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**For Anna, Eleanor, Gemma,
Rachel and Stephanie**

Chronology of main events, 238–1000

British Isles	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	North Africa	Near East
	238 murder of Maximin I	244 Gordian III deposed by Philip	248 Cyprian bishop of Carthage	241–72 reign of Shapur I
	253–60 reign of Valerian			260 Shapur I captures Valerian
	253–68 reign of Gallienus		258 martyrdom of Cyprian of Carthage	
286–93 reign of Carausius	260–73 'Gallic Empire'	282–3 reign of Carus		283 Carus' invasion of Persia
293–6 reign of Allectus	285 Diocletian ruling West	284–305 reign of Diocletian		293–303 reign of Narseh
	293 appointment of Caesars	303 beginning of 'Great Persecution'		296–7 war with Rome
	305–6 reign of Constantius I in West	305–11 reign of Galerius	311 reign of Alexander	309–79 reign of Shapur II
306 Constantine proclaimed at York	306–37 rule of Constantine in West	313 war between Maximin and Licinius	312 beginning of Donatist schism	
	312 Battle of Milvian Bridge, conversion of Constantine	314 war with Licinius (308–24)		
		324–37 Constantine ruling East		
		324 founding of Constantinople		
		325 Council of Nicaea		
		330 dedication of Constantinople		
343 visit of Constans	337–50 reign of Constans II	337–61 reign of Constantius II	354 birth of Augustine	
350–3 Britain supports Magnentius	357–9 Julian's campaigns in Gaul	350–3 Gallus Caesar at Antioch		360 war between Rome and Persia

367 raids by Picts, Irish and Saxons; Hadrian's Wall repaired	360 Julian's revolt	361–3 reign of Julian; 'pagan revival'	363 Julian's invasion of Persia
	364–75 reign of Valentinian I	364–78 reign of Valens	364 Jovian's treaty
		376 Visigoths admitted into Balkans	
	383–8 reign of Magnus Maximus	378 Battle of Adrianople	
	392–4 reign of Eugenius; 'pagan revival'	379–95 reign of Theodosius I	
	395–423 reign of Honorius	391 closing of pagan temples	395–430 Augustine bishop of Hippo
	395–408 ascendancy of Stilicho	395–408 reign of Arcadius	397 Augustine writes 'Confessions'
			397 revolt of Gildo
406 reigns of Marcus and Gratian	406 Vandals, Alans, Sueves cross Rhine		
407–11 reign of Constantine III	408 Alaric's Visigoths enter Italy		413–27 Augustine writing 'City of God'
410 revolt of Britain	410 sack of Rome		418 Council of Carthage
	c. 411–21 ascendancy of Constantius		429 Vandal invasion
Nynia in Galloway and southern Pictland	425–55 reign of Valentinian III		439 Vandals take Carthage
431 Palladius sent to Ireland	430–53 ascendancy of Aetius		442 Vandal treaty
	440–61 Leo I bishop of Rome	440s Hun raids on Balkans	
c. 446–53 appeal to Aetius			
Saxon treaty	451 Hun invasion of Gaul	451 Council of Chalcedon	
		453 death of Attila	
		454 battle on the Nedao	

Chronology of main events, 238–100 (*continued*)

British Isles	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	North Africa	Near East
	455–7 reign of Avitus		455 Vandal sack of Rome 468 attack by eastern fleet fails 476–84 reign of Huneric; 'persecution' of Catholics	459–84 reign of Peroz Persian wars with the Hephthalites
Patrick in Ireland	476/480 formal end of western Empire c. 481–c. 511 reign of Clovis in Gaul	474–91 reign of Zeno		488–97, 499–531 reign of Kavad I Mazdakite movement
490s Battle of Badon	493 Ostrogothic kingdom established in Italy 507 Battle of Vouillé c. 511 division of Frankish kingdom	527–65 reign of Justinian 529 Nika Riots	523–30 reign of Hilderic 533 imperial conquest of Africa	c. 525 Dhu Nuwas in the Yemen 531–79 reign of Khusrro I
c. 540 Gildas writing 'De Excidio'	535–53 wars in Italy, leading to imperial conquest	527–33 'Corpus Iuris Civilis'	536 Council of Carthage 543 Berber revolt 548 revolt suppressed	540 Persian sack of Antioch
	558–61 Francia united under Clotar I (c. 511–61) 568 Lombard invasion of Italy under Alboin 569–86 reign of Leovigild in Spain 574–84 'interregnum' in Lombard kingdom	550s beginning of Slav penetration of Balkans	563 new Berber revolt	570? birth of Muhammad 579–90 reign of Hormizd IV
c. 560–c. 590 career of Ceawlin 563/5 foundation of Iona				

589 Third Council of Toledo	591 Maurice installs Khusrō II in Iran
590–616 reign of Agilulf in Italy	
590–604 Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome	
594 death of Gregory of Tours	590s campaigns against Slavs
604 death of Augustine	602 overthrow of Maurice
	610 revolt of Heraclius
613 unification of Francia under Chlotar II	
620s Isidore writing 'History' and 'Chronicle'	628 murder of Khusrō II
629–32 Roman mission in Northumbria	630 Muhammad conquers Mecca
632 death of Edwin	632 succession of Abu Bakr
633–42 reign of Oswald in Northumbria	634 succession of 'Umar
c. 632–55 reign of Penda in Mercia	636 Arab conquest of Jerusalem
642–70 reign of Oswy in Northumbria	640 conquest of Egypt
655–8 Northumbrian rule over Mercia	642 collapse of Persia before Arabs
	651 death of last shah, Yazdgerd III
	656–61 caliphate of 'Alī
	661–80 Mu'awiya first Umayyad Caliph

Chronology of main events, 238–100 (continued)

British Isles	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	North Africa	Near East
663/4 Synod of Whitby	657–664/5 regency of Balthildis c. 660–73, 675–80, Ebroin Mayor of Palace in Neustria	668 murder of Constans at Syracuse 674–7 Arab siege of Constantinople 681 Bulgars established in Balkans	669 Arab invasion under 'Uqba 670 foundation of Kairouan 683 death of 'Uqba ibn Nafqi 698 Arab capture of Carthage 700–12 governorship of Musa ibn Nusayr	
685 Battle of Nectansmere	673 war between Wamba and Paul			680–4 civil wars
705 death of Adarnan	687 Battle of Terry			
709 death of Aldhelm	711 Arab invasion of Spain 712–14 reign of Liutprand in Italy 714–19 Charles Martel gains control of Austrasia and Neustria	711 overthrow of Justinian II 717 Arab siege of Constantinople and accession of Leo III		
716–57 reign of Æthelbald of Mercia	720s Charles restores control east of Rhine			724–43 caliphate of Hisham
731/2 Bede finishes his 'History'	733 Battle of Poitiers	726 Leo III's first Iconoclast measures		

735 death of Bede	735 Charles occupies Aquitaine	741–75 reign of Constantine V; most intense period of Iconoclasm	743–50 conflicts in Syria
	737 and 739 campaigns in Provence		
	741–7 joint rule of Pippin III and Carloman		
	749–56 reign of Aistulf in Italy		749 'Abbasid revolt
	751 coronation of Pippin III		750 Umayyads replaced as Caliphs by the 'Abbasids
	756 Umayyad Amirate founded in Spain		762 foundation of Baghdad
754 death of Boniface			
757–96 reign of Offa of Mercia			
766 death of archbishop Egbert of York – Alcuin's teacher	768–814 reign of Charlemagne	761 restoration of 'Abbasid rule	
	772–804 Saxon wars	777 Rustamid kingdom in W. Algeria	
	774 Frankish conquest of Lombard kingdom		
	775–80 reign of Leo IV the Khazar	789 Idrisid kingdom in Morocco	786–809 reign of Harun ar-Rashid
	787 Second Council of Nicaea		
	790s Frankish Avar wars	796 blinding of Constantine VI	
793 Viking raid on Lindisfarne	800 imperial coronation of Charlemagne		
802–39 reign of Egbert of Wessex	802 deposition of empress Irene	800 Aghlabid kingdom in Tunisia	
804 death of Alcuin	808–10 Frankish conflict with Godfred		
	811 defeat of Nicephorus by Bulgars		
	814–40 reign of Louis the Pious		

Chronology of main events, 238–100 (*continued*)

British Isles	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	North Africa	Near East
829 compiling of 'Historia Brittonum'	817 'Ordinatio Imperii'	813 Iconoclasm revived by Leo V (813–20)		813–19 civil war in Caliphate
835 beginning of Viking raids on Wessex	822 Louis's penance at Attigny 830–4 civil wars in Francia	814 death of Khan Krum of Bulgars 815 Byzantine-Bulgar peace treaty 830, 837 Byzantine victories over Arabs	827–78 Aghlabid conquest of Sicily	836 Samarra becomes 'Abbasid capital
850/1 first Viking wintering in Britain	835 beginning of Danish raids on Francia 840–3 civil wars in Francia 843 Treaty of Verdun	847 end of Iconoclasm		861 murder of caliph Al-Muwakkil: ascendancy of Turks in the 'Abbasid Caliphate – 945
	858 Louis the German invades West Francia	860 'Rus' attack Constantinople		
867 Danish conquest of York	866–910 reign of Alfonso the Great in Asturias	864 conversion of the Bulgars 867 Macedonian dynasty in Byzantium lasts until 1056	868 Aghlabids take Malta	
869/70 conquest of East Anglia				
871–99 reign of Alfred of Wessex				
871 Battle of Ashdown	871 Byzantine recapture Bari			
874 Danes expel Burgred from Mercia	872 Louis II forced to leave south Italy 875 Charles the Bald crowned emperor			

878 Danes winter attack on Alfred Battle of Edington	877 death of Charles the Bald	870s Byzantine campaigns in Asia Minor under Basil I (867–86)
	879–92 resumed Viking raids in N. Francia	
	881 imperial coronation of Charles the Fat	
	882 death of Hincmar of Rheims	
886 Alfred captures London	885–6 Viking siege of Paris	886–912 reign of Leo the Wise
	887 deposition of Charles the Fat	889 abdication of Boris
892 new Danish invasion under Haesten		893 Symeon becomes ruler of the Bulgars
894 dispersal of the invaders		892 Baghdad restored as 'Abbasid capital
909 Wessex armies harry Viking kingdom of York	911 Charles the Simple's treaty with Rollo Carolingian dynasty in E. Francia extinct	909 Aghlabids overthrown by Fatimids
918 death of Æthelflaed: Wessex annexes western Mercia		
920 Wessex conquest of East Mercia	912–61 rule of Abd ar-Rahman III in Spain	912–59 reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos
924–39 reign of Athelstan	923 deposition of Charles the Simple	917–24 Bulgar attacks on Byzantium 920–44 Romanos Lecapenos co-emperor

Chronology of main events, 238–100 (*continued*)

British Isles	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	North Africa	Near East
937 Battle of Brunanburh	936 restoration of Carolingian rule in France with Louis IV (d.954)	927 death of tsar Symeon of the Bulgars; peace made with Byzantium		945 Buyids take Baghdad; 'Abbasid Caliphs under Buyid control until 1055
944 Edmund of Wessex conquers Northumbria				
948 Eadred of Wessex harries Northumbria				
942–9/50 Hywel Oda 'King of all Wales'	955 Battle on the Lech	957 visit of Olga to Constantinople		
	960 Hugh Capet 'Duke of the Franks'	c. 962–71 rule of Svyatoslav in Kiev		
	962 imperial coronation of Otto I	963–9 reign of Nicephorus Phocas		
961–88 Dunstan archbishop of Canterbury	972 Otto (II) marries Byzantine princess	Byzantium regains Crete and Antioch	969 Fatimids take Cairo	
973 coronation of Edgar at Bath	973–83 reign of Otto II	969–76 reign of John Zimiskes	972 Zirid kingdom in Tunisia	
		970 defeat of 'Rus' invasion of Thrace		
975–8 reign of Edward the Martyr	982 Otto II defeated in southern Italy	976–1025 rule of Basil the Bulgarslayer		
978–1016 reign of Æthelred the Unready		978 Vladimir becomes ruler of Kiev		
	987 end of Carolingian dynasty in France; Hugh Capet crowned	c. 987 conversion of Vladimir		
980 Viking raids on southern England				

991 Battle of Maldon

996 Otto III attains his majority

990s mounting Viking attacks

1000 Conversion of Iceland

995–1000 Olaf Tryggveson
king of Norway

1002 death of Otto III

Preface

At an early stage in thinking about the question of its contents it became clear that this was doomed to be a book that nobody could like, or at least that if some of its readers were pleased with some of it, none of them would possibly enjoy all of it. There are too many variables in the topics, themes, events and personalities that have to be considered for inclusion in a work of this (relative!) brevity that has to concern itself with so extended a chronological period. It became increasingly obvious that the real decisions to be made were those concerning what was to be omitted, and for an author temperamentally inclined to squeezing limited and fragmentary evidence as far as it will extend, if not beyond, this has been a particularly hard task.

Wholesale omissions and the reduction of complicated and nuanced arguments to bald assertions are bound to dissatisfy the discerning reader (as much as the author). In consequence what is attempted here has to be a personal approach that may at times seem wrong headed in its concentration on some subjects to the exclusion of others or its occasional descent into detailed argument that seems out of proportion to the scale of the rest of the book. In that sense I can only fall back on the defence of a great, if idiosyncratic, ninth century bishop, that was recently echoed by a much revered Master: *Scripti quod sensi*.

It may seem strange to those unfamiliar with these centuries that such an apology is necessary, and that a period of such apparent remoteness and obscurity should not manage to encompass itself totally in a book of even half the length of this one. Only brief acquaintance, however, will reveal how substantial is the corpus of evidence relating to this time, and how numerous and varied the problems involved in interpreting it. Moreover, the proper understanding of this period involves the historian in moving his gaze on occasion from the western fringes of Iran to Iceland and from Ethiopia and the edge of the Sahara to the steppes of Central Asia. Such breadth of geographical and chronological vision seems to be less necessary – or less demanded – in later periods.

In trying to present, even in outline, this series of interrelated developments, it was clearly necessary to push the chronological limits of this book back to an earlier period than those of the beginning of the sixth century, which was where it had first been intended to place them. So much of what was to make up the framework of ideas and

institutions which shaped subsequent centuries originated in the fourth century that it would have been perverse to start any later than c. 300, and, indeed, a lack of Late Roman background has often led to mistaken and misleading interpretations of Early Medieval History. In turn, the decision to start with the fourth century prompted at least some preliminary investigation of the third.

Doubtless such a process could be indefinitely prolonged, recessing ever further back in time, but there is a certain rightness about commencing such a study as this in the mid-third century, when so many of the principal ideas and institutions of Antiquity were undergoing transformation. This period, however little studied and poorly documented, represents the first formative stage of the major changes that were to follow, and it is here that this enquiry begins.

Where to end was to some extent predetermined by the structure of the series in which this volume is to appear, but the disintegration of the Frankish successor empire in the late ninth and early tenth centuries again makes for something of a natural break, at least in some aspects of the history of medieval Europe. Extending the survey slightly further than I might have liked, the symbolic date of the year 1000 makes an aesthetically pleasing, if intellectually not entirely satisfying terminal point. To a certain extent, then, this book could have been given such a subtitle as 'From Constantine the Great to Charles the Simple'! In practice, treatment of the tenth century offered here is less full than for some earlier periods, largely because a number of the major themes that have their origin in this, still relatively little studied, time are best considered in the wider context of their development in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Other topics that might have merited inclusion have been omitted partly due to personal style and inclination on the part of the author and partly due to the fact that the lack of other general surveys of this period necessitated the provision of a substantial narrative outline of events, taken together with analysis of and comment on the major sources of evidence. In consequence there may be less economic history to be found in this book than some readers might like. This is conditioned on the author's part by a dislike for generalisation based on an insufficiency of evidence, and this is one of several areas for which the Early Middle Ages are poorly equipped in terms of the survival of source material. It is relatively easy to create general models on the basis of limited evidence, but these tend all too often in such circumstances to rest on *a priori* assumptions as to how societies and their economies should work. Such determinism should be resisted. It is also preferable to ask questions of evidence that its particular nature fits it to answer rather than ones that the historian feels he *ought* to pose.

The first victims of this book – paradoxically, even before it was ever

commissioned – were the successive first year history students in the University of Liverpool, to whom between the years 1974 and 1980 elements of it were expounded in the form of lectures on this period. The most recent guinea pigs to have suffered in its genesis are those former students at the Royal School, Bath, to whom it is dedicated. I am very grateful to them for their enthusiasm in the discussion of a range of issues and topics that are considered in the chapters below. My especial thanks must go to Ian Wood, who read all of the first draft of this book, and whose comments and suggestions on it enabled me to avoid many errors. The greatest debt of all, though, is that to my wife Judith McClure, with whom so much of it has been shared in all of the phases just mentioned and whose role in it is truly omnipresent.

Bath

September 1990

ROGER COLLINS

Introduction

When Gibbon surveyed the centuries of 'decline' in the history of the Roman empire and its Byzantine successor he allowed himself to start with a little mild Utopianism. Of the Antonine period he commented that 'If a man were called upon to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus' (i.e. AD 96–181). Few might nowadays ask themselves such a question, let alone come up with a response that equates 'the world' exclusively with the Mediterranean and 'the human race' with a small economic and social elite. However, for all of his enthusiasm for second century Rome, some of which was intended as implicit criticism of aspects of his own society of which he disapproved, it was not about this period that Gibbon intended to write.

Periods of tranquillity, social harmony and economic stability do not make very good history – even if we now would detect more conflict and change in the second century than was apparent to Gibbon. The turbulent centuries that were to follow pose more interesting historiographical problems, not least because they encompassed the most important developments in the history of the Near East, the Mediterranean and Western Europe, between the formation of the Roman Empire in the first century BC and the discovery of the New World in the late fifteenth AD. Even then much of the way that the society and economy of the Americas were to be developed and exploited was directly conditioned by a body of ideas and through the means of institutions that had come into being in the period of the Late Roman Empire.

In general the centuries covered by this book constitute a period of the greatest significance for the future development, not only of Europe, but also in the longer term of much else of the world. They saw, not least, the establishment of Christianity as the majority religion of the Roman Empire, and with it an indissoluble fusing of Judaeo-Christian and Romano-Greek thought. Apart from the first brief period of the founding of the religion in the time of the Early Roman Empire, there was to be no time in the whole subsequent history of the Christian Church so fertile in the development of its distinctive ideas and practices as the 'Patristic Age', lasting from roughly the mid-fourth century to the early sixth.

The writings of such men as Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine and their immediate successors provided the intellectual framework of Christian thinking not only throughout the rest of the Middle Ages, but also for the Reformation and more recent centuries. The distinctive Christian emphasis on Virginity and the extraordinary ideological and institutional structures of monasticism were likewise the products of these centuries. They also saw the challenge to and modification of the Romano-Christian tradition with the rise to dominance of Islam over the whole of the Near East and the southern Mediterranean. The direct relevance of this formative period of Islamic thought and institutions to the modern society of these regions and to various contemporary political and economic issues hardly needs underlining.

In the West the Roman Empire dissolved itself as a unitary political entity in the fifth century, but its intellectual and material cultural legacy continued to direct the fragmentary successor states that came into being in its ruin. Especially true was this of that extraordinary institution the Papacy, whose own distinctive view of its nature and purpose was formed in this time, together with many of the institutional features that would enable it to play so dominant a role in Western Europe for centuries to come. As a corollary to this, the most substantial, and still unhealed, rift in Christendom, that between the Latin and Greek Churches, came into being in the latter part of the period.

This itself was not uninfluenced by political changes in the West, with the emergence of the short-lived Frankish empire of the Carolingians, which in its territorial expansion both northwards and eastwards further extended the areas of influence of the intellectual culture and some of the material civilisation of Late Antiquity. This first self-conscious effort to revive a western Empire was itself to set precedents for the future, which even now in a period of renewed aspirations towards European unity can make themselves felt or, it might be fairer to say, are available for contemporary political manipulation.

To return, however, to the perspective of the historian, it was perhaps easier for Gibbon in an age of relative tranquillity to take a broad, if hardly dispassionate, view of this sequence of events. His approach to it, though, was conditioned by a desire to criticise certain elements in the society of his own day that he found reprehensible, notably its penchant for apparently pointless wars of conquest and the continuing strength of elements of unreason, above all in religion. At the same time a much more radical critique, symbolised by the French Revolution, was to lead directly to the subversion of much of the social order of Europe and, perhaps paradoxically, to the proliferation of aggressive warfare on an almost unprecedented scale, together with

the emergence of ideologies far more menacing to Liberal individualism and reason than the placid religiosity of the eighteenth century. Flamboyant despots of the succeeding period, from Napoleon to Hitler, also turned to the Roman imperial past and its attempted revival under Charlemagne for some of the imagery and the framework of ideas needed to shape and manifest their regimes.

The revival of scholarly interest in the periods of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages can, as much as the historiography of any period, partake of the quality of mere antiquarianism. However, the nature of its subject matter, the scale and significance of so many of its events, and the intellectual force of the thought of so many of its greatest writers should militate against this. History should not necessarily be expected to teach lessons, and certainly is not cyclical, but the study of these apparently remote centuries is as conducive as any to the questioning of received value systems, the evaluation of dogma and the formulation of principles to guide the conduct of states and individuals in complex times.