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300–1000

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Roger Collins

*Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies
University of Edinburgh*

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Chronology of main events, 238–1000

British Isles	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	North Africa	Near East
286–93 reign of Carausius 293–6 reign of Allectus	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	
	260–73 'Gallic Empire'	282–3 reign of Carus		283 Carus' invasion of Persia
	285 Diocletian ruling West 293 appointment of Caesars	284–305 reign of Diocletian		293–303 reign of Narseh
306 Constantine proclaimed at York	305–6 reign of Constantius I in West	303 beginning of 'Great Persecution'		296–7 war with Rome
	306–37 rule of Constantine in West	305–11 reign of Galerius	311 reign of Alexander	309–79 reign of Shapur II
	312 Battle of Milvian Bridge; conversion of Constantine	313 war between Maximin and Licinius 314 war with Licinius (308–24)	312 beginning of Donatist schism	
		324–37 Constantine ruling East 324 founding of Constantinople		

343	visit of Constans	337–50	reign of Constans	325	Council of Nicaea		
350–3	Britain supports Magnentius	357–9	Julian's campaigns in Gaul	330	dedication of Constantinople		
367	raids by Picts, Irish and Saxons; Hadrian's Wall repaired	360	Julian's revolt	337–61	reign of Constantius II	354	birth of Augustine
		364–75	reign of Valentinian I	350–3	Gallus Caesar at Antioch	360	war between Rome and Persia
		383–8	reign of Magnus Maximus	361–3	reign of Julian; 'pagan revival'	363	Julian's invasion of Persia
		392–4	reign of Eugenius; 'pagan revival'	376	Visigoths admitted into Balkans	364	Jovian's treaty
		395–423	reign of Honorius	378	Battle of Adrianople		
		395–408	ascendancy of Stilicho	379–95	reign of Theodosius I		
				391	closing of pagan temples	395–430	Augustine bishop of Hippo
406	reigns of Marcus and Gratian	406	Vandals, Alans, Sueves cross Rhine	397	Augustine writes 'Confessions'		
407–11	reign of Constantine III	408	Alaric's Visigoths enter Italy	397	revolt of Gildo		
410	revolt of Britain	410	sack of Rome	413–27	Augustine writing 'City of God'		
		c. 411–21	ascendancy of Constantius	418	Council of Carthage		

Chronology of main events, 238–1000 *(continued)*

British Isles	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	North Africa	Near East
Nynia in Galloway and southern Pictland	425–55 reign of Valentinian III		429 Vandal invasion	
431 Palladius sent to Ireland	430–53 ascendancy of Aetius		439 Vandals take Carthage	
	440–61 Leo I bishop of Rome	440s Hun raids on Balkans	442 Vandal treaty	
c. 446–53 appeal to Aetius Saxon treaty				
	451 Hun invasion of Gaul	451 Council of Chalcedon		
		453 death of Attila		
	455–7 reign of Avitus	454 battle on the Nedao	455 Vandal sack of Rome	459–84 reign of Peroz
			468 attack by eastern fleet fails	Persian wars with the Hephthalites
Patrick in Ireland	476/480 formal end of western Empire	474–91 reign of Zeno	476–84 reign of Huneric; 'persecution' of Catholics	
	c. 481–c. 511 reign of Clovis in Gaul			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	523–30 reign of Hilderic	c. 525 Dhu Nuwas in the Yemen
		529 Nika Riots	533 imperial conquest of Africa	531–79 reign of Khusrō I

c. 540	Gildas writing 'De Excidio'	535–53 wars in Italy, leading to imperial conquest	527–33 'Corpus Iuris Civilis'	540	Persian sack of Antioch
				536	Council of Carthage
				543	Berber revolt
				548	revolt suppressed
		558–61 Francia united under Chlotar I (c. 511–61)	550s beginning of Slav penetration of Balkans		
c. 560–c. 590	career of Ceawlin	568 Lombard invasion of Italy under Alboin		563	new Berber revolt
563/5	foundation of Iona	569–86 reign of Leovigild in Spain			
		574–84 'interregnum' in Lombard kingdom			570? birth of Muhammad
		589 Third Council of Toledo			579–90 reign of Hormizd IV
		590–616 reign of Agilulf in Italy			
597	arrival of Augustine in Kent and death of Columba	590–604 Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome		591	Maurice installs Khusro II in Iran
		594 death of Gregory of Tours	590s campaigns against Slavs		
604	death of Augustine	602 overthrow of Maurice		610	Muhammad's revelations begin
		613 unification of Francia under Chlotar II	610 fall of Phocas	614	Persian capture of Jerusalem
		620s Isidore writing 'History' and 'Chronicle'		622	the Hijra
				628	murder of Khusro II

Chronology of main events, 238–1000 (continued)

British Isles	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	North Africa	Near East
629–32 Roman mission in Northumbria				630 Muhammad conquers Mecca
632 death of Edwin	623–38 rule of Dagobert I in Francia	626 Avar siege of Constantinople		632 succession of Abu Bakr
633–42 reign of Oswald in Northumbria	636 death of Isidore of Seville	636 Battle of Yarmuk		634 succession of 'Umar
c. 632–55 reign of Penda in Mercia	639 Thuringian revolt	641 death of Heradius I	646 revolt of exarch Gregory	636 Arab conquest of Jerusalem
642–70 reign of Oswy in Northumbria	649–72 reign of Recessuinth	649 Arab conquest of Cyprus	647 first Arab raid – death of Gregory	640 conquest of Egypt
655–8 Northumbrian rule over Mercia	654 issue of 'Forum Iudicum'			642 collapse of Persia before Arabs
				651 death of last shah, Yazdgard III
				656–61 caliphate of 'Ali
663/4 Synod of Whitby	657–664/5 regency of Balthildis			661–80 Mu'awiya first Umayyad Caliph
	c. 660–73, 675–80, Ebroin Mayor of Palace in Neustria	668 murder of Constans at Syracuse	669 Arab invasion under Uqba	
	673 war between Wamba and Paul	674–7 Arab siege of Constantinople	670 foundation of Kairouan	
685 Battle of Dunnichen		681 Bulgars established in Balkans	683 death of 'Uqba ibn Nafi	680–4 civil wars

705	death of Adamnan	687	Battle of Terry	698	Arab capture of Carthage
709	death of Aldhelm	711	Arab invasion of Spain	700–12	governorship of Musa ibn Nusayr
		712–14	reign of Liutprand in Italy	711	overthrow of Justinian II
		714–19	Charles Martel gains control of Austrasia and most of Neustria	717	Arab siege of Constantinople and accession of Leo III
716–57	reign of Æthelbald of Mercia	720s	Charles restores control east of Rhine	726	Leo III's first Iconoclast measures
731/2	Bede finishes his 'History'	733	Battle of Poitiers		
735	death of Bede	735	Charles occupies Aquitaine		
		737 and 739	campaigns in Provence		
		741–7	joint rule of Pippin III and Carloman	741–75	reign of Constantine V; most intense period of Iconoclasm
		749–56	reign of Aistulf in Italy	744–55	rule of Ibn Habib
		751	coronation of Pippin III	743–50	conflicts in Syria
				749	'Abbasid revolt
				750	Umayyads replaced as Caliphs by the 'Abbasids

Chronology of main events, 238–1000 (continued)

British Isles	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	North Africa	Near East
754 death of Boniface	756 Umayyad Amirate founded in Spain			
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	762 foundation of Baghdad
	772–804 Saxon wars		777 Rustamid kingdom in W. Algeria	
				786–809 reign of Harun ar-Rashid
	774 Frankish conquest of Lombard kingdom	775–80 reign of Leo IV the Khazar		
		787 Second Council of Nicaea	789 Idrisid kingdom in Morocco	
793 Viking raid on Lindisfarne	790s Frankish Avar wars	796 blinding of Constantine VI		
802–39 reign of Egbert of Wessex	800 imperial coronation of Charlemagne			
804 death of Alcuin	808–10 Frankish conflict with Godefred	802 deposition of empress Irene	800 Aghlabid kingdom in Tunisia	
	814–40 reign of Louis the Pious	811 defeat of Nicephorus by Bulgars		
	817 'Ordinatio Imperii'	813 Iconoclasm revived by Leo V (813–20)		
		814 death of Khan Krum of Bulgars		
829 compiling of 'Historia Brittonum'	822 Louis's penance at Atigny			813–19 civil war in Caliphate
835 beginning of Viking raids on Wessex	830–4 civil wars in Francia	815 Byzantine–Bulgar peace treaty	827–78 Aghlabid conquest of Sicily	

835	beginning of Danish raids on Francia	830, 837	Byzantine victories over Arabs	836	Samarra becomes 'Abbasid capital
840–3	civil wars in Francia				
843	Treaty of Verdun	847	end of Iconoclasm		
858	Louis the German invades West Francia	860	Rhos attack Constantinople	861	murder of caliph Al-Mutawakkil: ascendancy of Turks in the 'Abbasid Caliphate until 945
850/1	first Viking wintering in Britain	864	conversion of the Bulgars		
867	Danish conquest of York	866–910	reign of Alfonso the Great in Asturias	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	877	death of Charles the Bald	870s	Byzantine campaigns in Asia Minor under Basil I (867–86)
	Battle of Edington				

Chronology of main events, 238–1000 *(continued)*

British Isles	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	North Africa	Near East
	879–92 resumed Viking raids in N. Francia			
	881 imperial coronation of Charles the Fat			
	882 death of Hincmar of Reims			
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		892 Baghdad restored as 'Abbasid capital
894 dispersal of the invaders			909 Aghlabids overthrown by Fatimids	
909 Wessex armies harry Viking kingdom of York	911 Charles the Simple's treaty with Rollo; Carolingian dynasty in E. Francia extinct			
		912–59 reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos		
918 death of Æthelæd; Wessex annexes western Mercia				
920 Wessex conquest of East Mercia	912–61 rule of Abd ar-Rahman III in Spain			917–24 Bulgar attacks on Byzantium

924–39	reign of Athelstan	923	deposition of Charles the Simple	920–44	Romanos Lecapenos co-emperor	
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	
944	Edmund of Wessex conquers Northumbria	939	battle of Simancas			
948	Eadred of Wessex harries Northumbria					
942–9/50	Hywel Dda 'King of all Wales'	955	Battle on the Lech	957	visit of Olga to Constantinople	
961–88	Dunstan archbishop of Canterbury	960	Hugh Capet 'Duke of the Franks' imperial coronation of Otto I	c. 962–71	rule of Svyatoslav in Kiev	
		962	imperial coronation of Otto I	963–9	reign of Nicephorus Phocas	
973	coronation of Edgar at Bath	972	Otto (II) marries Byzantine princess	969	Fatimids take Cairo	
		973–83	reign of Otto II	Byzantium regains Crete and Antioch	972	Zirid kingdom in Tunisia
975–8	reign of Edward the Martyr	982	Otto II defeated in southern Italy	969–76	reign of John Zimiskes	
978–1016	reign of Æthelred the Unready			970	defeat of 'Rhos' invasion of Thrace	
				976–1025	rule of Basil the Bulgarslayer	
		987	end of Carolingian rule in France; Hugh Capet crowned	978	Vladimir becomes ruler of Kiev	
				c. 987	conversion of Vladimir	

945 Buyids take Baghdad; 'Abbasid Caliphs under Buyid control until 1055

Chronology of main events, 238–1000 *(continued)*

British Isles	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	North Africa	Near East
980 Viking raids on southern England				
991 Battle of Maldon	994 Otto III attains his majority			
990s mounting Viking attacks	1000 Conversion of Iceland	995–1000 Olaf Tryggvason king of Norway		
	1002 death of Otto III			

Preface to the first edition

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 permit, 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: *Scripsi 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 the first edition 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

Preface to the second edition

Thanks to that miracle of modern publishing, the text of a book on computer disk, it has been both possible and relatively easy to make changes and corrections throughout. Not only has this meant that errors detected since the first publication of this book, including the most delightful of all, the entirely spurious Anskar's *Life of Rimbert*, which eluded detection by both author and first readers alike, have been purged, but it has also been possible to make stylistic improvements throughout. In addition, an entirely new chapter on Spain after the Arab Conquest has been included, while the one dealing with the Ottonian Empire has been significantly expanded.

The early medieval centuries have enjoyed a period of remarkable prosperity and growth in terms of the research that has been carried out and the books and articles published on a wide range of subjects relating to them in the course of the 1990s. This flourishing of scholarship has been taken account of as much as has been possible in the preparation of this second edition, and has influenced changes to the text throughout. It will also be seen to be reflected in alterations and additions to both the notes to each chapter and to the general bibliography. In some cases it may be too early to see what constitutes genuine advances in our understanding of this complex period and what may prove to be false starts or misleading trails. Only time will tell.

As in the original edition, the selection of subjects for inclusion and the interpretations offered have ultimately to be matters of personal choice and conviction. While trying to take account of the great wealth of current and past scholarship relating to this period, seven hundred years of the history of Europe, North Africa and parts of the Middle East are not easily to be covered, and fashions in historiography can change rapidly. However, in making revisions I have generally tried to be less judgmental, leaving the reader even greater scope to make her and his decisions as to the merits of the cases argued here.

Edinburgh
March 1998

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’ (that is 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 exciting 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 that would take place 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 at the very end of this 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. These would be taken even further to the east in the succeeding centuries, when the German realm that was brought into being under the Ottonian kings and emperors, established itself as the dominant force in central Europe. At the same time a resurgent Byzantine Empire was once more extending its own influence both westwards and northwards, not least into the region that would become Russia, thus creating a long-lasting divide in the cultural traditions of Europe.

To turn once more 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.

For Judith