453 is dedicated to the foundational period stretching from the inauguration of the capital of Constantine on the site of the former Byzantium in 330 to the beginnings of the Arab conquest in the mid-seventh century, which determined the reduced territorial boundaries of the Middle Byzantine Empire. It stops symbolically at the end of the reign of Heraclius in 641 but does not attribute to him, as used to be done, systematic reforms of the administration and the army. In fact, any division of time and space is more or less arbitrary and debatable, and the adjective Byzantine—which has been used out of convenience since the seventeenth century to designate the Eastern Empire in reference to the former name of Constantinople—has been associated with very diverse chronological proposals" (VI).

[82] It should be noted that, according to the periodisation adopted in Bintliff and Hamerow 1995, the "Early Byzantine era" is situated in the "seventh–eighth centuries A.D." and "Middle Byzantine times" during the "final centuries of the first millennium". This timeline implicitly puts the end of antiquity at the turn of the seventh century, a date that, in the view of these authors, works for both the West and the East. Papyrologists, however, continue to describe Egyptian documents of the sixth century as "Byzantine".

[83] Belmond 1994, 300.

into the Middle Ages, but as itself a consequence of a rupture that had already occurred. Pirenne's contestable and contested arguments are not reasons in and of themselves to disqualify his chronology for the end of antiquity, once we can establish it with the support of a different argumentation. As for the Arab conquests in the seventh century, they progressed at the expense of an already deconstructed world.

At this point we should consider what undoubtedly constituted the key factor, albeit the most largely disregarded one, of the end of the ancient world. I wish to talk about the major climatic phenomenon, today incontestably established, which during the fifth and sixth centuries affected the whole area previously covered by the Roman Empire. An accentuated wet phase led to a drop in temperatures, which explains the agrarian transformations previously brought to light by rural archaeology. Essentially, the surface area for growing grains for urban alimentation shrank, pastureland and forests were extended, the selection of animal species was abandoned, and artisanal products imported into the countryside became increasingly scarce. In comparison with other historical periods of cooling (e.g. the Little Ice Age), it is not difficult to imagine the effects of such a climatic transformation: increasingly frequent periods of scarcity, a decrease in the number of city-dwellers dependent on the sale of agricultural surpluses, and agrarian society's loss of interest in the urban market.[84] These effects were added to health calamities such as the plague, which alone would not have shaken the demographic, economic, and societal foundations of the ancient world but which, magnified by malnutrition and climatic rigours, aggravated, in return, the destructive effects of the climatic phenomenon. Does not the economic weakening of the Roman countryside in turn explain the political and military collapse of the Empire when confronted with the barbarians, themselves affected by the same agricultural restrictions as the Empire, on whose territory they believed that they could find the solution?

It might be objected that the chronology of this climatic phase—essentially the fifth and sixth centuries—is at odds with the date that I put forward for the end of the ancient world. Would not the signs of decline, withdrawal, crisis, and economic and demographic regression that were growing considerably during the fifth and sixth centuries better suggest, instead, that period as the time when the Empire—at least in its Western part—entered the Middle Ages? I shall give an answer that cannot, I believe, be deemed sophistic. Facing a major climatic and ecological crisis, a secular social structure attempted to overcome it by using lessons

[84] Cheyette 2008.

drawn from its experience and tradition, which amounted to prolonging the existing structure in a minor register. For example, the drop in the density of human settlements in Western Europe and, more particularly, in Gaul beginning in the fourth century accelerated in the fifth and sixth centuries before new patterns of occupying the territory appeared, which were related to a new sociopolitical model. Such a process of dwindling away can last a long time, until the moment when a new world is built on foundations foreign to the previously consolidated tradition. It is at that historical moment, only, that we can speak of a new age: when the rupture has entirely occurred, even if some swaths of reality have already undergone an earlier, foreshadowing transformation. In line with a multitude of recent sector-specific research, I am thus proposing to situate that moment in the seventh century.

Putting an end to lamentations over lost antiquity

The notion of civilisation has long conveyed a value judgement, and it has taken historians time to free themselves of a simplistic historiographical myth inherited from the Renaissance, according to which the "barbarians" killed our great classical civilisation. It should be recalled that, as it was impossible to destroy all of the mediaeval religious buildings labelled "Gothic" in reference to the barbarity of the Goths,[85] the seventeenth century in particular gave rise to countless Baroque and classicising decorative veneers on ancient churches and cathedrals. It was precisely during the "Enlightenment" that the concept of civilisation was developed, soon to be linked to that of "progress". One has rightly spoken of the "religion of progress", especially in relation to the nineteenth century, but it does not appear to me that our twenty-first century, despite the environmental movement, has been freed from this new "opium of the people".

A strictly historical appreciation of the significance of the fall requires that we finish once and for all with the ideological valorisation of two "civilisations". The concepts of "Romanness" and "Germanicness" are hardly more than the cultural appendices of geopolitical antagonisms between European nations over the last five centuries (sixteenth to twentieth centuries). As though, in 2015, it could be a topical concern for us to disprove "legends of the Italian Renaissance about the destruction of the Empire by the Goths" (Karl Ferdinand Werner, who did not feel any

[85] This is the word used by Montesquieu, who contributed more than a little to its success in in art history.

less obliged to do so)! The transition from the ancient world to the mediaeval world is not to be understood as resulting in "better" or "worse". At the risk of shocking many, let us acknowledge that no argument supports the superiority or inferiority of one civilisation in comparison with another. How, though, can we not wonder why Europe in the twelfth century presented such a different aspect from the Roman west of the fifth century and from contemporary Byzantine Empire, which had, however, also developed over seven centuries, but in keeping the general framework of Roman heritage? Without denying the importance of the ancient legacy in modern European civilisation—which has nevertheless probably been overestimated, successively, by some currents of humanistic, illuminationist, revolutionary, and, lastly, nationalistic ideologies—several surprises cannot be ignored. How, for example, did the forms of economic rationality that set Europe apart from the rest of the world not appear as early as antiquity, as some historians have wondered (most recently, Aldo Schiavone[86])? Was it not because the Roman Empire, after bringing the pre-capitalistic potentialities of ancient civilisation to their final stages of fruition, had reached its insurmountable limits, the stumbling points representing hurdles to a later qualitative leap (the word "qualitative" being used here in a strictly descriptive sense, with absolutely no value judgement)? In other words—without, however, crediting the barbarians with bringing forward a consciously organised alternative model—were they not the blind and partially accidental initiators of a new course of history, discernible not at its point of departure, but at its point of arrival? Were they not, quite unknowingly—or even, contrary to their own aspirations—the instruments of a long-term historical rupture that was indispensable to stopping history from going round and round in circles and treading water? A comparison with the field of art may shed some light on this economic reasoning. The barbarians did not interrupt a golden age that took ten centuries to return. The European Renaissance was not the restoration of antiquity, and currents of it that were limited to such aims were the least creative (to take just one example, the theoreticians of literary Aristotelianism applied to theatre). Left to its own potentialities and perpetuating its own obstacles, the ancient world would not have produced Cinquecento painting any more than the British East India Company or the Bank of Amsterdam. Of course, such historical innovations were certainly not more within reach of the barbarians in the fifth century, but would the conditions for their emergence have been

[86] Schiavone 2000. Cf. the criticism expressed by Aymard, Giardina, and Romano 1998.

created if those same barbarians had not put an end to the ancient world? Such questions are not meant to be irreverent. Let us appreciate the full extent of the paradox: by twice—between 400 and 410, and then in the 470s—pushing back the barbarian threat towards the West, surely the Eastern Roman Empire contributed in the long run to the slow, centuries-long genesis of the same Europe that, eight centuries later, would set the stage for the final fall of the Roman Empire through the capture of Constantinople?

Yet, even without delaying until so late the moment when the performance levels achieved by Late Antiquity were surpassed, recent research has highlighted advances outside the Mediterranean world and the results, not necessarily negative, of abandoning the features of ancient civilisation. For example, in the area of agricultural practices between the end of antiquity and the eighth and ninth centuries, "there was not just catching-up. There was development. Or, more precisely, the catching-up occurred through methods that would be the basis for future developments" (e.g. the scythe; new accessories for the plough including the mouldboard, coulter, and headstock; hay barns; enclosed hayfields; and the combination of oats and winter grain, the beginnings of the three-field system).[87] "We increasingly see today, in particular thanks to archaeologists, that there were continuities, at least in the area of technical development. Of course, some elements of Roman civilisation disappeared or considerably waned, and such losses are too visible to be contested. But it was perhaps because the economic foundations were too fragile."[88] In several fields, "non-Mediterranean countries demonstrated an original dynamism" in ploughing, harvesting tools, barrel-making, and wheelwrighting.[89]

This is what scientific history can tell us, as much as it can be scientific. Yet even today, is this what the "common reader" wants to be told about Late Antiquity? Did not the Decadent art movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, by depicting its figures somewhere between dazed, languid hedonism and apprehensive, powerless solemnity, symbolically and intuitively ascribe to the men and women of late Antiquity the feeling that their world had reached its limits? The suicidal temptation of a society sated with itself remains a leitmotif in the often morbid, unceasing fascination for the fall of Rome. Suicide or murder: neither of these two paths leads very far, if truth be told. Despite the efforts of historical research to move beyond the discourse of appearances,

[87] Sigaut 2004, 30.
[88] Ibid., 31.
[89] Ibid., 12. Cf., for example, the "Gallic" inventions mentioned by Pliny the Elder as curiosities rather than models to be followed.

despite its warnings against any anachronistic identification with past societies, the collapse of Rome remains an eternal wellspring of collective fantasies to which civilisations struck by uncertainty about their future constantly return.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE BIRTH OF A NEW SHORT LATE ANTIQUITY

HERVÉ INGLEBERT*

In her presentation of the specialized theme *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate* of the 22nd *CIHS* (*ICHS*), Rita Lizzi Testa reminded us that today the two big problems of late–antique studies are the chronological and the spatial definition of the period, which has produced since 1971 much debate and many publications. Consequently, for this workshop, she defined a way of understanding these problems, asking "to what extent can this historiographic reflection bring us a better understanding of Late Antiquity?" After reading the papers and the collective discussion, we can now produce some methodological, chronological and epistemological conclusions.

1. From a methodological point of view, we can distinguish four ways that will help us in our thinking about Late Antiquity.

The first would be a thought about the concepts used by historians to describe the period: how do some words inform our narratives? Clifford Ando, in *Empire and Aftermath*, talked about the concept of decline and its uses during the eighteenth century, before Gibbon. During the twentieth century, until 1970, decline was mostly linked with the end of the Roman Empire in the West (but with some problems after 1960 because of growing awareness of the prosperity of the Roman East during the fourth and fifth centuries).[1] And from 1971 to 1999, the idea of decline became academically incorrect (except for Ramsay MacMullen).[2] But the beginning of Roman decline could also be considered in relation to Roman

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[1] For example in Jones 1964.

[2] MacMullen 1988.

Republican imperialism (Sallust or John Pocock),[3] with Julius Caesar or Augustus (Montesquieu, but also Aldo Schiavone)[4] or with the end of the Antonine Age (Gibbon and many other historians after him).[5] Of course, the tradition of decline during the fifth century was also an old one (since Flavio Biondo), and is still prestigious (with Peter Heather,[6] Chris Wickham[7] and Bryan Ward–Perkins[8]), but it was not the only one, and we should not forget this point today.

Perhaps another conception of these imperial centuries in Late Antiquity is possible. Pablo Diaz, in *Crisis, Transition, Transformation. The End of the Roman World and the Usefulness of Useless Categories*, explained that if the term "transformation" may be better than "transition", "crisis", "decadence" or "fall" to understand these centuries, it is not neutral, because it occults the idea of discontinuity, which exists in some fields; and the other terms could also be useful in some cases. Thus, the words used by historians are always closer to being present representations than true descriptions of the past.

The second way is thought about the status of evidence: how does the use of iconography, law compilations, and pagan literary or Christian theological texts create some peculiar perspectives and periodizations? Jutta Dresken-Weiland, in *Transformation and Transition in the Art of Late Antiquity*, studied the birth of private Christian iconography from its beginnings at the end of the second century to its disappearance at the end of the fifth century. And Ignazio Tantillo, in *Defining Late Antiquity through Epigraphy?*, analysed Late–Antique epigraphy from 250 to 600. These two case–studies showed how this kind of medium is important to appreciate and understand the past and its periodization. As private Christian pictures (circa 500) or public epigraphy (after 600) vanished, the existence of this kind of evidence created its own chronology. But this non–literary evidence can also contribute to asking new questions, very different from the classical ones, which were grounded on literary texts. And they provided arguments in favour of those who think that Late Antiquity is mostly a creative period, because these peculiar forms of social communication did not exist before 150 (for Christian pictures) or 250 (for late–antique inscriptions). It would, of course, be very interesting

[3] Pocock 2003.
[4] Schiavone 2002.
[5] Potter 2004.
[6] Heather 2005.
[7] Wickham 2009.
[8] Ward–Perkins 2005.

to study other such chronologies of evidence.

The third way is thought about new hermeneutic patterns: how can they bring new focuses on old debates and periodizations? With a new concept, Philippe Blaudeau, in *What is geo–ecclesiology?: Defining Elements Applied to the Late–Antiquity Period (Fourth–Sixth Century)*, wanted to think about the doctrinal debates and the ways of ecclesiastical development together. During Late Antiquity, defined by him as the period of the great theological conflicts, with their political, social and wealth aspects, the games of power inside the Church linked exegetical and ecclesiological ideas and new kinds of communication.

The last way is thought about historical singularities: how can we integrate them into the definition of a period? Gilles Bransbourg, in Reddite quae sunt Caesaris, Caesari. *The Late Roman Empire and the dream of fair taxation*, studied fiscal rhetoric and practice over centuries, mainly from Diocletian to Maurice, with a late Justinianic peak of taxation, and insisted on the greater wealth of Western aristocracy. Noel Lenski, in *Peasant and Slave in Late Antique North Africa, c. 200–600 CE*, analysed the erratic transformations of the juridical status of the rural workers in Africa from the second to the sixth century, between free peasants, *coloni*, *coloni* linked to the earth, and slaves. Finally, Jean–Michel Carrié, in *The Historical Path of "Late Antiquity": From Transformation to Rupture*, recalled the political, social and economic peculiarities of Late Antiquity, showing the gap between ancient discourses and ancient realities in this new Roman world, where fewer *potentes* were more powerful and richer than before, at least in the West.

So, these papers are very important from a methodological point of view, because they show us how modern representations, types of evidence, patterns of interpretation and knowledge of the *realia* all combined to build up our understanding of the past. And historians should always remember these four points and combine all these dimensions to understand the past.

2. If we want now to think about periodization, it is very interesting to note that all the papers were describing a short Late Antiquity. Of course, this could be so because of the data (there is little evidence about private Christian iconography after 500, about slaves in Africa after 600, there are few public inscriptions after 600, and less evidence about the tax–system in Egypt after 600), or because of the themes (large–scale economy and

ecclesiastical history in relation to the Empire). Nobody talked about religious or cultural trends, or about some archaeological items that are invoked more by Long–Late–Antiquity supporters. But this unexpected convergence is interesting, because if each theme and each kind of evidence implies its own set of problems and periodization, we need then to integrate them in an overarching narrative. And for the last 10 years, these overarching narratives have focused more on a short Late Antiquity.

- In 1999, Andrea Giardina[10] called for a description that would include different diachronic evolutions in one systemic synchronicity. But he never developed this idea of a morphological solution, which, I suppose, could be structured by the Marxist dialectic between a social–economical infrastructure and a cultural–religious superstructure.[11] The most important novelty is that today the Imperial State, with its pyramidal administration from the Palatine offices to the provincial level, appears to us as having a structural (and not a superstructural) function in the antique Mediterranean world. So its disappearance was surely more important than the evolution of slavery (because slaves were not the most numerous workers) or the Christianization of the Empire,[12] because of the social and economic consequences of the decline and fall of the Roman State in the West. Chris Wickham, who studied the evolution of taxation in relation to aristocratic wealth, and Bryan Ward–Perkins, who linked the decline of antique prosperity to foreign invasions, which destroyed the imperial fiscal and commercial systems, first in the West during the fifth century, and then in the East during the first half of the seventh century, are Giardina's direct heirs, with different themes and periodizations. But this kind of narrative, where the impact of the destruction of the Roman State is so central in the West and in the East, is focalized on the 400–650 period. Maybe we can begin one century before with the new historical deal of the creation of the new Roman Empire with Diocletian, but that is not absolutely necessary.
- In 2005, Peter Heather wrote that, after 226, the new Sassanian power forced the Roman Empire to increase its army in the East, and that the Roman defence became too weak in Europe against the

[10] Giardina 1999.
[11] For an approach of this kind, see Wickham 2007, with a contribution by Giardina 2007. See also Giardina 2011.
[12] As was suggested by Thebert 1988, and MacMullen 1986.

Germanic or Hunnic tribes. So, for him, Late Antiquity would be defined by Roman–Sassanian relations from 226 to 630, and its dynamic would be understood by geo–strategy.

– Jean–Michel Carrié, too, may have been thinking of a similar structural idea to Giardina's when he talked about "the different layers of the historical 'puff pastry'", but with a more Braudelian touch, where a global economic model could explain the chronological borders of Late Antiquity. He argued for a Late Antiquity from Diocletian to Heraclius, ending with the vanishing of the Roman *économie–monde*, linked with the Muslim invasion. One may also think that the process began twenty years earlier, with the Sassanian war.

All these recent narratives link political, economic and sociological dimensions. They suppose a short Late Antiquity, from the third or fourth to the seventh century, which is not very different, except for Heather, from the former chronology of late-Roman discourse, from Diocletian to Heraclius. All the Jinan papers chose that option. This was not obvious, and it is very important. Maybe the Jinan congress will be a turning point for a new era of the historiography of Late Antiquity, after, and against, the Long Late Antiquity that became hegemonic after the publication, in 1971 of *The World of Late Antiquity* by Peter Brown.

We have to understand that what could be called the New Short Late Antiquity (NSLA) is not just a come–back from the late–Roman perspective, for three reasons. First, the late–Roman discourse was linked to some kinds of evidence, which were mostly classical, juridical or epigraphic texts.[13] But forty years of scholarship has made a difference. The NSLA is grounded not only on rhetorical, political, administrative or religious texts, but on new, archaeological and papyrological, evidence. Secondly, if our predecessors were slow to accept, after 1940, the idea that the Roman state did not decline before 400, we ourselves were also slow to understand that the Roman state was more than a parasitic superstructure that could disappear without great consequences for the cities and provinces. Ironically, the new importance of the socio–economic history of Late Antiquity is not very Marxist, because of the infrastructural role attributed to the Empire as Empire (but it could be more Marxist if we consider that since Constantine there had been a strong social link between the great officials of the Roman state and the overarching aristocracy). Roman power and Roman peace had an automatic positive effect on

[13] Stephen Mitchell 2007 still works on this principle.

demography, wealth, taxation and maritime trade (the last of which declined after 400, but partly survived in the Western Mediterranean, even after the end of the Western Empire). So the failure of the Roman power after 400 in the West and 600 in the East must have been crucial. Last point, the geographical space of the NSLA is different, because we need to integrate Central Europe, the Middle East (but not the whole of the Sassanian Empire) and Arabia to understand what happened to the Roman Empire. That is why we now speak of Late Antiquity rather than late–Roman, even though all the new narratives in the last ten years have still been Romano–centric, with Roman evidence and perspectives. But we should not forget that the Roman Empire was always the core of the extended late–antique world, from demographical, economical and ideological points of view.[14] So, late–Roman is not coming back, but in Jinan, the consciousness of a New Short Late Antiquity was born.

But, to be fair, we should also mention the alternative solution of a Long Late Antiquity,[15] from the mid–third to the eighth century, or longer. Those who support it insist mostly on cultural or religious topics (Hellenism for Glenn Bowersock[16] and monotheism for Garth Fowden[17]). But we cannot distinguish a short "material" Late Antiquity and a long "spiritual" Late Antiquity. Understanding "short" and "long" Late Antiquity as two different perspectives, with diverse thematic approaches grounded on diverse kinds of evidence and incompatible chronological definitions was possible during the late twentieth century, because after 1971, there was a distinction, rather than an opposition, between late–Roman and late–antique studies. But, since 1999 and the publication of *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* by a group of Princeton scholars, the Long-Late–Antiquity conception has claimed that it, rather than the late–Roman one (now also called Late Antiquity)[19] is the only true Late Antiquity, including all the themes, but with a different hierarchy from that of the late–Roman approach. So, they were no longer complementary, but antagonistic.

Now, an extremely coherent New Short Late Antiquity has appeared, thanks to the new socio–economic structural role attributed to the Roman state. But the question of the unity of a Long Late Antiquity is a real problem. Peter Brown knew that in 1996, when he tried to distinguish a

[14] Inglebert 2012.
[15] Marcone 2008.
[16] Glenn Bowersock, Peter Brown and Oleg Grabar 1999.
[17] Fowden 2014.
[19] Cameron, Averil, Ward-Perkins, Bryan, and Whitby, Michael 2000.

Spätantike and a *spätere Spätantike,*[20] but only Wolfgang Liebeschuetz accepted such a distinction then, for the cities and with a different periodization from Brown's,[21] and in 1999, Giardina rejected it, claiming that Late Antiquity had still to be antique. He thought that the *spätere Spätantike* was no longer antique, but mediaeval. But British and American scholars (the *Guide to Late Antiquity* in 1999, *The Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity* in 2005 and the *Journal of Late Antiquity* in 2008) did not discuss it, and they accepted a Long Late Antiquity without any real debate.[22]

If we want to try to solve these problems from the period 1996–1999, facing Brown's proposition and Giardina's objection seriously, there could be different solutions. The first would integrate the short and long conceptions of Late Antiquity in a complex model that included diverse spatial and temporal scales. In this way a Roman Short Late Antiquity might be integrated in a broader temporal and spatial, Eastern–European Long Late Antiquity. The second would distinguish and combine material life and mental representations with different periodizations and some pseudo–morphosis (persistence without continuity) which would explain the different chronologies and hierarchies between the items. The third solution would try to understand what happened between the end of the Roman Mediterranean *économie–monde* after 600 and the emergence of a new Muslim *économie–monde* around the Indian Ocean circa 750. A fourth solution could be to think of the change in terms of civilization, with a new Muslim one that appeared circa 700 CE.

3. The last point will be about epistemology. Transition and transformation are terms which are used in Jean–Michel Carrié's, Pablo Diaz' and Jutta Dresken–Weiland's titles, and we can also find them in Gilles Bransbourg's, and Ignazio Tantillo's texts. And, in her presentation of the workshop, Rita Lizzi asked about "the conceptual validity of the alternative between 'transformation' and 'transition'".

Gilles Bransbourg and Jutta Dresken–Weiland use the terms without giving them a special conceptual definition. Gilles Bransbourg thought in terms of a big change, and Jutta Dresken–Weiland asked about the speed of that change. Ignazio Tantillo quoted Cavallo asking the same question as Jean–Michel Carrié: is Late Antiquity a period of transition or a period "that stands on its own", as Bowersock wrote in 1999? What he called "the new old heresy of political disruption" is supported, with different

[20] Brown 1997.
[21] Liebeschuetz 2001.
[22] And the debate published in *Studi Storici* 45 (2004) was not conclusive.

arguments and periodizations, by Peter Heather, Bryan Ward–Perkins, Chris Wickham and Andrea Giardina.

Pablo Diaz distinguished crisis, which has to be short—no more than a few years—from longer processes of transition and transformation. He thought that "transition" is charged with negative connotations, such as decadence, fall or decline, and therefore Late Antiquity is better defined as a period of transformation, as Peter Brown did. But his definition is not as positive as Peter Brown's—a period of creation—because he agrees with Walter Pohl's use of the term, which includes positive and negative aspects, as did Santo Mazzarino[23] and Henri–Irénée Marrou.[24] Pablo Diaz makes two points, then: the opposition between a short or a longer time, and the distinction between judgment (negative or positive) and description (supposedly neutral). In this case, the difference between late–Roman (*Bas–Empire, Basso Impero, Spätrömisch*) and Late Antiquity (*Antiquité tardive, Tardoantico, Spätantike*) would be more a change of name and perception than a change in structure (as it is with the New Short Late Antiquity).

Jean–Michel Carrié accepts the difference between a short crisis and other longer processes, but for these events he uses three French words: *transition*, *transformation* and *mutation*. We may have a problem with the translation here, because in English, "mutation" is used mostly in biology;[25] either we accept this neologism for history, or we have to translate *transformation* with change and *mutation* with transformation. But "*transformation*" or "change" is too vague, and Jean–Michel Carrié wrote that the problem is that of knowing if Late Antiquity is a period of transition (continuous with both a former and a later period) or an autonomous period, with discontinuity (breakdown or *mutation* at the outset and at the end, with two other different periods surrounding it). And he chose the second option, following Henri–Irénée Marrou and Glenn Bowersock. So, Late Antiquity is defined by Jean–Michel Carrié as beginning with a *mutation* (which occurred at the end of the third century, as in his paper in Jinan, but which may have begun before, with the third-century crisis or even the Severian dynasty),[26] and ending with a breakdown (during the seventh century).

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[23] Mazzarino 1974–1980, and Mazzarino 1959, 190–191.

[24] Marrou 1977.

[25] This was also so forty years ago in French; Marrou 1977, 12–13 wrote: "L'histoire enregistre ici une mutation, s'il est permis d'emprunter le mot et l'image à la biologie." But for him, the use of this word was metaphorical.

[26] Carrié, and Rousselle 1999. But the title of Chapter Four is "La rupture constantinienne"…

This is a very elegant solution, because we have a problem with the meaning of the term Late Antiquity. Either this term is just a name, a label, and it could describe a period with no relation to Antiquity, or Late Antiquity is the last part of Antiquity, after Classical Antiquity, or Greco–Roman Antiquity. If we accept that there is a link between Antiquity and Late Antiquity, as Giardina asked in 1999 (and we can agree that *Spätantike ist noch Antike*), then the relation between the time existing before Late Antiquity and Late Antiquity itself could not be the same as the relation between Late Antiquity and the time coming after Late Antiquity. And the distinction between *mutation* and breakdown is perfect in this perspective, even though the problem of the beginning of the *mutation* could be debated. One consequence of this solution is that Late Antiquity is conceived as a sub–period of Antiquity. Nevertheless, it could be an autonomous sub–period, and could be called another civilization.[27] But there are still four problems.

First, if we accept that Late Antiquity is a sub–period of Antiquity, we have now to define what Antiquity is, or, at least, Classical Antiquity. If we try, with Jean-Michel Carrié, to link Classical Antiquity with the Roman *économie–monde*, it is difficult to begin before Alexander. So, the periodization will be from Alexander to Muhammad,[28] and this period will be defined by:

- a global *économie–monde* from the Atlantic Ocean to India
- the asymmetrical relation between the local autonomous cities (*polis, ciuitas*) and the royal (Greek) or imperial (Roman, post-Republican) power
- a first cultural period with Hellenism, a second with Roman–ness, and a third with Christianity.

This classical Antiquity would be divided in three sub–periods:

- the Hellenistic–Republican time, from 330 to 30 BCE, which begins with a breakdown, the foundation of the Macedonian

[27] Marrou 1977, 12–13. Bowersock, in his Introduction to Bowersock, Glenn W., Brown, Peter, and Grabar, Oleg, 1999, also thought that Late Antiquity was a genuine civilization. But Marrou's idea was only linked to the Roman Empire and not to a geographical space that included the Roman and Sassanian Empires. So Marrou's intuition is more acute. For a definition and periodization of Roman civilization, see Inglebert 2005.

[28] For examples of the use of this kind of periodization in economic, political and religious contexts, see Lombard 1971; AA.VV. 1981; Schwartz 2014.

Empire (and of Alexandria in Egypt), and includes a transition–or–*mutation* period from 90 to 30/27 BCE, the Roman revolution and the creation of the Principate
- the High Roman Empire, from 30 BCE until 284 CE, which includes a transition–or–*mutation* period from 250 to 284, the third–century crisis
- Late Antiquity, from 284 CE to 636/651, which ended in breakdown, the Muslim invasion, the disappearance of the Sassanian Empire, and the weakening of the Eastern Roman Empire.

The second problem is that the definition and the chronology of Antiquity as a period of *transformation*–change could be different. If we do not use the *économie–monde* but the city (*polis, ciuitas*) as the main feature of Antiquity, periodization would include the period from Archaic Greece to Late Antiquity (which we could call Greco–Roman Antiquity), but it might be difficult to prove the survival of the city (as distinct from urban life) after 550 or 600.[29] This would mean that the end of Late Antiquity might be unlike the previous case. Another solution would be to use, with Marrou, the term civilization (which is also linked with socio–eco–political *realia*, but which better includes mental representations, like religious developments, or the transformation from a juridical definition of society to a sociological one). On this view, Late Antiquity was a genuine civilization, different from the classical and mediaeval ones in the Mediterranean region, and, from Constantine until the seventh century, the Christian Roman Empire the most powerful ideological and civilizational —political, religious, cultural—model of an enlarged late-antique world. But, in this case, Late Antiquity continues until as late as 700, when the Muslims were starting to create a new global model of meaning for the world, because we have to distinguish Islam as a religion (after 612), as an empire (after 632) and as a civilization (only circa 700, with the new administrative and cultural status of Arabic, a new currency system, and the appearance of new Muslim architecture and decoration).

The third problem is that we can also defend the idea of Late Antiquity as a period of transition. Classical or Graeco–Roman Antiquity is defined by the *polis*/*ciuitas*, and the Middle Ages by the existence of religious collectivities, or that Classical or Greco–Roman Antiquity is defined by the polytheistic cults, and the Middle Ages by monotheisms. Similarly,

[29] On this topic, see Liebeschuetz 2001 and the papers in Krause and Witschel 2006.

Late Antiquity could be correctly described as a period of transition from the first model to the second, because there was a coexistence of the two models during the period from the fourth to the sixth or seventh century. But, even in this case, we can still continue to understand Late Antiquity in itself, because a period of transition, whose peculiarity would be the mixture of different models, can also be thought of as an autonomous and distinctive period (and this may even be preferable to defining it as an autonomous sub–period of Classical or Greco–Roman Antiquity). And we can also accept the idea of a *mutation* for its beginning and of a breakdown for the end of this transitional period. Such a hypothesis could be grounded when reconsidering the links, and the diverse periodizations, between the various imperial crises from the second to the seventh century and the idea of Late Antiquity as a period of transition.[30]

The last problem is that it is possible to argue that the beginning of Late Antiquity is a breakdown and not a *mutation*. For example, Anne-Valérie Pont wrote recently[31] that the end of the political form of the Greek city occurred in Asia Minor at the beginning of the fourth century AD, linked to the great Tetrarchic Persecution of the Christians, the administrative reforms of Diocletian and Constantine, and the nearby presence of an imperial residence (first Nicomedia and then Constantinople). This suggested to her a breakdown in civic life in this region: even when there was an urban continuity, the *polis* disappeared. And this breakdown could mark the beginning of Late Antiquity. In this case, there would be a conflict between the idea of a classical and civic Antiquity and a Macedonian–Roman Antiquity including Late Antiquity.

So, even after the Jinan congress and the reinforcement of the hypothesis of the New Short Late Antiquity (NSLA), we can be sure that research and discussion will still go on, for three reasons. First, there are several models of NSLA (beginning between 224/26 and 395, and ending between 362 and 700); secondly, the debate between transition and *transformation*–change is still open; and lastly, the debate between *mutation* and breakdown needs to be resolved at each end of the period, in relation to the socio–economic–imperial question, the civic question, and the question of civilization.

[30] Inglebert 2016.
[31] Pont 2015.

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