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A REVIEW OF PETER BROWN'S *THE WORLD OF LATE ANTIQUITY*: VISION, FRAMEWORK, AND APPROACH

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Abstract: First published in 1971, *The World of Late Antiquity* written by Peter Brown profoundly shaped the research paradigm of the late antiquity period. This article offers a review of the book by analyzing the shift in its vision, the reconstruction of its narrative and postmodern character of its methodological approach. Rather than adhering to the dominant narrative of "decline and fall" since Edward Gibbon, Peter Brown reframes the late antiquity world as a period of "transformation". This review engages with Peter Brown's broader contributions to social, religious and spiritual history, and his emphasis on marginal regions, non-mainstream participant. The review also situates the book in the context of post-modern historiography.
Keywords: Peter Brown; Late antiquity; Transformation; Roman Empire; Post-modern historiography

1 INTRODUCTION

Peter Brown, the author of *The World of Late Antiquity*, graduated from the University of Oxford and is the Philip and Beulah Rollins Professor of History Emeritus at Princeton University. His major works include *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (1967), *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971), *The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity* (1971), *The Body and Society* (1988), *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000* (1996), and *Through the Eye of a Needle* (2012). Throughout his oeuvre, Brown's historical scholarship has focused on the social, cultural, intellectual, corporeal, spiritual, and ecclesiastical history of the Mediterranean world (and its broader Near Eastern and Western European contexts) from the third century onward, a period conventionally situated in the interstitial space between the "Classical Age" and the Middle Ages. His work has been instrumental in redefining the conventional boundaries of classical antiquity. Widely regarded as the pioneering figure in the field of Late Antiquity studies, Brown has significantly expanded the conceptual frontiers of what constitutes the "Classical period" in traditional historiography[1].

The World of Late Antiquity was commissioned by Thames & Hudson or their "Library of European Civilization" series as a work of public-facing scholarship. Nevertheless, its academic rigor remains uncompromised, and its widespread dissemination within the broader scholarly community significantly contributed to establishing "Late Antiquity" as a distinct historical period worthy of specialized study[2]. In 2024, the Thames & Hudson published the new edition of The World of Late Antiquity, 36 years after the revised edition was published in 1988, and more than half a century after the first edition in 1971. The monograph is structurally divided into two parts: (1) "The Late Roman Revolution" examines the emergence of new social strata, reconfigured power structures, novel intellectual currents, shifting collective mentalities, and transformative religious movements within Roman society through dual socio-religious lenses. (2) "Divergent Legacies" employs comparative analysis of Mediterranean political entities to trace how late antique traditions developed regional particularities during their transmission. This paper conducts a critical examination of Brown's conceptual framework, narrative architecture, and methodological approaches in *The World of Late Antiquity*, with particular attention to how this historiographical intervention reoriented scholarly engagement with the late antique period.

2 SOCIETY, FRONTIERS, AND THE PSYCHE: NEW PERSPECTIVES BEYOND POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND MILITARY HISTORY

Peter Brown places particular emphasis on social history methodology, employing its analytical framework to examine the transformative processes of Late Antiquity. The inaugural chapter of *The World of Late Antiquity* systematically reconstructs the social landscape of this period, deliberately constructing a vivid sociological framework for readers whose prior understanding may have been confined to traditional political-military historiography.

The initial focus of inquiry concerns famine and grain supply logistics. "In the first place, the classical Mediterranean had always been a world on the edge of starvation." "Once a cargo left the waters of the Mediterranean or of a great river, its brisk and inexpensive progress changed to a ruinous slow-motion. It cost less to bring a cargo of grain from one end of the Mediterranean to another than to carry it another seventy-five miles inland." "The Roman of the great land routes, empire appears at its most cumbersome and brutal in the ceaseless effort it made to bold itself together." The maintenance of these state mechanisms fell to an aristocracy united by shared cultural codes and aesthetic sensibilities. Remarkably, six centuries after Plato's era, Hellenic culture retained remarkable vitality. By this period, Greek elites had fully internalized Roman political identity as their own, while contemporaneous sources note that "A shift of the centre of gravity of the Roman empire towards the Greek cities of Asia Minor." In the political and social

spheres, a new professional military class emerged as the structural backbone of the state. As documented in the *Cambridge Ancient History*, "By the end of the third century, its officers and administrators had ousted the traditional aristocracy from control of the empire." "The new upper classes brought with them reminders of their brisk military origins", as evidenced by their adoption of formalized attire derived from Danubian frontier military dress rather than the traditional Roman toga. Beyond the imperial court and army, "The great landowners had continued to amass great estates, and the classical system of education had continued to turn out young men roomed in conservative ways." The 4th-century elite perceived themselves as inhabiting an "Age of Restoration" (*Reparatio Saeculi*). Their lavish mosaic-adorned villas starkly manifested growing wealth disparities: "The income of a Roman senator could be as much as 120,000 gold pieces, that of a courtier at Constantinople 1000; but that of a merchant only 200, and of a peasant 5 gold pieces a year." This new aristocracy demonstrated deeper provincial roots — "By the fourth century, most 'senators' had never seen Rome... They visited the same towns and stayed at the same villas where they passed their time as private persons.... Taxes were paid and recruits appeared for the army because the grate landowners ensured that their peasants did what they were told." Facing the terror of tax collectors, the plebeian masses' "all attempts to secure protection and redress of grievances had to pass through a great man — a patronus — 'the boss' (as in French, le patron)." Yet civic participation waned as 4th-century elites prioritized imperial titles over traditional euergetism. Private life flourished through palatial villas where patron-client networks sustained Greek philosophical traditions. Archaeological evidence from regional mosaics confirms Brown's thesis of expanding *Romanitas* — now a universal identity claimable by all imperial subjects.

A defining hallmark of The World of Late Antiquity lies in its expansive geographical scope and pioneering engagement with frontier studies. Brown's analysis systematically incorporates diverse actors ranging from metropolitan bishops to peripheral communities across the Near Eastern, North African, Danube, and Britannic limes zones, while foregrounding the emergent agency of new participants in the imperial periphery.

In Chapter 3 "The West", Peter Brown examines the causes and consequences of barbarian invasions: "The barbarian settlers in the West found themselves both powerful and unabsorbable. They were encapsulated by a wall of dumb hatred. They could not have been 'detribalized' even if they had wanted to be, because as 'barbarians' and heretics they were marked men. The intolerance that greeted the barbarian immigration, therefore, led directly to the formation of the barbarian kingdoms." "Yet in China the barbarians 'went native' within a few generations... The Visigothic, the Ostrogothic and the Vandal kingdoms of western Europe were never absorbed in this way: they survived as foreign bodies, perched insecurely on top of populations who ignored them and set about the more congenial business of looking after themselves." Chapter 4 "Byzantium" extensively addresses provincial taxation systems, governance structures, and social organization. Chapter 5 "The New Participants" focuses on Muhammad and the rise of the Islamic world within late antiquity. Brown's narrative includes Arab cultural exchanges with surrounding societies: "Even non-Muslims quickly absorbed Arab culture. The Christians of southern Spain, for instance, were called 'Mozarabic' because, though Christians, they nevertheless 'wished to be like Arabs'. 'Many of my co-religionists wrote a ninth-century bishop of Cordova, 'read verses and fairy-tales of the Arabs, and study the works of Muhammadan philosophers and theologians, not in order to refute them, but to learn to express themselves in the Arab language more correctly and more elegantly.'"

A defining characteristic of Peter Brown's scholarly trajectory has been his sustained focus on religious history, intellectual history, and the history of mentalities. Through judicious incorporation of psychoanalytic perspectives, combined with methodologies from social and cultural history, Brown employs diverse primary sources—including personal correspondence, homiletic texts, and epigraphic evidence—to vividly reconstruct the inner lives of Mediterranean populations fifteen centuries past. This approach finds particular expression in Chapter 2 "Religion" of *The World of Late Antiquity*. The chapter commences with an evocative citation of oneirological accounts recorded by Aelius Aristides (118-180 CE), the second-century Greek rhetorician, thereby granting readers direct access to contemporary thought processes. Brown's analysis reveals how populations of this era increasingly manifested what he identifies as a distinctive "new mood"—a collective psychological shift reflecting late antique spiritual sensibilities. "The individual had a growing sense of possessing something in himself that was infinitely valuable and yet painfully unrelated to the outside world." Relationships with the divine became more privatized and less communal, with a growing tendency to appeal to higher, more abstract deities rather than lesser gods. The cosmos grew more mysterious and inscrutable. "The sense of an imminent 'breakthrough' of divine energy in the inner world of the individual had revolutionary effects... Pagan and Christian writings of the 'new mood' share an interest in 'conversion' in its sharpest sense—that is, they regarded it as possible for the 'real' divine self suddenly to emerge at the expense of the individual's normal social identity." "The 'new mood' encouraged men to feel that they needed to defend their identity by drawing sharp boundaries round it. They fitted less easily into their communities and felt out of place in the physical world. They stood aloof and alone with their One God. By conversion, by accepting a revelation, they cut themselves off from their own past and from the beliefs of the mass of their fellows." The development of the Christian Church must be understood within this social transformation—it offered a unified, egalitarian community in a fluid society, providing those who felt alienated and "abandoned" an opportunity for radical rupture, creating "a new and self-sufficient world." "The individual could drop from a wide impersonal world into a miniature community, whose demands and relations were explicit." Paganism and philosophy also experienced revival after the 2nd century. "By the mid-fourth century Athens was once again a thriving university city." Pagan philosophers and rhetoricians now self-identified as "Hellenes" adhering to "Hellenism", demonstrating important non-Christian dimensions of late antique society. Plotinus exemplified this trend—initially influenced by Gnosticism but ultimately returning to Platonic

dialectic. These "last Hellenes" profoundly influenced early medieval philosophy. For Christian thinkers, the relationship between Athens and Jerusalem became a central concern. "When the humanists of the Renaissance rediscovered Plato, what caught their enthusiasm was not the Plato of the modern classical scholar, but the living Plato of the religious thinkers of Late Antiquity." However, by the 4th century, "from being a sect ranged against or to one side of Roman civilization, Christianity had become a church prepared to absorb a whole society." Diocletian's reign brought relative peace, and Constantine's conversion fundamentally transformed Mediterranean paradigms. This period saw monastic expansion, with Brown analyzing saints' "privileged" interactions with power structures—their authority to advise rulers, issue prophecies, and pronounce condemnations ex cathedra, all of which facilitated Christianity's emergence as a mass religion. Brown also contrasts Eastern and Western monasticism: "In the West, the new ascetic piety tended to 'splinter' an already divided society." "In the East, by contrast, monasticism did not stand aloof. It flowed directly into the life of the great cities."

While *The World of Late Antiquity* remains a 200-page, illustrated popular history targeting general audiences—with its treatment of asceticism and hagiography necessarily broad in scope—Peter Brown's other monographs demonstrate far greater scholarly depth in their examination of Christian history and saintly cults. Through these specialized works, Brown systematically analyzes the sociopolitical functions of saints, their psychological and ideological impacts, and the divergent developmental trajectories between Eastern and Western traditions. His later monograph *Through the Eye of a Needle*, which focuses on the histoire des mentalités surrounding wealth in late antiquity, particularly excels in its detailed case studies of saints, bishops, aristocrats, and intellectuals. From Augustine (his biographical subject) to Jerome, from Symmachus (the "last Roman aristocrat") to Ambrose of Milan, Brown meticulously reconstructs shifting attitudes toward wealth through these figures' lives, writings, correspondence, and social interactions—thereby elucidating how the "camel passed through the needle's eye" in late antique consciousness. The documentary legacy of saints, often dismissed as fantastical legends under the positivist "scientific historiography" of the 19th century, has been rehabilitated by groundbreaking works like *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Such scholarship established the crucial methodological paradigm of examining how symbolic systems, discursive contexts, and structural frameworks shaped historical action.

The authors of primary literary sources for Late Antique studies can be broadly categorized into the following groups: classicizing historians, breviaria, ecclesiastical historians, and apologetic historians—their works exhibiting varying degrees of religious influence[3]. Stylistically, some continued the tradition of Roman historians like Tacitus and Livy, while others used history to defend Christianity or attack opposing views. Consequently, these works primarily focused on rulers, generals, and ecclesiastical history. Peter Brown, however, draws upon a wider range of documentary evidence and archaeological materials to reveal previously overlooked dimensions of the world of late antiquity. At the societal level, continuity and resilience prove more enduring than political and military upheavals. As stated in Chapter 1 of *The World of Late Antiquity*: "The history of Athens illustrates an important facet of the civilization of Late Antiquity. In this period, tenacious survivals, regroupings of traditional forces and rediscoveries of the past are quite as important as the radical changes we have just been describing. Future ages were to owe as much to the revivals as to the innovations of the Late Antique period." "More even than in the case of the landed aristocracy, we are dealing with a world of long traditions, that changed slowly and had merely regrouped itself, without any break with the past." Given this new perspective, it is hardly surprising that fresh understandings of Late Antiquity have emerged. However, while emphasizing the innovative approaches of Late Antique scholars, we must also recognize that the assumption that these authors prioritized social history at the expense of political and military history is a stereotype, particularly when applied to *The World of Late Antiquity*, a work with an introductory survey nature. In the book's second part, Brown dedicates considerable attention to Barbarian invasions in the West, Justinian's reconquests, Arab military expansions, and so on. This shift in focus should be seen not as a rejection of traditional political and military historiography—which had already been extensively explored—but as a scholarly expansion and complement. The new perspective, along with the revised understanding of Late Antiquity it fosters, is far from a nihilistic tendency or a simplistic rebellion against conventional historical writing. Rather, this reinterpretation—rescuing the history of the later Roman Empire from the "decline" narrative and reconstructing it through a "transformation" lens—will be the focus of the next section.

3 FROM DECLINE TO TRANSFORMATION: HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION THROUGH A NEW NARRATIVE

The narrative of Western Roman imperial collapse dominated pre-modern understandings of Late Antiquity, with Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776) constituting its most seminal formulation. Gibbon framed Rome's fall as a civilizational catastrophe where barbarism triumphed over enlightenment, attributing this to moral decay bred by prosperity, the erosion of civic virtue, and Christianity's diversion of attention from frontier defense and public affairs. The 19th-20th centuries witnessed fundamental shifts in historical methodology. While 19th-century scholarship emphasized economic factors, 20th-century historiography progressively incorporated social, cultural, bodily, and psychological dimensions—without neglecting traditional concerns like fiscal systems, bureaucracy, military organization, agricultural production, and legal frameworks. A.H.M. Jones' magisterial *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (1964) remains indispensable in this regard (a work reviewed by Peter Brown himself). Peter Brown's transformative intervention reconceptualized Late Antiquity through a paradigm of *transformation* rather than narratives of catastrophic collapse, moral degeneration, or

revolutionary rupture. This theoretical reorientation marked a decisive historiographical turning point. *The World of Late Antiquity* is universally recognized as the epoch-making work that catalyzed this disciplinary shift, establishing Late Antiquity as a period of creative adaptation rather than terminal decline.

"To study such a period one must be constantly aware of the tension between change and continuity in the exceptionally ancient and well-rooted world round the Mediterranean." Specifically, the "transformation" narrative in *The World of Late Antiquity* is constructed through four principal research dimensions: first, shifting the analytical focus from abrupt political-military changes to more nuanced examinations of social stratification, where alterations in the daily lives of ordinary people manifested as gradual displacements over extended temporal frameworks; second, investigating subtle evolutions in psychological, emotional, and intellectual spheres, particularly the dialectical engagements between competing ideologies such as various Christian sects and Greek philosophical traditions; third, employing pluralistic source methodologies that incorporate diverse evidentiary materials including Byzantine artistic production; and fourth, adopting a trans-regional perspective that, when liberated from Western-centric constraints and viewing Byzantium and the Islamic world as legitimate heirs to Mediterranean civilization, reveals striking regional continuities standing in sharp contrast to Western disintegration. This analytical framework demonstrates how the transformation paradigm moves beyond traditional narratives of catastrophic collapse while maintaining terminological precision through concepts like "social-stratigraphic analysis," "archaeology of mentalities," and "regional particularity," all of which reflect Brown's innovative synthesis of *Annales* school *longue durée* approaches with material culture studies and postcolonial critiques of center-periphery models, as evidenced in both his original 1971 text and subsequent methodological reflections.

This paradigm shift has drawn considerable scholarly criticism, which can be summarized in two main points: "First, its excessive emphasis on continuity and structural transformation has led to relative neglect of change, particularly dramatic political and military upheavals... Archaeologists especially remain convinced of decisive historical ruptures in the sixth century. British archaeologist Richard Hodges, based on evidence from over one hundred excavated sites, maintains that such discontinuities were undeniable, with urban landscapes becoming fundamentally transformed." "Secondly, there are concerns about the skewed perspective of Late Antiquity scholars, who appear to have shifted from an overemphasis on politics and institutions to an equally disproportionate focus on religious culture. 'Late Antiquity' risks becoming reduced to a realm of exotic curiosities: desert monks, ecstatic virgins, and conflicts dominated by religion, mentalities, and lifestyles."[4]

However, it should be noted that Peter Brown's approach does not stem from deliberate cherry-picking of evidence or tendentious interpretation, but rather reflects his specific research focus. Reflecting on his academic career, Brown praised Princeton University's exceptional collections of archaeological reports, inscriptions, papyri, and texts as "the Footnote Capital of the Western World"—resources that significantly shaped his textually-oriented methodology[5]. Moreover, as previously mentioned, even in The World of Late Antiquity (a work intended for general readership), Brown dedicates substantial attention to political and military developments in its second part. Modern scholarship observes that in the half-century since its publication, both "decline" and "transformation" narratives have maintained their interpretive vitality without necessarily being mutually exclusive. "Within the pluralistic context of modern academia, these debates have become more nuanced rather than bifurcated into opposing camps. Yet historiographically speaking, due to the dichotomous nature of extant sources, these two methodological approaches continue to coexist latently.[4]" Researchers should therefore adopt complementary paradigms to achieve a more comprehensive understanding.

The distinction between viewing the Late Antique world through the lenses of "decline" or "transformation" fundamentally represents divergent perspectives on historical change. Similar historiographical debates have persisted across different epochs from classical antiquity to the present, spanning various domains including politics, economics, and science. Examples include whether the Middle Ages should be characterized as a disparaged "Dark Age" or rather as an era that gave birth to numerous institutions and concepts such as social structures, urban centers, universities, nation-states, and commercial systems; whether the Industrial Revolution constituted a sudden breakthrough or a gradual evolution; whether the French Revolution represented a radical rupture or a long-term development; and whether the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe in the late twentieth century signified systemic collapse or prolonged structural transformation. As the French Annales historian Jacques Le Goff argued in *Faut-il vraiment découper l'histoire en tranches?* (*Must We Really Divide History into Slices?*), any periodization of history inevitably involves a degree of arbitrariness. Rather than being a neutral scholarly exercise, it constitutes a choice imbued with ideological and power dimensions, reflecting how we understand, narrate, and construct history. Peter Brown vividly illustrates this point in his autobiographical lecture, where he recounted how archaeologists excavating Byzantine sites along the southern coast of Turkey uncovered magical tablets blending pagan, Jewish, and Christian elements—reminding us that the people living through Late Antiquity were entirely unaware that "Late Antiquity" was happening to them[5].

In summary, *The World of Late Antiquity* has provided academia with a profoundly innovative and heuristic perspective, endowing Late Antique studies with acute sensitivity to cultural meanings, social imaginaries, identity construction, art history, the history of the body, memory, and the imperial periphery along with its adjacent regions. Its influence remains undiminished more than half a century after publication. This paradigm shift undoubtedly embodies distinct postmodern sensibilities—challenging grand narratives through its emphasis on fragmentation, hybridity, and the decentering of traditional historical subjects. Brown's methodology anticipated later theoretical turns by demonstrating how power operates through cultural discourses rather than merely through political institutions, while his interdisciplinary approach blurred conventional boundaries between social history, religious studies, and anthropology.

The work's enduring relevance lies precisely in its ability to reveal the constructed nature of historical periodization while recovering the lived experiences of those who inhabited this liminal epoch.

4 BETWEEN DECONSTRUCTION AND SUBSTANCE: POSTMODERN APPROACHES TO HISTORIOGRAPHY

Postmodern historical writing has fundamentally moved away from centering on states, nations, and political leaders, instead focusing more extensively on diverse social groups. This approach consciously rejects Grand Narratives and abandons the positivist ideal of "objective representation," emphasizing instead that historical texts are constructed and imagined products. Consequently, it advocates adopting a critical perspective to examine who gets to narrate history and through what means this narration occurs.

Peter Brown emphasizes applying literary theory to textual interpretation rather than studying "pure texts" in isolation. As he observes, "If every age gets the historiography it deserves, then the Christian writers of late antiquity, skilled rhetoricians and stubborn producers of powerful, self-interested 'representations' of their world, have gotten theirs: a properly postmodern 'hermeneutics of suspicion.'" He argues that scholars must "sift through these texts again and again, searching for hitherto unconsidered fragments of evidence, hints of unresolved anomalies, and alternative voices lurking at the margins of the evidence." This focus on marginalized groups, non-dominant narratives, and latent textual meanings carries distinct postmodern undertones. Brown maintains that through such hermeneutical engagement with texts, we gain greater appreciation for "the more gentle, slower changes and the less verbally explicit phenomena"[5]. The extensive resources of Princeton University Library provided him with ideal conditions for this approach. During his tenure at UC Berkeley, Brown was profoundly influenced by the institution's interdisciplinary methodologies, the context in which he authored *The Body and Society*. His scholarly trajectory also intersected with that of Michel Foucaul[6]. Brown has acknowledged his intellectual debt to Foucault's work and cherished their academic friendship.

In *The World of Late Antiquity*, the postmodern characteristics of its historical methodology manifest in several key aspects: First, in its approach to source materials, the book employs a "postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion" toward texts. It deconstructs traditional literary sources while innovatively utilizing them, while also incorporating interdisciplinary materials from diverse fields—most notably through its inclusion of over a hundred exquisite illustrations, predominantly archaeological portraits, which reflect the world as seen through the eyes of Late Antiquity's "silent subjects," capturing both their surroundings and self-perceptions. Second, the work challenges grand narratives by presenting multiple dimensions of society, culture, and thought, thereby contesting singular "decline and fall" interpretations. Through marginal perspectives, it reveals the diverse facets of Late Antique society, demonstrating history as an ongoing process of interpretation and construction. Third, it rejects historical teleology and determinism, denying simplistic progress/decline narratives or linear historical trajectories, instead emphasizing societal "transformation" as its central analytical framework.

This postmodern historical methodology can be understood as a response to historiographical traditions[7]. *The World of Late Antiquity* is firmly situated within twentieth-century historiography, with several contemporary scholarly currents subtly reflected in its approach. First, the influence of the Annales School is discernible, as is that of psychohistory. However, while these methodological trends and concepts undoubtedly shaped Brown's thinking, his work cannot be neatly categorized under either school. Compared to the Annales School's preferred *longue durée* framework, Peter Brown's conception of "Late Antiquity" remains more circumscribed, retaining space for political and military perspectives (though when pressed on the endpoint of Late Antiquity, he famously quipped, "Always later than you think"). Brown also focuses more intently on the roles of individuals—saints, bishops, ascetics—rather than privileging economic, demographic, or geographic factors as Braudel and his generation tended to do. His approach avoids excessive structural determinism, instead infusing history with vivid literary sensibility. While Freudian psychoanalytic methods and terminology commonly employed by psychohistorians are conspicuously absent in *The World of Late Antiquity*, Brown examines the dynamic interplay between sociocultural contexts and psychological shifts (such as what he terms the "new mood"). As noted in the preface: "No one can deny the close links between the social and the spiritual revolution of the Late Antique period. Yet, just because they are so intimate, such links cannot be reduced to a superficial relationship of 'cause and effect'. Often, the historian can only say that certain changes coincided in such a way that the one cannot be understood without reference to the other." Beyond the Annales School and psychohistory, other emerging methodologies of the era, such as cliometrics, appear in works by fellow "Late Antique" scholars. For instance, Ian Wood's *The Transformation of the Roman West* employs quantitative analysis of surviving archival samples to estimate clerical population figures, thereby assessing Christianity's societal impact[8].

Peter Brown's historical writing is neither vacuous nor deliberately obscure, but rather substantively rich and elegantly crafted. His methodology therefore represents not radical postmodern deconstruction, but rather the revelation of history's multifaceted dimensions within a structured framework that stimulates critical reflection. This measured engagement with postmodern historiography assumes particular significance when considering the work's original purpose as a publication intended for public readership.

5 CONCLUSION

The World of Late Antiquity stands not merely as an exemplary work of popular history, but as a paradigm for contemporary public history writing that masterfully integrates cutting-edge historiographical research with postmodern methodologies. While maintaining remarkable readability, Brown demonstrates profound scholarly depth and methodological innovation throughout the text. His conceptualization of "Late Antiquity" as a distinct field of study, coupled with multifaceted analyses of social, cultural, and religious transformations, has fundamentally reshaped academic perspectives and approaches to this historical period.

Following the seminal works of Peter Brown and other scholars of the "Late Antique school," there emerged a profound re-evaluation of the "decline or transformation" debate. Employing contemporary historical methodologies and diverse perspectives—including quantitative analysis, climate and environmental history, and plague studies—these scholars reassessed the extent of the Roman Empire's decline while enriching its conceptual dimensions. Concurrently, "Late Antiquity" rapidly established itself as a distinct field of study, evidenced by the proliferation of specialized journals, international conferences, and authoritative publication projects from Oxford University Press, Blackwell, and Johns Hopkins University Press. The most telling example of this disciplinary recognition can be found in the second edition of *The Cambridge Ancient History*, which expanded beyond its original twelve-volume framework (dating from the early 20th century) to include Volumes XIII and XIV, extending the endpoint of the ancient world to AD 600 while extensively incorporating the research findings and methodologies of Brown and his fellow Late Antique scholars. Undoubtedly, the study of Late Antiquity has flourished remarkably since the publication of *The World of Late Antiquity*.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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