Introduction

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This collection of essays on Late Antiquity was composed as a collaborative textbook by the students of my Fall 2020 HIS 307 Late Antiquity course. We set out to create these resources for other students and researchers due to the demonstrable lack of accessible, student-friendly texts on Late Antiquity. The students created this essay collection from its conception to its finish with only minimal guidance from me, and our Humanities Librarian, Ms. Kristen Bailey. Students collaboratively selected on chapter topics, decided on chapter order, and chose chapter assignments. Each student author had complete authorial latitude within their chapter; however, as part of the final assignment students read and commented on each other’s chapter drafts. The result was that the class pushed each student expand or in some cases, refine, their chapters to suit the book as a whole better. The students ultimately decided it was crucial to link the chapters with intertextual citations, which they added during the final review period. What is printed included here represents the final chapters turned in by 11 of the 12 students. Due to medical reasons, the twelfth student was unable to complete their final draft, which was on the historiography of the Fall of Rome – an unfortunate but understandable omission. The text was formatted by another Mercer History student, Rachel Wright.
Chapter One

*Studying Late Antiquity’s Origins*

Caroline Smith

Studying Late Antiquity involves studying Roman culture. Roman culture, like many other cultures, had a wide variety of aspects involved. What makes Roman culture unique is the influence it has had on later societies. The concept of citizenship in a modern context relies heavily on understanding the idea of Roman citizenship.¹ Of course, there are many aspects of Roman culture that are still relevant. This textbook highlights different aspects of Roman culture, and it’s important to understand all of these within the context of Late Antiquity. But first, it’s important to determine what Late Antiquity is.

**Periodization of Late Antiquity**

The study of Late Antiquity is one that encompasses a broad time period across multiple areas of the world. While the actual boundaries of Late Antiquity are still debated, there are distinct characteristics of Late Antiquity that are typically accepted. One of the most widely accepted events of Late Antiquity is the highly debated “Fall of Rome.” Whether one believes Rome “fell” or not, most historians can agree that the end of the Roman Empire is a distinct and key feature of the period.

First, it’s important to discuss the ever-pressing question about when exactly Late Antiquity falls in the course of human existence. It’s already been stated that the “fall” of Rome is an essential event for the period of Late Antiquity and for the purposes of this essay, this gradual fall took place between 395-476 CE, so the period of Late Antiquity has to include those

¹ See Chapter Two
dates. However, the exact boundaries vary from scholar to scholar. There are a couple of things that heavily influence this lack of clear distinction in the period.

The first is that some historians rely heavily on Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ideas of what Late Antiquity is. In the Enlightenment period, they “understood the collapse of Rome to issue in a period of cultural stagnation and religious superstition.” Rome’s fall, according to Enlightenment-era historians, is the main signifier between Antiquity and the Middle Ages. This period was then dubbed the Dark Ages (as a stark contrast to the Enlightenment). According to these beliefs about Late Antiquity, the period should begin with the decline of Rome. Comfortably, the period of Late Antiquity starts in 395 CE (give or take) because that’s the first big shift in the period.

Once 476 CE comes around, historians debate what the ending date of Late Antiquity as a period should be. There are a few options for end dates, all of them categorized by shifts in leadership. Scholars heavily debate whether Late Antiquity ended with the early Muslim conquests of the Iberian peninsula or with Charlemagne’s reign. Charlamagne’s reign is notable for the fact that he helped unite Europe in a way that had not been done since the Roman empire. With his death in 814 CE, most historians agree that Late Antiquity came to an end.

Periodization is problematic by nature, but it’s important to help set a timeline that can help distinguish different trends in history. It’s important to keep in mind that while it’s easy to look back on a certain period in time and see the who/what/when/why/how, the history that is passed on is much more complex than what historians get to see. Even when looking back, attempting to place these boundaries on history proves to be a difficult task.

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Roughly, Late Antiquity begins in 395 CE and ends in 814 CE. The idea of Late Antiquity began around the Enlightenment period when it was dubbed the Dark Ages, but the term Late Antiquity was not a common phrase until a scholar named Peter Brown wrote “The World of Late Antiquity” published in 1971. Brown is often regarded as one of the key players in the formation of studying Late Antiquity. Of course, this term did not just pop up out of nowhere. The term originally comes from “an English book-title in a 1945 catalog of late antique textiles by Paul Friedlaender ... which presumably borrowed the term from Wulff and Volbach’s earlier catalog of late antique textiles.” However, it wasn’t until Peter Brown’s use of it did the phrase become more popular amongst historians. James even dubs Peter Brown “the Father of Late Antiquity”, but if he’s not that, “then certainly he is its presiding genius”.

This is the opening chapter for a textbook discussing the different aspects of Western Late Antiquity. Note that this book does not really include any sort of Eastern history. Rather, it focuses on what is now called the “West.” The physical location of the “West” shifts constantly but for purposes of this textbook, the “West” would be Central and Southern Europe with some North African influences. Geography is always important when studying history but especially in the study of Late Antiquity. Noting the geographical boundaries is important for understanding exactly who historians are studying. In this case, the focus will be on the “West.”

The study of Late Antiquity is a relatively new one with Peter Brown being one of the earliest, self-proclaimed historians of Late Antiquity. Since the release of “The World of Late Antiquity” by Peter Brown, the study of this field has expanded dramatically. Even the simple (or not so simple) time constraints of what Late Antiquity continues to be debated. Being the stepping-stone between Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages, this period is often seen as one

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with little cultural development and even considered a period of stagnation. However, this view of Late Antiquity is heavily embedded in the Enlightenment period and how Enlightenment historians viewed the world in the wake of growing importance on logic and reason. The period of Late Antiquity in the West was a period of heavy instability between religious growth and rapid political changes, so it’s no wonder there was a dip in cultural creation and cultural ‘advancement.’

Understanding what Late Antiquity is will help further the study of Roman culture. Roman citizenship is one of those aspects of Roman culture that has heavily influenced society in a myriad of ways. Chapter two will dive into Roman citizenship and how that has had influence over the study of Late Antiquity.
Bibliography


Chapter 2

The Role of Roman Citizenship in Late Antiquity

Davis Varner

Citizenship is an ever changing and evolving concept. From the beginning of civilization, there have been in and out groups and some ideas of citizenship. Throughout the rise and “fall” of the Roman Empire, citizenship constantly evolved. Citizenship was meaningful and often was connected with social structures and the rights of people living in the Roman Empire. For example, marriage in Rome was often connected to different levels of citizenship, and in some cases, it was illegal for citizens to marry non-citizens. Citizenship often gave people advantages. There were legal advantages as well as social advantages that accompanied levels of citizenship. Again, citizenship was a constantly evolving discipline in Rome. Emperors had different policies, and some even changed their policies several times. There were some emperors who would have fought for more of what we would think of as universal citizenship, and there were some who gave citizenship to what they classified as a true roman. Overall, the idea of citizenship in Rome is very complex in nature. With the constant shifts in power and ideology, Rome experienced many different policies on citizenship. However, even with the constant shifts in ideology, many countries around the world still follow Roman lead on the idea of citizenship, and their principals still remain influential today.

Rights Associated with Citizenship

Roman Citizens had the right to many different things based on their level of citizenship. In many cases, you were given rights like marriage and a legal will and testament based on being a citizen. “Glimpses of Daily Life: From the Papyri of Karanis” goes as far as to say, “The Romans prized citizenship and viewed citizens as belonging in a higher social class and
exempted them from paying certain taxes.”

Citizenship was hierarchical in nature. In Edicts of Augustus and Decree of the Senate Judicial Process, there is a breakdown in the levels of citizenship and how that connects to legal issues. The people of Rome are split into groups based off of census ratings. These groups are important to the interpretation of the law and influence decisions made regarding the law. The quote says:

Emperor Caesar Augustus, pontifex maximus, holding the tribunician power for the seventeenth time, saluted imperator for the fourteenth time, proclaims: Since I find that in the province of Cyrene there are altogether 215 Roman citizens of every age whose census rating is 2,500 denarii or more, and that the jurors are drawn from this number in which several cliques are known to exist, and since the delegations coming from the cities of the province have complained that these cliques are unfair to Greeks in capital crimes, when the same people act as prosecutors and as witnesses for each other in turn, and since I myself have learned that some innocent persons have been overwhelmed in this way and have suffered the death penalty, until the Senate decides on this point or I myself find some better remedy, it appears to me that the governors of Crete and Cyrene will do wisely and fittingly, if they appoint in the province of Cyrene an equal number of jurors from both Greeks and Romans of greatest wealth and not less than twenty-five years of age, having a census rating and property of not less than 7,500 denarii, if a sufficient number of such men can be found, or, if the number of jurors to be placed on the album cannot be provided in this way, they shall post as jurors citizens who have the half of this amount of wealth and not less than half to sit on capital cases involving Greeks.

This quotation shows how important census ratings were in the Roman legal system. In this quote the Greeks have a noticeably different role in court than a Roman. In the same way, Romans were offered more rights based on their citizenship. Even in the case of Roman people, there were more rights associated with climbing the citizenship hierarchy. Certain citizens had access to higher Census ratings, which in turn affected the way that they were seen by the law in Rome. Ralph W. Mathisen states “the primary distinction in Roman law now was not even

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between citizen and non-citizen, but between free and degrees of legal disability, as denoted by being, for example, a slave, a freedman, a *colonus*, a *dediticius*, or a person under a sentence of *infamia*. Free status conveyed full access to *ius civile*, whereas nonfree status, as always, brought non-citizen status in the sense of incomplete access to *ius civile*.”

**Evolving of Citizenship in Rome**

The Roman Empire saw constant change in what it meant to be a citizen and what that looked like legally. Some emperors believed that you had to be perfectly Roman to be considered a citizen. Others gave rights to Barbarians who had fought alongside the Romans in battle. There were emperors who banned citizenship for people who had fought against Rome in battle, even if Rome annexed their lands. The tides of citizenship constantly changed. Ralph W. Mathisen says, “In 447, a *novella* (new law) of the emperor Valentinian III (425–455) spoke of the testamentary rights of ‘a *libertus*, who will have obtained the privilege of Roman citizenship.’ In exceptional cases, slaves could become citizens directly, without any intermediate process. Indeed, nearly all, if not all, of the acquisitions of citizenship attested after 212 resulted from promotions from servile to free status. This is what really was at issue; citizenship was merely the legal vehicle used to enable these changes.” Major changes were common during the reign of separate Emperors in the Empire. *Constitutio Antoniniana* is a document that is a transcription of an edict by a Roman Emperor about changes in citizenship laws.

Edict of the [Emperor Caesar] M. Aurelius [Severus] Antoninus Augustus.... 'I grant, therefore, to all [free persons throughout the Roman] world the citizenship of the

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Romans, [no other legal status remaining] except that of the dediticians; for it seems fair, [that the masses not only] should bear all the burdens, but participate in the victory as well. [This my own] edict is to reveal the majesty of the Roman people. [For this majesty happens] to be superior to that of the other [nations], the [honour] in which [the Romans have excelled from the beginning], after no inhabitant of any country [in the world has been left without citizenship and] honour. [Referring to the] taxes [which exist at present, all are to pay what has been] imposed [on Romans, from the beginning of the 21st(?)] year, as it is law according to the edicts and letters, issued by us and our ancestors. Displayed publicly....]8

In this article, we can see changes made to the identity of citizenship in the Roman Empire under Caesar M. Aurelius Severus. In this quotation, he grants citizenship to all free people throughout the Roman world. Reading that, one would assume that free people would have citizenship in the empire, but that is not exactly true. Throughout the Roman empire, there was an evolving sense of what being a citizen meant. There was a major range in the number of people who received citizenship and the level to which they received it. There were points where Rome was the closest thing we have ever seen to universal citizenship. There were also times when Roman citizenship was considered sacred and was only given to certain members of society. Throughout the history of the Roman Empire, there was an evolution of a hierarchical system of citizenship in Rome. Over time citizenship became a rank associated with social class and was connected with legal rights. At times people were given major privileges based on what level of citizenship they had.

“Glimpses of Daily Life: From the Papyri of Karanis” tells the story of Roman citizens within a heavy Greek area. The article says, “The Romans prized citizenship and viewed citizens as belonging in a higher social class and exempted them from paying certain taxes. As a result, Karanis, with its Roman population, was different from most other towns in Egypt.”9

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8 The Text of the ‘Constitutio Antoniniana’ and the Three Other Decrees of the Emperor Caracalla Contained in Papyrus Gissensis
The Idea of Universal Citizenship and Modern-Day Equivalency

Rome is one of, if not the closest, to achieving universal citizenship. In many ways, they are comparable to both the European Union and the United States. “Like Rome, as *e pluribus unum*, the Latin motto on the U.S. dollar bill, suggests, Washington prefers national unity to imperial diversity, encouraging assimilation by choice. Such features are relatively uncommon in world history, and it is even more unusual to find them in a single country. From this point of view, the United States is more like republican Rome than it is like many of the past century's authoritarian states.” However, like both of these there were major changes throughout the history of the Roman Empire when citizenship was and was not universal in nature. In “Peregrini, Barbari, and Cives Romani: Concepts of Citizenship and the Legal Identity of Barbarians in the Later Roman Empire,” the author says, “In the Roman Empire, in the early second century, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus likewise spoke of being a ‘citizen of the World.’ Even the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180) called himself a ‘citizen of the world-city,’ opening that ‘under its laws equal treatment is meted out to all.’” Rome came the closest we have ever seen to universal citizenship. Rome was one of the largest empires we have ever seen and granted the rights of citizenship to almost anyone who wanted it. Although the reign of the Roman Empire was long ago, many of the countries and unions in the world have taken pieces of the Roman idea of citizenship, and it is still prevalent today.

Roman Citizenship bleeds over into many cultural aspects as we will see in future chapters. Later chapters in this textbook will take a deeper dive into how citizenship has an effect on women and children as well as art in the Late Antique Roman Empire.
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Chapter 3

*Barbarians: Who were they?*

Evelyn Johnson

When considering the ‘barbarian’, the image that is often conjured is a horde of hardened men in animal skins and speaking in guttural voices, and this image is exactly what the Roman empire portrayed of the barbarian in the heights of the empire’s rule. The ‘barbarian’ was any group who were decidedly non-Roman. The word barbarian originates from ancient Greece referring to those who babble when trying to speak Greek. It imitates the sound Greek speaking population would have heard from a non-Greek speaker sounding like “bar-bar.” The Romans took that definition and expanded to include any and all foreigners that they encountered. The word was especially relevant to the groups that were beginning to encroach on their borders.

The ‘barbarians’ were all grouped together, when in reality, there were many different tribes of barbarians that the Romans came into contact with. The main tribes to come into contact with the Romans were the Franks, Huns, Vandals, Saxons, and the Goths. González Sánchez argued the opinions developed as a result of “Roman imperialism, and the way in which the peoples of the Roman Empire interacted (militarily, culturally, economically, or otherwise) with the ‘barbarian’ peoples they encountered as a result of their territorial expansion…” I would agree with Sanchez that the barbarian image that came from the Romans’ opinion of the barbarians was simplistic and shorthanded. The nomadic and tribal groups were simply not

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Most historians relate to the ‘barbarians’ and the Romans through the cultural exchanges that did occur as a result of imperialistic Rome and in turn the encroaching barbarian groups.

The barbarians appeared hostile towards the Romans, and this reflects in the Roman’s documentation of their behavior and impact. The most influential tribes were largely the German tribes: the Goth, Lombards, Franks, Saxons, Angles, and Burgundians. Despite the cultural ties between them, the Germanic peoples all operated and fought as individual groups furthering the narrative of the isolated barbarian tribes.\(^\text{14}\) Other groups would also encroach on Roman lands, and it was this constant battling and fighting that allowed the Roman narrative of the ‘uncivilized barbarian’ to continue. Chapter 10 delves deeply into the Roman bias towards foreigners. In \textit{Writing the Barbarian Past}, Roman emperors were often “presented as having to keep the peace and defend Rome against the savage barbarians… the literary scheme of rebellious settler-barbarians is also quite common.”\(^\text{15}\) Very few of the Roman emperors sought to discover much beyond the fact that the barbarians were the perfect scapegoat for military escapades.

Romans and Byzantines developed specific strategy for the dealing with the barbarians. In Maurice’s \textit{Strategikon}, he describes that the Huns and those like them are hardy people who “are clever at estimating suitable opportunities…prefer to prevail over their enemies not so much by force as by deceit, surprise attacks, and cutting off supplies.”\(^\text{16}\) They were particularly concerned with their strange haphazard military strategy and way of life. The Byzantines thought of the Franks and Lombards as the “light-haired people” and grouped them together. They highlighted their kinship bonds and their skill at hand to hand combat. However, Maurice calls

\(^{15}\) Ghosh, \textit{Writing the Barbarian Past}, 11-12.
them “pampered and soft” and refers to their great wealth and hierarchical social structure. All in all, the Romans largely amassed the barbarians into two loosely defined groups and made little distinction between each.

**Role of Citizenship In Further Muddying the Narrative**

A vast majority of the barbarians “became Roman” through military service. From the third century on, it became standard for the empire to use largely barbarian forces to protect the borders of their kingdoms. The barbarians that were present were not actually the exotic and uncivilized peoples that the Roman literature would have its reader believe. The tribes developed treaties and relationships with the Roman administration and military. However, Caracalla, in 212 AD, declared that all people that resided within Rome’s border were now Roman citizens. The edict asserts, “I grant, therefore, to all foreigners throughout the Empire the Roman citizenship…This edict will enhance the majesty of the Roman people.” This edict only served to further obscure the definition of ‘barbarian’ and caused more tension between colliding cultures.

**The Franks**

The Franks originated as a group of people who were found on the border of the Roman empire that engaged in raiding and were eventually settled on the Rhine by Roman emperors. They, like many others, allied with the Romans and served in the Roman army. Clovis would bring the settlers together and unify the fighting forces of the Franks. The Franks were a heavily

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17 *Maurice’s Strategikon*, 119.
19 “Edicta Caracallae (English Translation).”
20 Please refer to Chapter 2 for more information on Roman citizenship and identity.
militarized group and quickly established dominance over previously Roman groups. Frankish rule extended over modern-day Germany, Italy, and Austria.\textsuperscript{21}

The Romans found it to be an adjustment when the Franks took control of previously Roman lands. A Roman writing home to an old friend described his life under new rule as “The princelings and allies who escorted him presented an aspect terrifying even in peacetime. Their feet from toe to ankle were laced in hairy shoes…the total effect was such that this bridal drama displayed a pageant of Mars no less than of Venus.”\textsuperscript{22} The Franks hoarded luxurious goods and carried themselves as aristocrats. Chapter 6 describes in detail their delicate glasswork and rich lifestyles. Although the Franks were definitively different from Roman in culture, their law codes carried certain Roman influences. Overall, the Frankish people’s language, law, and religion was a mix of both Germanic and Roman influences. In 585 CE, bishops in power established a law code called the Simonidean Constitutions rendering them untouchable by any other law. This code was imperial in style, mirroring Roman administration, and was not the only of its kind to surface among the “barbarian” Franks. The Franks were a largely unified group of people that had an existing culture and law that only borrowed from Roman influence.

**Goths**

The Goths came to Rome as refugees in the summer of 376 CE over the Danube river, retreating from the invading Huns. The Goths orchestrated an alliance with an emperor and settled in Roman lands across the Danube.\textsuperscript{23} The Gothic people served as soldiers for the Roman military and quickly rose through the ranks. The Romans were somewhat ambiguous about the

\textsuperscript{21} Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past*, 94-95.
incoming refugees. One such Roman, Ammianus Marcellinus, voiced his uncertainty of the foreigner saying, “With such stormy eagerness on the part of insistent men was the ruin of Rome brought in.” After the migration in Roman land, the Gothic people were at once locked in a land battle of tug of war with the Romans. After securing a victory at the Battle of Adrianople in 378 CE, the Gothic people attempted a take-over, but they fell short of victory. The Goths were split between two distinct groups: the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths. The Gothic leader Alaric would unify the two political groups and established the Gothic people as a strong Post-Roman state in the Sack of Rome in 410 CE. The Goths would carve a large portion of land from the Romans. Alaric’s actions demonstrated the evolution of the Goths from refugees to a powerful Post-Roman state.

Hun

The Huns were a nomadic people from what is now northwestern China and west-central Asia. When resources began to dissipate, the Huns began to migrate towards Gothic territory. The Huns lived a hardened lifestyle and almost live entirely on horseback. Like other equestrian societies, they made a living out of raiding and plundering. Attila united the Huns in 434 CE and established a stronghold in modern-day Hungary. The Huns lived still a largely nomadic life and their stronghold lacked cities. By 450 CE, the soldiers and Atilla allied with the Franks attacked Gaul, and Attila needed Gaul to keep the Hunnic Confederation together. In 452 CE, the Huns captures Milan and Attila had succeeded in his efforts to keep the Confederation of the different Hunnic groups together.

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25 Chapter 11 has excellent additional information on Ostrogothic art and culture.
26 Gwynn, The Goths, 47.
27 Scaliger, “Overwhelmed by Immigrants.”
28 “Huns and Vandals | Kanopy.”
“This race of untamed men, without encumbrances, aflame with an inhuman desire for plundering others’ property...”

The Huns quickly joined the fray of barbarian groups invading Roman lands. The Romans saw them as the epitome of savagery and their barbarian definition. However, they military prowess and ability to form a basic Confederation proved the Roman definition incorrect.

**Vandals**

The Vandals were renowned in the Roman empire for causing mass destruction. Victor of Vita describes the persecution of Christians after they sacked Rome in 455 CE. He says that the Vandals, “divided up the vast crowds of people; and, as is the way with barbarians, separated husbands from wives and children form parents.” However, the Vandals were not always considered a danger to the Roman people. The Vandals migrated closer to Roman lands because of the Hun. This placed them in conflict with the Goth, which resulted in their being removed from their small settlements at the Danube into Pannonia. The Vandals allied with the Romans and experienced “Romanization.” They adapted Arianism and trade patterns that mimicked the Romans. Gaiseric would unify the various tribes of the Vandal after his father’s failures. The Vandals in 428 CE would cross the Rhine and attack Gaul. The Vandals favored hand to hand combat and would eventually adapt to an equestrian dominant military. Once they had taken Gaul, Spain, and North Africa, the Vandals experience an unprecedented period of success and lived lives of luxury.

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30 Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past*.
33 Gaiseric was born into the Asding people of the Vandals. His father Godigisel experienced the pressure from the Hun invading Pannonia and chose to attack the Roman stronghold Raietia and failed. From this failure, Gaiseric was able to unify the various group of Vandals in order to recuperate from losses.
34 Simon MacDowall, *Conquerors of the Roman Empire: The Vandals*. (Pen & Sword, 2016) 122.
Justinian, emperor of the Byzantine empire, attempted to take back Roman land from the Vandals. However, the Vandal army had grown from the small and disjointed fighting forces that began the war. Each warrior was, according to Simon MacDowell, “an aristocrat, maintained on a large estate worked by subject Romans. Apart from enjoying life as a conqueror, the only real occupation for a Vandal man was to be a warrior. He probably has a string of good horses and was very well equipped…” Even so, the result of the war was that the Romans would take back Carthage, and the Vandals would retreat. However, by 439 CE, the Vandals would retake Carthage and the tax system and trading with North Africa would come to an almost halt. The Vandals are the perfect example of a society that goes against the Roman definition of a barbarian. They both experienced “Romanization” and had a structured society before they established a Post-Roman state.

**Conclusion**

The “barbarian” that Roman literature displays is not an accurate portrayal of the true culture and social structure of each culture. Romans categorized barbarians’ groups based on broad generalizations and stereotypes that they had developed in battle. Their analysis of the society remains steeped in the opposing side’s military strategy and the behavior that follows after the battle is won. They defined them by their “otherness” and often got it wrong. The word barbarian does not appropriately describe the intricate cultures that were present at the Roman borders, nor does it speak to what the group accomplished in the Post-Roman state. They cannot simply be grouped together as one because even the Roman definition fails after the Edict of Caracalla is in place. Barbarians represent the blending of culture that occurred in the years following the “fall” of the Roman empire.

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35 MacDowall, *Conquerors of the Roman Empire*, 122-123.
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Chapter 4

The Christian Narrative of Late Antiquity

Miranda “Randi” Jackson

The Christian narrative throughout Late Antiquity not only shapes many different aspects of the post-Roman world, but also allows the reader to fully understand many different significant players of the time. While Christianity was not the only religion of the time, its lens has been the main viewpoint that both writers at the time and historians have used to explain this particular era. Modern-day historians have taken care to be cautious of the Christian narrative in order to accurately depict the culture, people, and ideals of late antiquity. Douglas Boin writes of the “Christianization” of Rome, further stating that studiers of this time must be wary of the pre-existing narrative surrounding Christianity. While one may take this caution to heart, the narrative of Christianity is still foundational to understanding the larger picture of late antiquity. Brown argues that Christianity in late antiquity brought forth the discussion of religion, and that the religion itself allowed for the rendering of ethnicity, culture, and Roman imperial power. In this perspective, without Christianity, one may have seen a very different discussion of Late Antiquity and religion itself.

Late Antiquity featured an era of early Christianity. The religion at this point in time was not fully established and had rival sects attempting to persuade others what Christianity actually was. Christianity in Late Antiquity was a foreground for discussions of persecution, religious

purity, and control. Thomas Sizgorich argues that the elements of Christianity in Late Antiquity were subsequent results from a “Roman Empire ruled by Christian emperors (and one pagan).” In essence, Christianity was a new and moldable religion at this time, influenced by many different areas of the Roman Empire. Churches were not an established meeting place for Christians in the first part of Late Antiquity. The early Church was seen more as an association and met often at homes for dinners or other small gatherings. However, it is important to note that Late Antiquity, along with the role of Constantine, established traditions such as Sunday allocated as a day of rest. It was not until the third century that actual homes became meeting places for Christians. The distribution and copying of Biblical texts was done primarily by monks and nuns, and most common people did not have a copy of the Bible. Many other practices varied by type of Christianity, including the Eucharist. The variety showcases the differences Christianity held in Late Antiquity, and the arguments and violence that resulted from it.

Early Christianity is typically associated with persecution. Persecution of Christians is an important topic to discuss when looking at the narrative given in Late Antiquity because it is an arguable idea. The narrative of Christianity follows many martyr stories and persecution brought on by leadership of the time. However, scholars of Late Antiquity are quick to question this process and suggest that Christians may have later interwoven this narrative into previous histories. Religions, both pagan and Christian based, have also been documented as persecuted.

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for extended amounts of time, and some writers suggest that Christianity borrowed this narrative from other accounts. Regardless of the reasoning, one must be careful when looking over this particular history of Christians in late antiquity. While caution is necessary, Christians were unquestionably persecuted at points in Late Antiquity. The Great Persecution resulting from Emperor Diocletian’s dislike of the monotheistic nature of Christianity amongst other reasons caused many Christians to become martyrs. Later persecution from the last pagan emperor, Julian, discluded Christians from higher education and other areas of life.  

Later persecution from the last pagan emperor, Julian, discluded Christians from higher education and other areas of life. In conclusion to this point, Christians unequivocally were persecuted, but not in the same way that their narrative might suggest. This analysis is important in understanding further Christian areas of Late Antiquity.

Christianity became divided in the 4th century, which allowed the narrative to be changed enough for results to still show up today. Early Christianity dealt with many controversies amongst different sects, however, a sticking point was the discussion of whether or not Jesus was of the same or of similar substance to God. Christianity had long been a monotheistic religion, unlike other Roman religions of the day. The triumph over Christian persecution and the rise of Constantine almost completely discredited paganism. Because of the assertion of the singular God, many thought that the consideration of Jesus of the same substance as God was polytheistic heresy. Arius, a preacher in the time of Constantine and the origin for the Arian sect of

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Christianity, held the belief that Jesus was subordinate to His Father. Arius and his followers were met with criticism of heresy and many sought excommunication against them. Arius wrote letters to Eusebius of Nicomedia, someone in the church he sought sympathy with, stating that “Before he was begotten, or created, or defined, or established, he did not exist. For he was not unbegotten.” The Council of Nicea met to settle this controversy over homoousion (Christ being consubstantial) and homoiousion (Christ being of the same substance), creating the Nicene Creed, a document that many sects of Christianity follow to this day:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (ὁμοούσιον) with the Father; by whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost.

The trinity was established through the Nicene Council, deeming that both Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit were all of the same substance. This proclamation resulted in the excommunication and exile of Arius and Eusebius. The narrative of Christianity was changed after the split between Arian and Nicene Christianity and allowed the narrative of Late Antiquity to change as well. “Christian intolerance,” as Harold Drake states, is a byproduct of political and religious processes that argued for a single, acceptable version of Christianity. This search for an exclusive Christianity is a prominent feature of Late Antiquity.40

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Leadership figures in the church had immense control over many areas of life in late antiquity. The emergence of the holy man not only fulfilled the prior roles that respected elders or hermits once had control of but created a new level of power previously unmatched. Specific church heads, the designated holy men, were often comparable or of even more power than philosophers, kings, and other rulers. The role of the ascetic became one associated directly with a locus of power. Ascetics, such as monks and nuns, were first considered in more of the role of one who lived in solitude. Before living in convents - a later idea - ascetics distance from society was deemed a measure of holiness. Other unconventional measuring sticks, which varied from the use of hair as determining one’s holiness to the use of a pillar as a home, allowed the holy men and women to show themselves as a societal oddity. Later, the roles of bishops and priests became center points of both the Christian faith and political power. Converted rulership itself, with Constantine as a prime example, allowed for Christianity’s narrative role in Late Antiquity to reach much further. Religious purity was a direct route to political authority. Even after the decline of Rome, the holy man was an integral part of societies and rulerships. Documentation shows that Frankish king Chlodovocar converted to Christianity after an encounter with the archbishop St. Remi in 496 AD. Ascetics, from monk to bishop, were an integral part of the story of Christianity. The Christian narrative was further weaved into Late Antiquity through its power holds.41

The Christian narrative of Late Antiquity commonly holds the actual narrative for Late Antiquity itself. With this weight attached to it, one must be careful to study the narrative Christianity brings forth itself to not only fully understand the religion better, but to understand the way in which information is presented in Late Antiquity and how historians have spoken of it through the years. While the narrative may be twisted from embellishment, there are truths to be found through it. From martyr to monk to bishop, the Christian narrative of Late Antiquity has found itself in many different roles. The way in which Christians were viewed, persecuted, divided, or sought leadership created a deep narrative within Late Antiquity.
Bibliography


Mystery cults were prevalent throughout the early Late antiquity leading up to the Christianization of the Mediterranean. Mystery cults were known at the time to be the prime expression of paganism due to the focus on individual gods. Through this focus, believers in these cults were revealed to the ultimate truths about their deity. Mystery Cults were deeply ritualistic and kept their practices in secret. Due to the secretiveness, there is a lack of literary sources on the practices of these cults.

**Cult of Mithras**

The Cult of Mithras was the most widely worshipped cult throughout the Mediterranean during Late Antiquity. The earliest physical evidence found of the Cult of Mithras dates to around the first century A.D. The approximate number of Roman Mithraists is impossible to know due to the complex population demographics of the time. However, there is a rough estimate of around 41,000 Mithraists within Rome before 300 C.E. There have been many comparisons to the size of early Christianity to the size of the Cult of Mithras during this time. Mithraism was popular during the time due to the similarity of their beliefs to the other astral cults of Late Antiquity. Mithraism was practiced commonly among Roman officials because it fulfilled a tradition of following a Roman religion. Many legionaries in the Roman army were members of the Cult of Mithras. The Cult of Mithras benefited majorly from the “pagan revival” under Justinian’s rule (Refer to Ch. 9). When Constantine came into power, Mithraism slowly

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42 Koen Demarsin, “Paganism’ In Late Antiquity: Thematic Studies.”

started to crumble. Roman officials now were Christian and the tradition of practicing a Roman religion dissolved. By the end of the 4th century, when Theodosius outlawed Paganism, the Cult of Mithras was already a dead religion.\textsuperscript{44}

The Cult of Mithras was very ritualistic and kept their practices very secret. Due to this, there is a lack of primary sources on the beliefs and practices of the cult. The few sources that exist are primarily from outsiders who are criticizing the religion. However, scholars and historians have determined the beliefs of the Cult of Mithra through studying their temples, Mithraea. Mithraea usually consisted of an underground chamber, 75 feet long and 30 feet wide. The average amount of members that could fit in a temple was around 20 to 30 people. Mithraea always have a depiction of a man killing a bull accompanied by a dog, a snake, a raven, and a scorpion.\textsuperscript{45} Mithraea were most commonly found in the city of Rome and where large numbers of Roman soldiers were stationed. An outdated belief traces the founding of the Cult of Mithras to Iran due to Mithras’ origination in Iranian mythology. However, there is no mention in any Iranian texts about the god, Mithras, killing a bull. Rather, the iconography of the religion represents a star map. The man killing the bull represents the end of the astrological Age of the Bull and the animals accompanying him represent other zodiac signs. Also, the temples are subterranean due to the myth of Mithras being born from a rock. The temple represents the rock in which Mithras burst from to establish his presence in the universe.\textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{Cult of Isis}

The cult of Isis was another large cult during the time of Late Antiquity. The Cult of Isis originated from Alexandria, Egypt, and quickly spread throughout the Mediterranean. Scholars

\textsuperscript{44} Martin, \textit{The Mind of Mithraists: Historical and Cognitive Studies in the Roman Cult of Mithras}, 13-20.
\textsuperscript{45} Ulansey, "Cosmic Mysteries of Mithras: Mithraism: Ancient Religion."
\textsuperscript{46} Ulansey, "Cosmic Mysteries of Mithras: Mithraism: Ancient Religion."
have placed the start of its spread around 400 BCE from the conquests of Alexander the Great. The peak of the religion occurred in the 400-year gap between the second century BCE and the second century CE. 640 inscriptions have been found from this time period, and 35 new sanctuaries are thought to have been built as well. 167 Isis sanctuaries covered the Late Roman empire from 400 BCE to 400 CE. The hubs of the cult would be its birth city, Alexandria, and the capital of the empire, Rome. The cult allowed women to join, and women were very attracted to the cult. This was a contrast to the Cult of Mithras, which did not allow women participants. The religion also was commonly practiced by sailors and merchants who thus spread the religion from port to port.47

The members of the Cult of Isis believed her to be the goddess of navigation, a savior, the goddess of heaven, the mother of the universe, and is known to be wise.48 In an inscription from Asia Minor, Isis claims, “I am the Queen of war. / I am the Queen of seamanship. / I created walls of cities. / I am called the Lawgiver. / I am Lord of rainstorms.”49 Worshippers believe Isis to be an all-powerful deity and this is evident in Lucius Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass*. Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass* is one of the few primary sources about the religion dedicated to Isis with Apuleius being a follower himself. In a section, Isis reveals herself to Apuleius and tells of how she is every god as one.50 We know today that followers of the cult, or Isiacs, celebrated two major festivals. The *navigum Isidis* was a festival in which they launched a model ship to ensure safety at sea during the shipping season. The second was *inventio Osiridis* which was a secretive ritual symbolizing the death and resurrection of Osiris from Egyptian mythology. One of the

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longest lasting temples, found in Pompeii, from the Cult of Isis has shed light on the secretive practices and rituals within the cult. The inside of the temple is decorated with frescos that depict Egyptian animals, such as hippos and certain snakes. There also is an area to hold water from the Nile River within the temple. The decoration of the temple shows that the Cult of Isis had deep ritual practices that were still based on the original Egyptian culture.51

Paganism

In his book, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, Eusebius of Caesara helped define paganism of the time when it was released in the early 4th century C.E. This passage is one of the versions that Eusebius gives for the definition of paganism:

How can they be pardoned, the people who turned away from the divinities that traditionally received worship among all Greeks and barbarians in the cities and the countryside, in all kinds of temples, initiations and mysteries, by all the kings and lawgivers, and philosophers; the people who then chose from among mankind’s achievements, the irreligious and atheistic?52

In this section, Eusebius is saying that a pagan religion is any religion that the Greeks and Barbarians follow. He also makes sure to state that paganism is everywhere, city and the countryside. Eusebius clumps all foreign religions together due to the similarity between them. This idea was stated earlier on in the “Cults” section on how mystery cults are the truest version of paganism.

Paganism was the main religion of early Late Antiquity before the Christianization of the Roman empire occurred. Although Eusebius claims that paganism is the religion of Greece and Barbarians, paganism was the state sponsored religion of the Roman empire until the Act of

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51 Lauren Hackworth Peterson, “The Places of Roman Isis.”
52 Demarsin, “Paganism’ In Late Antiquity: Thematic Studies”, 93.
Thessalonica in 380 C.E. Mystery cults were especially prevalent throughout the empire, with cults, such as the Cult of Demeter, Isis, and Mithras, prospering in the first three centuries C.E. However, the tide soon changed against paganism with the rise of Christianity and Constantine being in power (Refer to Ch. 8).53

**Persecution**

Roman and pagan relationship soon started to suffer as Christianity slowly started to grip the area that was the Roman empire. In 320 C.E., Constantine outlawed private sacrifices but continued to allow public sacrifices to occur. This was not for a religious reason, but rather it operated as a political strategy. Constantine wished to eliminate divining from sacrifices in hopes that there would not be anything revealed about his rule. This law only truly affected the upper class due to lower classes not being able to afford private animal sacrifices. However, every class suffered when Constantine confiscated the treasures of the pagan temples and redirected their funds towards Christianity. Many Christianized cities stopped funding the temples and many cults were unable to bounce back. Under Constantius, regulations against paganism increased with him banning any sacrifice and closing all the temples. In 356 C.E, people who practiced sacrifice or worshipped images would be subject to capital punishment. Also, during this time, attacks against pagan temples began. Julian’s pagan reforms offered some relief, but his rule was too short for anything to stick (Refer to Ch. 9).

After Justinian, more laws were made to limit paganism. The Christian empire soon seized the lands of the temples and thus their loss of income. The impoverishment of temples affected small village temples more than large sanctuaries due to the larger temples being able to gain revenue still. Soon, Christian militants would damage the temples and the pagan religions would lack the

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53 Demarsin, “Paganism’ In Late Antiquity: Thematic Studies”, 89-107.
funds to be able to repair them. In the 4th and 5th centuries C.E., the emperors soon wanted to see the complete end of paganism. This led to paganism having to be practiced in secret. Paganists soon started using the woods and nature to hide from the government as they practiced their religions.54

Other Religions

Although Christianity dominated most of Late Antiquity, the time period also gave birth to Islam. Also, many religions were able to survive the early stages of Christianity, such as Judaism.

Islam

The Late Antiquity period was not only the rise of Christianity, but also the rise of Islam. In 571 C.E., the prophet Muhammad was born, and the story of Islam began. According to Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad was powerful since birth and displayed prophetic powers his whole life. Sources for early Islam are very difficult to find and the earliest sources of the time are dated around 100 years after the events occurred.55 Also, these sources had been passed down generations as oral traditions before they were put in writing, so the reliability of them are wavering. During this time, the rise of the Islamic empire played heavily into the beliefs of the religion during the time. With the expansion of the Islamic empire, many ancient Muslim writers connected the battles for expansion to a “specifically Muslim narrative.”56 Similar to the rise of Christianity, the rise of Islam utilized martyrs and sacrifice in battle to further their religion and form a close community.

54 Demarsin, “Paganism’ In Late Antiquity: Thematic Studies”, 111-131.
56 Thomas Sizgorigh, Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam, 149.
The use of martyrs was not the only similarity to the rise of Christianity within the emergence of Islam. During the time, the two religions shared symbols due to the idea of “same plot, different narrative.” Due to both of the religions sharing the same deity, the signs and symbols of the time can be utilized for both religions. When early Islamic writers had to write about the emerging communities, they had to use symbols that were commonly used. These similarities in symbols can be seen in the Dome of the Rock mosque in Israel (Refer to Ch. 6). In one of the earliest Islamic mosques, iconography from Christianity is prevalent throughout due to the sharing of symbols.

**Judaism**

Late Antiquity was an interesting time for Judaism. In the first 4 centuries CE, Jews were tolerated by the Roman government and were allowed to continue with their practices. Many Jews held public office during this time and large synagogues could be found around the Mediterranean. Many emperors of the time tolerated Judaism with Diocletian exempting them from sacrificing and Julian giving them praise on their behavior. Julian even tried to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, but that ended in failure. Judaism also prospered with the rise of Christianity, as many people converted to the religion of Jesus. However, Judaism started doing too well and made the Christian Church uncomfortable. In the 5th century CE, some church authorities started to control the interactions between Christians and Jews. At the Frankish Council of Agde, Frankish officials banned clergy from eating with Jews. Soon Christian ascetism turned against Judaism, and synagogues were being destroyed by Christians. With Emperor Theodosius, protections were placed to allow Jewish people to worship in peace.

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57 Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*, 152.
However, he also outlawed any building of new synagogues. Following this, other laws were passed banning Jews from serving public office as well.\textsuperscript{59}

**Conclusion**

Religion within Late Antiquity was dominated by Christianity. However, other religions thrived during this period before Christianity stifled, or destroyed them. These pagan and other religions had vibrant communities that played important parts in the Mediterranean world. If not for the huge impact of Christianity, these religions would have flourished even more and would be practiced ecstatically today.

\textsuperscript{59} Lee, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, 159-176.
Bibliography


In any government, leadership is one of the most important traits that one can display, but in governments dominated by one or two political figures, it becomes the difference between success and failure for the entire government as a whole. In Imperial Rome, where emperors could be either great leaders like Caesar Augustus or unhinged and crazy like Caligula, this statement held truer than ever. Emperors in the third century of Rome had managed to plunge the empire into a crisis.60 One such effective leader was Diocletian, who is often credited with pulling Rome out of a crisis in the third century CE, as well as implementing many different reforms to help stabilize the government of the empire.

Diocletian rose to power in 284 CE with the deaths of the previous emperor, Carus, as well as Carus’s son, Numerianus. Following a campaign against Numerianus’s brother Carinus for control of the imperial throne, Diocletian emerged victorious and uncontested.61 After securing his authority, however, Diocletian’s troubles were not finished, since he found the empire in a dire situation when he first rose to the throne. Diocletian rose at the apex of what is usually referred to as the “Third Century Crisis,” a time marked by internal strife regarding the government of Rome as well as growing external military threats.62 While none of these individual problems facing Rome were new, they were worsened by the combination of these

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60 Procopius, *Secret History* 3.1 and 5.1
issues at the same time. It became increasingly apparent during this time that Rome needed a strong leader who was capable of bringing about reforms to help restore the empire’s government to a state of order, and Diocletian’s many reforms helped to reflect his influence as a leader and strength in bringing the empire out of a dire strait that threatened the empire.

**Diocletian’s Reforms**

One cannot reasonably begin to dissect the influence which Diocletian had on the Roman Empire during his reign without analyzing his attempts at reforms, both successfully and unsuccessfully implemented. One of the first ways Diocletian helped to reform the empire was through divisions of power. Unlike many of his predecessors, who sought to consolidate their own power and maintain as much control as possible, Diocletian recognized that he alone could not run such a massive empire effectively, and as a result he established a tetrarchy in 293 CE. This tetrarchy was heavily focused upon dividing the responsibilities of provincial government between four appointed leaders, two supreme Augusti, and two lesser leaders given the title of Caesar. The Augusti were typically a good deal older and handled most of the administrative duties of the empire, while the Caesars would be younger and focus more on carrying out the will of the Augusti. Through this use of a tetrarchy, Diocletian was able to spread stronger imperial leadership throughout the empire, as opposed to having multiple weaker provincial governors. This, combined with the loyalty of the Caesars and the other Augustus, helped to restore internal stability to the empire by restoring the military’s faith in the imperial office.

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63 Patricia Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine* (Florence, United States: Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 5.
65 Kathleen Kuiper and Britannica Educational Publishing Staff, *Ancient Rome: From Romulus and Remus to the Visigoth Invasion* (Chicago, IL, UNITED STATES: Rosen Publishing Group, 2010), 172.
In addition to these government structural reforms, Diocletian began making some reforms with respect to how the imperial office was conducted. His *adoratio*, an elaborate imperial court ceremony designed to further elevate the standing of the office, was often utilized to give the office the same air of authority that it held during the time of Augustus Caesar at the founding of the principate. By restoring the office of Augustus to a more prestigious standing than the Crisis of the Third Century had left it in, Diocletian was able to consolidate more power into his tetrarchy, not only into his own office, which would in turn unite the empire behind its four new leaders who were able to more effectively govern their slice of the empire.

One of Diocletian’s last reforms to the practice of governance was his decisions to put less of a focus on the city of Rome itself. Traditionally, the imperial government, while obviously concerned with the reaches of the empire, focused more on the Roman homeland when making policies, but Diocletian founded and operated the tetrarchy with the intention to help keep Roman laws relevant within the outer reaches of the empire, rather than worrying about Rome, which had not been encountering such issues with the enforcement of Roman legal systems. This helped the empire regain internal stability, as focusing harder on the restoration of law and order within the imperial provinces that had been somewhat ignored by the previous emperors who favored attempts at conquest more than domestic government. Diocletian’s switch towards domestic government rather than foreign conquests were major contributing factors towards the tetrarchy’s success.

While Diocletian’s political and governmental reforms were significant, he made other reforms directed at helping the economy recover from issues that had arisen again during the third century. Diocletian had put into place multiple reforms regarding the economy throughout

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66 Raymond Peter Davis, “Diocletian.” “Diocletian”. 241
67 Raymond Peter Davis. “Diocletian” 241
his reign, one of the biggest reforms he attempted to make was an edict regarding maximum prices of goods within the empire. In the *Edict on Maximum Prices*, he lists out many different goods and maximum prices of those goods in the interest of checking “…avarice which rushes for gain and for profit with no thought for mankind…” and continually justifies the edict as necessary due to the greed of the wealthy.\(^6\) While the edict was able to remain in place for a few years, it eventually failed due to the lack of enforcement and the sheer amount of resistance it met from the elites within the empire at the time.\(^7\) Despite this failure however, edicts such as this showed his dedication to helping stabilize Rome for all people, since failure to keep Roman elites in check had helped lead to internal strife in the third century.

Diocletian, however, was not able to please everyone within his empire, despite making many reforms and attempting others. Christians, in particular, remember Diocletian as a crooked and greedy persecutor who violently oppressed Christians based on the opinions of Galerius, one of the four tetrarchs.\(^8\) However, even some of these extremely biased accounts of Diocletian’s reign reflect some of his reforms. Lactantius, a notable Christian teacher who was oppressed under Diocletian’s rule, wrote a reflection on Diocletian’s reign after his death, and despite his harsh take on Diocletian’s policies, some of the goals of those policies are reflected in his writings regarding the emperor. Lactantius calls Diocletian greedy, says that he builds up a large army to feed this greed, and appoints many new government officials to control the empire and keep it in imperial control, as well as stockpiling money and fixing prices to make sure that the imperial government always had funds to spare.\(^9\) Lactantius is obviously highly critical of Diocletian due to the situation regarding the imperial government’s relationship with Christians

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\(^6\) Diocletian, *Edict on Maximum Prices*, preamble.  
\(^7\) Raymond Peter Davis, “Diocletian.” 241  
\(^8\) Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*. 455.  
\(^9\) Lactantius, *De Morbitus Persecutorum* 7.1-8
at the time, but his writings still reflect the ideas that Diocletian’s reforms were issued in an effort to reunify the empire and bring about more stability than was present in the third century up to that point.

**Conclusion**

Diocletian proved his ability as a leader by helping to remediate several of the issues that were facing Rome during what is often seen as one of its biggest times of crisis. His reforms, despite not all being fully effective and some of which did not last more than a few years, helped to return stability to the empire and pave the way for the future. His decisions to separate power and keep the imperial military strong were major factors in the stability of the empire during his reign. He decided to avoid many of the mistakes of his predecessors and rule in a similar manner to the early emperors who maintained great power over the empire, despite some differences in his policies here and there. As a whole however, Diocletian’s leadership is a prime example of why a strong leader with clear goals in mind is important to any society.
Bibliography


Chapter 7

Constantine’s Influence on Rome

Kylie Brown

Constantine, or Constantine the Great, as he is referred to by many historians, was Rome's emperor from 306 CE to 337 CE. Throughout his time as Emperor, Constantine made many changes to Roman society, all centralized around his conversion to Christianity. In this chapter, we will look at Constantine's transformation and how that impacted the rest of Roman culture, not only during his rule but far after.

Constantine’s Conversion

Historians contended that Constantine converted to Christianity in around 312 CE, but it is unclear why or even how serious he was about this conversion. Historians have debated for centuries how serious he was about his conversion to Christianity and whether he was still privately practicing paganism. Many scholars even go as far as to say that Constantine was solely using Christianity to gain approval and, ultimately, submission to his rule and authority. Christianity seemed to provide Constantine with a differentiating factor from all former Roman Emperors, even his father. Through Christianity, Constantine created what historians call a "state of the church" in the Roman empire. Laws changed, the history of Christians changed, and Rome's view changed all because of Constantine.

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The records we have from Constantine's rule mostly stem from Eusebius's writing, and it is not in the least bit comprehensive. Most of the papers we have from Eusebius consist of Constantine's laws in his new Christian Rome and very little about the personal thoughts and feelings. This type of writing was common throughout Constantine's rule, as he was too reserved about his public statements. Eusebius did, however, write a few lines in one of his books about Constantine's conversion. Eusebius says that Constantine, "convinced that he needed some more powerful aid than his military forces could afford him, on account of the wicked magical enchantments which were so diligently practiced by the tyrant, sought Divine assistance."76

According to Eusebius, it occurred to Constantine that “of the many emperors who had preceded him, those who had rested their hopes in a multitude of gods, and served them with sacrifices and offerings, had in the first place been deceived by flattering predictions, and oracles which promised them all prosperity and at last had been with an unhappy end.”77 These accounts of Constantine tend to point toward the theory that Constantine was not the most devout Christian. Instead, he saw the religion as an opportunity to gain control and even gain help from a deity. To Constantine, praising one God was a time saver. Constantine grew up seeing Emperors spend time praising multiple gods, and to him, one was more straight-forward.78

The Change in Roman Rule

After Constantine's conversion to Christianity, he completely overhauled the government systems currently in effect in Rome. While it is said that Constantine relied almost solely on his

father's name for the first portion of his rule, Constantine himself became a force in Late Antiquity after his conversion.\textsuperscript{79} Other than Christianity, the major feat for which Constantine is most notable is building a new capital. At the time of Constantine's rule, Rome was no longer the center of the Roman empire, and it was a strategic decision to move the capital to then Byzantium in order to defend his rule from outside forces such as the Barbarians and even the Persians.\textsuperscript{80} Part of the reasoning behind the change in location also stems from Constantine's most significant feat, reuniting Eastern and Western Rome, which Diocletian split under his rule. Historians commonly believed that Constantine's defeat of Licinius, the leader of the Eastern Roman Empire, to combine the two empires was again another strategic power grab to solidify Constantine as the ultimate ruler.\textsuperscript{81}

In all of this shifting of power and location, Constantine also introduced several new laws to Roman life, outlined again by Eusebius. Most of his laws were heavily pro Christian. He ordered that "if any such [goods] belonged to the Catholic Church of the Christians, in any city or other place, but are now held by citizens or by any others, thou shalt cause them to be restored immediately to the said churches."\textsuperscript{82} His laws served to re-enfranchise the Christians into Roman society by giving them their power back and outlawing Christians' persecution. On top of the previously stated law, there were laws granting money to churches, laws against persecution, and laws exempting clergy from civic duties.\textsuperscript{83} Historians often point out he favoredited Christians to

\textsuperscript{82} Eusebius. \textit{Church History}. Translated by P. Schaff and H. Wace. Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies, New York. \url{https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/const1-laws2.asp}
\textsuperscript{83} Eusebius. \textit{Church History}. Translated by P. Schaff and H. Wace. Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies, New York. \url{https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/const1-laws2.asp}
keep up the act that he was a devout Christian. It is often stated he thought there were more pressing issues than to continue the persecution of Christians.\(^{84}\)

Constantine went on to completely overhaul the Roman system of government. Throughout his time ruling, he completely dismantled the governmental systems set up by former rulers, more specifically by Diocletian.\(^{85}\) As discussed in Chapter 7, Diocletian implemented a Tetrarchy in Rome, meaning that there was a break-up of rule. A four-part division made up the governance of Rome. Constantine dismantled this system to make it so he was essentially the only Roman to hold power and all things had to go through him. This fits with the narrative of Constantine’s need to be the post powerful individual in Rome, going so far as to join the two Empires, get rid of all lower rulers, and make it so all power was shifted to him.\(^{86}\)

Constantine also re-introduced dynastic succession, putting his children and family members in charge after his death. This made it so that his positive legacy only grew, and very few bad words were said about him until long after his passing. Constantine worked hard to control the narrative around his name. He grew up seeing the hundreds of coups and exiles of Roman emperors so he made strategic decisions to create his own narrative and remain popular in the eyes of his people. Examples being grasping to Christianity, having total control of power, changing the governmental systems, and even moving the capital. Historians often cite these power grabs and governmental shifts as the reasoning behind the mostly positive accounts we


have of Constantine, and the inclination for early historians to refer to him as the greatest Roman Emperor. For a deeper understanding of this bias, look at chapter 10, Roman Bias.

**Conclusion**

Constantine’s Rome is often boiled down to his contributions to Christianity (see Chapter 4 for more detail.) While, Constantine did do a lot for the religion, he also changed the way Rome would look for the remainder of its time on top. Constantine’s choice to re-unite the two Roman empires, move the capital, change the laws, and welcome Christianity had an enormous impact on Rome, and Roman culture. So much so that when students learn about Rome, it goes from gladiators to Christians with almost nothing in between. Constantine so carefully created the narrative of his rule, that it took hundreds of years for researchers to find any negative writings about him. All of which creates the narrative we so often hear, of Constantine the Great.

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Bibliography


When people think of the leaders that shaped Rome, most think of leaders like Julius Caesar, Octavian, Diocletian, Justinian and the five good emperors. However there are other emperors that get lost in the annals of history and end up residing only in places like college classrooms and scholarly papers. This chapter will be covering just a few of these emperors poorly remembered by the majority of people. This is by no means a comprehensive or thorough list of Roman leaders or their deeds this is just a very brief summary of how these figures shaped Rome and her future.

Aurelian

Aurelian ascended to become emperor in 270 CE when the army refused to recognize the current emperor, and he would rule until 275 CE when he was assassinated by his Generals based on falsified reports that he was planning to have them executed. He was called the “Restorer of the World” and his military conquests led to him bringing both the Middle East and Gaul back under rule from Rome. He was not particularly controversial in his religion mostly due to his constant military conquests away from the core areas of the empire. He himself was a believer in Sol Invictus. While he was not known to hold a great hatred of Christianity, he was recorded as having organized persecution of Christians by Christian writers in later periods. In the Middle East, he subdued the self-proclaimed empress who controlled much of the Eastern Roman Empire, Zenobia. In Gaul, he convinced the Gallic Emperor Tetricus to abandon his forces in return for a pardon and a high ranking position in Italy. It was after the reconquest of Gaul that he was named “Restorer of the World”. His reconquest of areas of the empire were not
his only contributions to Rome. He withdrew from the province of Dacia allowing resources to be used in other more important areas of the empire.\textsuperscript{88} He built the massive Aurelian walls in Rome, who had outgrown her former walls. His re-establishment of Roman dominance over Gaul and the Middle East would greatly help stabilize the military situation of the Empire. Diocletian's later reforms that were mentioned in Chapter 7 were arguably made possible by the stabilization of the Imperial borders that Aurelian played an important part in making possible. Despite his great contribution of stability and unity to Rome he is often forgotten by the modern average person.

**Julian**

Emperor Julian, also known as Julian “The Apostate”, is a controversial ruler due to his conversion from Christianity to Neo-Platonic Hellenism. A competent military commander, he is often much more well-known for his Paganism and how he scorned the Christian Church, which was a great departure from the norm set by Constantine that was discussed in Chapter 8. Julian ascended to be emperor after the death of Constanius II in 361 CE and would rule until his death in battle at 363 CE. He began many “reforms” in an attempt to revitalize and to some degree centralize the Greco-Roman church. He reinstituted blood sacrifice which had begun to decline even among pagans during the chaos of the third century. He rebuilt and restored many temples that had either been destroyed or had fallen into disrepair. He also attempted to weaken the Christian church to make the Greco-Roman religion more competitive with the Christian church. He invited back religious leaders that did not ascribe to the orthodoxy set forth at the Council of Nicaea in order to cause conflict among the Christian church.\textsuperscript{89} He also would seek to undermine

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Christianity in less direct ways. The primary way in which he would do this would be to not punish those who had rioted or destroyed Christian churches or had murdered Christian leaders. This strategy of indirect attacks on the Christian church was most exemplified by the lynching of George the Cappadocian, an unpopular Arian bishop from Alexandria who was killed by a pagan mob. His relatively short reign would end in some controversy. He was killed in battle against the Sassanian Persians, but many believed that he had been assassinated due to the controversial nature of his rule. Julian’s reign was short and would be remembered as terrible by most of the chroniclers who recorded it, however many of those chroniclers were Christian so the validity of their writing is often questioned. His reign would not stop or even slow the decline of Roman Paganism.

**Theodosius I**

Theodosius I is often more remembered for his great contribution to Roman Architecture and the skyline of Constantinople rather than his rule as emperor. Theodosius ascended to rule in 379 CE when Emperor Gratian would make Theodosius Augustus over the Eastern empire. Theodosius would rule until his death in 395 CE from a severe disease outbreak. His most influential act as emperor was establishing Nicene Christianity as the official religion of the empire. While he would not totally destroy the Pagan religions of the empire, he would dissolve the order of the Vestal Virgins and outlaw the Olympic games. He would also not punish the destruction of Pagan temples in the empire. His reign would be marked by two large scale civil wars by pretenders who pressed claims as the rightful Emperors of the empire, he would manage to defeat both rebellions. What he is most remembered for is the construction of the Theodosian walls which would protect the City of Constantinople for a millennium and would only be rendered obsolete by the Cannons of the Ottoman empire in 1453.
Bibliography


Chapter 10

Women and Children Within Roman Society

Matthew Brandenburg

Historiographies covering the culture of Rome have previously often neglected certain aspects of Roman society, specifically those of age and gender. Women and children within the Roman Empire were one of the largest groups to be overlooked. Usually only the women that were members of the Roman aristocracy were ever covered in any detail. This was not merely a result of bias, but also the result of the frequent disenfranchisement of Roman women, who often had limited access to aspects of Roman society that allowed many male Roman scholars’ works to linger as sources or for women to be the topic of the textual source. Historians have much more access to the writing of lesser male aristocracy or Roman “middle” class than Roman women within this middle stratum of Roman society. This however did not mean that Roman women were completely disempowered participants in Roman society but rather that they lived under a series of norms and laws that shaped their place in Roman society. Another large group within Roman society lacking coverage is Roman children. The lives of children were varied and were dependent on their social class much like women and were also beholden to the whims of the patriarch of the family. This section attempts to offer a brief overview of some the lives of Roman women and children.

Roman Women

Roman women lived under a patriarchal society within the Roman empire from its inception. A Roman woman’s status was primarily defined by her marriage and her place of birth within Roman society. The official marriageable age was 12, although available examples vary, puberty
and other social norms were important factors as well.\textsuperscript{90} What little societal status climbing that could be achieved was done by marriage to a Roman man of higher or rising status. It was often more likely for the man the woman married to be the one who enjoyed further empowerment through the marriage (see Chapter 2 for further details). There were however exceptions to this norm, such as serving the role of a priestess within a temple or religious group. One of the most revered roles was that of a Vestal or Vestal Virgin who undertook a 30 year vow of chastity to tend the fire of Vesta.\textsuperscript{91} These more powerful roles faded with the growth of Christianity within the Empire although some religious communal positions remained, hence the ubiquity of female Saints during Late Antiquity. However female saints were often only glorified after their martyrdom and did not obtain status during their life before their sainthood.\textsuperscript{92} Once Christianity became predominant within the Roman empire greater restrictions were applied to some aspects of the lives of Roman women. With the advent of Christianity as the state religion of Rome, purity and virginity became more emphasized, causing women’s lives to be further restricted maritally through cultural norms of purity and legislature such as the \textit{Theodosian Code}.\textsuperscript{93}

Roman women operated under a combination of actual legal and societal norms within the Roman empire. These laws usually were derived from the Emperor of Rome who enacted legislation via edicts or announcements within public speeches that were further interpreted by officials.\textsuperscript{94} These laws did not strictly operate under a specifically written constitution, rather a series of shifting norms regarding who could enter a governmental position such as the senate.

There was very little enfranchisement of Roman women via this legislature, most laws relating to
women were related to marriage and most often reinforced the power of the husband such as the
lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus created in 18 CE during the reign of Augustus.\textsuperscript{95} Roman
women did not directly participate within the Roman republic or Empire that succeeded it. They
were unable to cast votes on legislature like their male counterparts, however wealthy and
powerful women from the upper class could potentially indirectly exert their influence over
elections or legislation. However, there are clear examples of restrictions on even Roman women
of the upper class via legislature such as the lex voconia, which restricted potential inheritance of
women within wealthy families.\textsuperscript{96}

A Roman woman’s place of work was most often primarily management of the family home.
A wife was expected to tend to the daily maintenance of the home and direct the efforts of
household slaves or servants. The appearance of the family home and garden were seen as
indirect indications of status that reflected onto the husband’s social status.\textsuperscript{97} The raising of the
family’s children would also be performed by the wife or her slaves. Most Roman women were
expected to live within the home of their husband or a male relative. Departures from the home
would often mean an escort by a male family member.\textsuperscript{98}

**Roman Children**

Information on the life of a Roman child is even more limited in some ways than that of an
adult Roman woman. The sources available do not give anywhere close to a full picture of a
child’s life during this time. However, there are a few surviving primary sources from Roman
children written during Antiquity. One of these limited examples comes from a Roman Egyptian

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\textsuperscript{95} Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire*, 12–13.

\textsuperscript{96} Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire*, 13.

\textsuperscript{97} Boin, *A Social and Cultural History of Late Antiquity*.

\textsuperscript{98} Grig, *Popular Culture in the Ancient World*. 
boy writing to his father demanding he take him with him on his travels. Most other examples of children in textual sources from Rome during this time are referenced by adult authors instead. Like most other societies during Late Antiquity, adolescence was a much briefer period than that of the modern conception of childhood.

One noteworthy distinction between the comparison of children from Late Antiquity Rome and modern-day children is height. Height is seen as a key identification of maturity in the modern day. However, with the average height of a Roman from Late antiquity being that of a short modern day European with a height of 1.64 meters for men and 1.54 meters for women, height was not a reliable marker for maturity during Late Antiquity. This meant that the height of a child approached that of an adult much more quickly within Roman Society. Another detail from children’s lives is found within sources such as friezes that depict children wearing the *toga praetexta*. The *toga praetexta* is a small toga with a colored border worn by children in surviving works such as the *Ara Pacis*. This clothing is depicted being worn by both younger male and female children, potentially implying a less defined gender divide for younger children despite being raised in a society with sharp gender divisions. As children further aged, they began to wear more gendered clothing in material sources such as the sarcophagi of children. Boys are shown to be wearing flowing tunics, potentially implying a more active daily life outdoors playing. Whereas girls are shown wearing longer more incumbering tunics, perhaps implying a less active daily routine. This later mimicry of adult clothing implies a gradual introduction into their gender role within their society.

**Conclusion**

100 Laes, *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*, 31–32.
102 Laes, *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*, 45.
As previously mentioned, the details of the lives of women and children are far more abstracted than those of Roman men from Late Antiquity. They were instead often only vaguely referenced in textual sources. The significance of material sources other than text is only heightened by this fact. The lives of these individuals were no less significant despite this lack of direct information and provide much broader image of Roman society during Antiquity and later. Roman society had far more breadth to it beyond the more well-known martial and masculine side so often depicted within history and popular culture.
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One of the most valuable sources in seeing how culture developed in Late Antiquity is art. Art can be used to show political power, religious and cultural practices, and even the extent of trade routes. This is not limited to only decorative pieces, such as mosaics or sculpture. Functional pieces, such as brooches and pottery, can be just as illuminating, and should still be considered art. There are so many examples of art in the world of Late Antiquity, and the purposes, political motivations, and creations of these pieces can be so nuanced that it would take several volumes to truly address everything. However, even with the limited space provided, there is still more than enough room to provide an overview, if not a totally comprehensive, account of art throughout the former Roman Empire in Late Antiquity.

**Roman Art in Late Antiquity**

The journey of art in Late Antiquity begins with the Roman Empire. There is a marked difference in Roman art of Late Antiquity and classical art, and seeing Rome in Late Antiquity, this seems like a natural change. Rome in this time was full of calamity. However, this is not the reason why art declined from the Classical ideal. After all, Rome was full of conflict throughout its history. Instead, there are two generally accepted reasons for the evolution of Roman art. One of these is the rise of Christianity. Early Christianity was an exercise in imagination. God and the spirits of Saints did not have physical bodies, and Christians discovered their doctrine not through temple friezes but through the written or spoken word. Thus, the image was not as necessary as the idea behind it, and the artists practice reflected that. As John Onians states in
“Christian painters typically looked neither at real human bodies, nor at their representations in sculpture. Instead they looked at earlier painted representations of the figures concerned, representations which were two-dimensional and in which the details of body and drapery were irrelevant.”

As Christianity spread through the Late Roman world, this attitude became prevalent among artists.

The second reason is the integration of barbarians into Roman culture. Barbarian was the term used in the Roman empire for any group of people who were not culturally Roman. For more on Barbarians, see Chapter Three. Roman citizenship for much of the empire was the marker used to differentiate Romans from barbarians, however The Edict of Caracalla in 212 CE gave Roman citizenship to every free man in the empire. This meant that citizenship was no longer exclusive (for more on citizenship, see Chapter 2). Thus, Romans began identifying themselves, not as simply Roman citizens but citizens of a province. As identity became more regional, art evolved into a more regional construction, and influence of the native ‘barbarian’ groups became more pronounced.

Due to these two influences, the classical style changed into something more abstract, geometric, and diverse. In functional pieces, such as vases and jewelry, this showed in less of a focus on the Greek style and more of a focus on the native art style of the region. A prime

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example of this is a dragon shaped brooch from CE 100-300.\textsuperscript{105} This brooch, while in the Roman Empire, is so steeped in Celtic design that it is unknown whether it originated from a Celtic or Roman source. When it comes to sculpture and wall art, the human form is not portrayed anatomically correct. Heads are disproportionately large or small in comparison to the body, and clothing is exaggerated, with hard lines as opposed to flowing, classical lines. This can be seen in a bronze statue of emperor Trebonianus Gallus.\textsuperscript{106} The head is tiny compared to the barrel shaped body, and there would be no way to mistake the fabric draped over his arm for real cloth. As this would be a form of imperial propaganda, the artistry is not due to a lack of funds, but to the aesthetic of the time.

**Christianity and Art**

The evolution of art in the Late Roman empire leads to the concept of art in the early Byzantine empire. By this period, Christianization had made it so almost all art was religious.\textsuperscript{107} Icons were an especially important part of Byzantine art, but attitudes about Icons varied during the Byzantine era. During the Roman world and the early Byzantine period, icons were

\textsuperscript{105} *Dragon-Shaped Brooch*, 100-300 ACE. Copper alloy with champlevé enamel, 1 7/8 x 7/8 x 3/16 in. (4.7 x 2.2 x 0.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/466061

\textsuperscript{106} *Bronze statue of the emperor Trebonianus Gallus*, 251-253 ACE, bronze, 95 in. (241.3 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/247117

\textsuperscript{107} Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2.
considered to have the real presence of who or what they were representing. This changed around the mid eighth century, during the Iconoclastic era. This era spans around a hundred year period of debate between 726-843 CE. A folk story details the reason behind this change, saying that an icon of Christ was destroyed. No one wished to believe Christ was harmed through the breaking of the image, and so icons changed to either a way to connect with real presence, but not having real presence in themselves, or downright blasphemous. These attitudes towards images contribute greatly to religious and political art. One example of this is *The Emperor Justinian and Members of His Court*, an excerpt from the mosaic across the roof of San Vitale, a basilica in Ravenna Italy. The piece is from the sixth century, and depicts Justinian holding bread. Clergy is on his right side, and bodyguards on his left. His image is among images of the divine, and like with the divine icons, his real presence would be inside the image. A worshipper of the day would have interpreted this piece as Justinian quite literally overseeing the service, second only to the images of the Divine above him. Politically, the concept of real presence allowed emperors to flaunt their power and make the populace fear their watchful eye throughout the Byzantine empire.

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108 Real presence is the belief that what is being represented is part of the object. Damaging the object would damage what is being represented. A modern example of Real Presence is the belief that the Eucharist consists of the literal body and blood of Christ.


110 *Emperor Justinian and Members of His Court*, 527-547 ACE, glass and stone, San Vitale, Ravenna Italy.
In the religious sphere, icons were used in much the same way, to show the power and constant presence of Christ. Unfortunately, few icons from the early Byzantine era exist, as during the Iconoclastic era many icons were destroyed or painted over, as they were considered blasphemous. After the Iconoclastic era, icons regained popularity. Most icons were tempera paint on wood, and they emphasized vibrant golds, reds, and blues. An example of this style of icon is *Madonna and Child*, an Italian work from the 1230s. While it is not Byzantine in origin, it copies the Hodegetria icon of Constantinople. Unfortunately, the original image was destroyed in 1453, but this copy remains. This image shows Mary holding the Christ child against a gold background. Mary’s robe is a deep blue, and she is gesturing towards Christ as the way of salvation. This image would have been typical of painted icons of the Byzantine era.

**Islamic Art**

Now the history of art in Late Antiquity moves farther east, to the budding Islamic empire. This empire appeared on the scene around the seventh century, and quickly became an impressive political and military power. The Islamic empire brought new perspectives to the art world as well. Unlike the churches of the Byzantine empire, which were full of images of people

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112 *Icons* (National Gallery of Art)
113 Berlinghiero, *Madonna and Child*, tempera on wood, gold ground, overall 31 5/8 x 21 1/8 in. (80.3 x 53.7 cm); painted surface 30 x 19 1/2 in. (76.2 x 49.5 cm). The MET, New York. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435658
and animals, representational forms in a mosque were akin to idolatry. However, unlike in the later dynasties, which had a blanket prohibition on figures, the Umayyad caliphate of 661-750 BC only banned representational figures within places of worship. This results in many pieces that may seem ‘un-Islamic’ to modern eyes.

One of these seemingly ‘un-Islamic’ works is in Qusayr ‘Amra, a Jordanian desert residence for nobles of the Umayyad caliphate. The home is covered in frescoes, but the most notable are the ones inside the bathhouse. Nude women are the main subjects of these bathhouse frescoes, most notably the image along the south wall of the tepidarium. This scene depicts several nude women bathing, and their buttocks are emphasized. While this scene may seem shocking to modern viewers with preconceived notions of Islamic art, it is important to note that the Umayyad’s approved artistic representations of nudity. They also were aware of classical traditions of nudity and believed nudity in art was a continuation of this tradition. It seems as if the Umayyad Muslim Caliphate was more liberal regarding depictions of the nude figure than the Christian Byzantine Empire of the same time.

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115 The Religious Prohibition Against Images (The David Collection).
117 Quseir Amra (UNESCO).
118 Bathing Women, 705-715 ACE. Fresco, Qusayr ‘Amra, Jordan.
119 Fowden, 58-59.
In contrast to the nudes of Qusayr ‘Amra are the intricate mosaics of Dome of the Rock. Dome of the Rock is a mosque built on Mount Moriah in the heart of Jerusalem and was completed between 691-692 CE. The artwork of the Dome holds to the prohibition of representational figures in places of worship, but its intricacy rivals Byzantine churches. Many of the mosaics on the inside of the Mosque depict trees and vines, wrapping around in complicated, detailed patterns.120 The exterior mosaics focus more on geometric patterns surrounding large tiles upon which verses from the Quran are rendered in Kufic calligraphic script.121 These verses praise God, and also give praise to Jesus while also emphasizing that he is a human prophet, not the son of God.122 They encourage contemplation upon God and the Quran, and emphasize Islam as the one true religion. This method of intricate geometric mosaics and Quranic script would influence the conventions of future mosque decoration.

**Barbarian Art**

This concludes the discussion of the former Eastern Roman Empire. Now it is time to move west, to places which have been ‘overrun by barbarians.’ The art of the former Western Roman Empire in Late Antiquity has long been considered symptomatic of decline, as little

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120 *Dome of the Rock Interior Mosaic*, 691-692 ACE, Dome of the Rock, Israel.
122 Milwright, 69-73.
representational art survives. Instead, art is compiled into functional objects, such as crowns and brooches. But these functional objects are often intricate, and what representational art survives shows painstaking work and vibrant color. These forms of art serve to challenge the idea that barbarian cultures were ‘less advanced’ than Roman. Chapter Three goes more in depth with a discussion of the barbarian kingdoms and their complexity.

**The Ostrogoths**

After the fall of Rome, Italy and the surrounding areas were taken by the Ostrogoths and king Theodoric. Theodoric brought peace both to the warring peoples of Italy and to the two feuding sects of Christianity at the time. Unlike previous rulers, he allowed his subjects to practice whichever form of Christianity they pleased, making him popular throughout his kingdom. He also saw himself as sort of a new Roman emperor, and the art he promoted during his reign emphasized that. He restored historic buildings and attempted to copy Classical work. However, traditional Ostrogothic art was also popular during the period, particularly in brooches and other types of jewelry. One example of traditional Ostrogothic art is a collar pendant from the fifth or sixth century. The pendant is made of gold, and garnets and glass are embedded into the pendant in geometric patterns. It would have been part of a necklace, but the other pieces have been lost. It is an impressive piece in terms of metalwork, and the sheer amount of gold shows the wealth of the Ostrogothic kingdom.

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123 Joshua Mark, *Theodoric the Great.* (Ancient History Encyclopedia, 2014)
124 Carola Hicks, *Ostrogothic art* (Grove Art Online, 2003)
125 *Collar Pendant, 5th-6th century ACE, gold, garnet, and glass, 1 3/4 x 9/16 x 1/4 in. (4.4 x 1.4 x 0.7 cm).* The MET, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/464570
This traditional Ostrogothic art and the Classical ideals meld together to create a new style of art throughout the Ostrogothic Empire. This is best seen in the mausoleum of Theodoric, a building which has inspired controversy as scholars’ debate whether it is barbarian or Roman. Likely, the mausoleum is both. Theodoric saw himself as both Ostrogoth and the new emperor of Rome, and he also ruled a diverse group of people. The Roman and non-Roman style of the mausoleum was probably an attempt to show unity throughout the kingdom Theodoric ruled and the different people groups within that kingdom.

**The Merovingian Franks**

To the north of the Ostrogoth kingdom is the kingdom of the Merovingians. They span most of what is now France and Germany and were created due to a confederation of Frankish tribes coming together in the fifth century. Their art, like that of many other ‘barbarian’ kingdoms in Late Antiquity, combined Roman influences with traditional art and techniques. Much of the art from this period has been found in grave sites and takes the form of ornately decorated functional objects, such as tableware, brooches, and weapons.

Beaded jewelry was particularly popular with the Merovingian Franks. Most beads were glass, although some are ceramic, and others are semiprecious stones. The provenance of the

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126 Mausoleum of Theodoric, 520 ACE, Istria stone, Ravenna Italy.
128 Carola Hicks, *Merovingian Art* (Grove Art Online, 2003).
129 Constantin Pion, Bernard Gratuze, *Indo-Pacific glass beads from the Indian subcontinent in Early Merovingian graves (5th–6th century AD)*, (Archeological Research in Asia, 2016) 51-64.
glass stones is particularly interesting. Much of the glasswork created in the Frankish kingdoms was created using Roman methods of blown glass. The glass created was also fairly colorful, and most was opaque, looking very similar to ceramic beads. Glass beads were also used in imitation of semiprecious stones, much like in the Roman era. However, the beads of this time also reveal sophisticated trade routes. For example, between the fifth and sixth centuries, beads from the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia were found inside tombs. This shows that trade was strong enough for products from so far away to become popular, showing there may not have been much of an economic decline after the fall of Rome.

Out of all the art created by the Merovingians, their metalwork is most impressive. While some of their techniques are similar to the Ostrogoths, namely semiprecious stones arranged in a geometric fashion, most of it is in a class of its own. Like the glasswork, there are multiple techniques taken from Roman art, such as certain filigree designs, but the intricacy of the designs is far more complex than Roman metalwork. Prime examples of this are the bow brooches. These were normally worn in a pair, and after CE 450 were made mostly of precious metals. Practically every woman owned a pair, and upper-class women would even wear two pairs at a time. But while they are common, they are all

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131 Pion, Gratuze.
132 Brown, 9-12. ; *Disk Brooch*. 1st-4th century ACE. Copper alloy, 1 1/16 x 1/2 in. (2.7 x 1.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. [https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/464923](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/464923)
133 *From Attila to Charlemagne, Arts of the Early Medieval Period in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. (Yale University Press, 2000) 228.
incredibly intricate and individual pieces. One striking example from the Metropolitan Museum of Art shows a T-shaped brooch with detailed linework throughout. The scrollwork around the middle of the piece is reminiscent of a Celtic knot, and though the linework is complicated, symmetry remains.\textsuperscript{134} This amount of craftsmanship is extremely impressive for such a common type of piece. The influence of this type of metalwork extends far beyond the end of the Merovingian period. After the end of this dynasty, the Carolingian dynasty began and brought this style of highly detailed, ropelike metalwork into other mediums such as ivory, and most notably, illuminated manuscripts.

This concludes the discussion of art in Late Antiquity. Unfortunately, due to space, it was impossible to discuss every barbarian empire that took over the former Roman Empire, and also many pieces from Islamic art were not discussed. Regardless, this chapter attempted to show some of the facets of art in Late Antiquity, and the cultural influences of those pieces.

\textsuperscript{134} Square-Headed Bow Brooch, 530-560 ACE, silver, 4 1/16 x 1 13/16 x 11/16 in. (10.3 x 4.6 x 1.8 cm). The MET, New York. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/465786
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Berlinghiero, Madonna and Child. Possibly 1230s ACE. Tempera on wood, gold ground, Overall 31 5/8 x 21 1/8 in. (80.3 x 53.7 cm); painted surface 30 x 19 1/2 in. (76.2 x 49.5 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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Collar Pendant. Late 5th-early 6th century. Gold - sheet; cells - garnets (patterned foil), glass (green); wire - beaded. Suspension Loops: gold – rod, Overall: 1 3/4 x 9/16 x 1/4 in. (4.4 x 1.4 x 0.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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**Dragon Shaped Brooch.** 100-300 ACE. Copper alloy with champlevé enamel, 1 7/8 x 7/8 x 3/16 in. (4.7 x 2.2 x 0.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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