

Glen W. Bowersock, Peter Brown and Oleg Grabar (eds.), *Late Antiquity. A Guide to the Postclassical World*. Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999. xiii + 780 pp. ISBN 0 674 51173 5.

This massive volume, edited by the three masters of late antique studies, is the most eloquent witness to the increase over the last thirty years of scholarly interest in matters related to the transformation of the Roman world and the emergence of the early Middle Ages. The purpose of *Late Antiquity*, as determined by its editors, is 'to provide as wide a range of information as possible on the late antique period' (p. xii). Thus its chronological span ranges from AD 250 to AD 850, and geographically it covers the lands between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean. There are some illustrious names here and many stimulating ideas, but in a review of this length I can do no more than list the papers of the first section, and give my own impression of the volume as a whole.

The first section of *Late Antiquity* (pp. 1-272) is a collection of eleven papers, which discuss major topics in late antique studies: 'Remaking the Past' by Averil Cameron (pp. 1-20); 'Sacred Landscapes' by Béatrice Caseau (pp. 21-59); 'Philosophical Traditions and the Self' by Henry Chadwick (pp. 60-81); 'Religious Communities' by Garth Fowden (pp. 82-106); 'Barbarians and Ethnicity' by Patrick J. Geary (pp. 107-29); 'War and Violence' by Brent D. Shaw (pp. 130-69); 'Empire Building' by Christopher Kelly (pp. 170-95); 'Christian Triumph and Controversy' by Richard Lim (pp. 196-218); 'Islam' by Hugh Kennedy (pp. 219-37); 'The Good Life' by Henry Maguire (pp. 238-57); and 'Habitat' by Yizhar Hirschfeld (pp. 258-72). In their introduction the editors state that 'in the essays with which the volume begins, we have not wished to sacrifice the vividness of a personal introduction to selected themes to the harmless drudgery of a comprehensive survey. The essays are meant to provoke thought. They are not there to repeat, under the guise of providing comprehensive information, the narrative stereotypes that have weighed particularly heavily on our interpretation of the period. It is the frank intention of the authors of the essays to encourage readers to travel further in new directions' (p. xii). The authors of the essays managed, it seems, to fulfil masterfully the editors' goals and, read as a whole, these essays provide a splendid introduction to the world of Late Antiquity.

The second part of the volume (pp. 273-757) is a collection of short entries arranged alphabetically on central figures, places and a wide range of topics, from religious phenomena through social institutions, to literary genres and material culture. This list of entries was not intended to be exhaustive and, as the editors themselves warn, 'the reader ... should know that this is a guide. It is not an encyclopaedia, a dictionary, or a lexicon' (p. xii). Some of the topics or persons missing from the alphabetical list (such as Anglo-Saxon England or the Franks) are discussed by the papers in the first part. Thus, the two sections of the book are complementary, and one is well advised to check the comprehensive index which concludes the volume (pp. 771-80).

*Late Antiquity* deserves a very warm welcome indeed, and we should all be grateful to the editors for the huge amount of work they invested in producing this magnificent volume. Maybe the most rewarding compliment they could get is the fact that, shortly after its publication, *Late Antiquity* is already an indispensable tool not only for students, but also for scholars. And readers of this review who think I am biased simply because I was asked to contribute a short entry to this laudable project, are urged to read the book for themselves and be impressed by the colossal amount of scholarship crammed into these 780 pages.