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*The Later Roman Empire*¹

By PETER BROWN

I

Not only has the appearance of the work of Jones been an event of the first importance in the study of the Later Roman Empire: it is a monument to a distinctive approach to ancient history. For the book is an intellectual triumph: it is marked by the mastery of a vast quantity of texts, by a never-failing felicity of interpretation, above all, by a massive independence of mind.

It is the splendid isolation of Jones that most strikes the student of Later Roman history. This is a period that is more in danger of being taken for granted than of being ignored. Guiding-lines towards an understanding of the period from 284 to 602, that had begun as brilliant essays in interpretation by ancient and medieval historians of the early decades of this century, have imperceptibly hardened into *Schultraditionen*, piously handed down from footnote to footnote. There is, indeed, a "sacred rhetoric" of Later Roman social history, which is all the more hypnotic for being based on a genuine anxiety to master the profound and disquieting changes of the Roman Empire, whose decline and fall has always stirred the sensitive European as, in some way, a *memento mori* for his own age.²

There has been a tendency to take for granted, both that the main social and economic developments of the Late Roman period provide the clue to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, and that the transition between the ancient world and the Middle Ages is best understood in terms of the replacement, in this period, of an "ancient" by a "medieval" style of society.³ These developments have been summed up in the growth of great estates,⁴ the abandonment of a monetary for a natural economy,⁵ the decline of the urban middle classes,⁶ the

¹ A review of A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602. A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964. 3 vols. Vols. I-II: pp. xiv + 1068; Vol. III: pp. 448. £14 14s.). Here abbreviated as *L.R.E.* *The Decline of the Ancient World* (Longmans, 1966) presents the substance of *L.R.E.* in an abbreviated form.

² For example, M. Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 2nd ed. revised by P. M. Fraser (1957), I, 541, and G. I. Brătianu, 'Vers le Bas-Empire', *Etudes byzantines d'histoire économique et sociale* (1938), 15-22. S. Mazzarino, *The End of the Ancient World*, trans. Holmes (1966), is a suggestive if sketchy *aperçu* of the historiography of the decline of the Roman Empire; A. Piganiol, *L'Empire chrétien* (*Histoire romaine*, IV, 2), 1947, esp. 411-22, remains the best introduction to modern views.

³ See notably L. M. Hartmann, *Kapitel vom spätantiken und mittelalterlichen Staate* (1913). The same concern is fundamental to H. Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, trans. Miall (1937); see A. Riising, 'The Fate of Henri Pirenne's thesis on the consequences of the Islamic Expansion', *Classica et Medievalia*, XIII (1952), 87-130. It is shared, from a different perspective, by Soviet historians, most notably by E. M. Shtajerman, *Die Krise der Sklavenhalterordnung im Westen des römischen Reiches*, trans. Seyfarth (1964), and 'Programmes politiques à l'époque de la crise du III. siècle', *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*, IV (1958), 310-29.

⁴ See M. Weber, *Die sozialen Gründe des Untergangs der antiken Kultur* (1896). Contrast *L.R.E.* II, 781-8.

⁵ See F. Lot, *La fin du monde antique et le début du moyen-âge*, 2nd ed. (1951), esp. 96. Contrast *L.R.E.* I, 26-32, 61-6, and 101-9.

⁶ See S. Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire* (1899), 245-81, and Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History*, I, 467-541. Contrast *L.R.E.* II, 737-63 and 1053.

collapse of trade,¹ the regimentation of society into a caste-system;² the immediate circumstances of the fall of the Western Empire have been understood in terms of a decline of population,³ of the barbarization of the Roman army,⁴ of the rise of provincial nationalism in the guise of Christian heresies; and it has been held that the divergent destinies of the Eastern and the Western Empires merely ratify our impression of the deep-seated weaknesses of Roman society in the West of the third and fourth centuries A.D.⁵ These broad outlines having once been presented, recent scholars of the period have been content, with some notable exceptions, to execute intricate manœuvres in well-charted seas, such as the vicissitudes and programmes of the pagan aristocracy of Rome⁶ and the social position and *Tendenz* of the leading contemporary historians,⁷ and to lavish their ingenuity on the political message of frivolous texts, such as the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*.⁸

Jones, by contrast, takes very little for granted. It is not only the caution of a great scholar which strikes us, as when Jones writes of the widely accepted superiority of the Eastern to the Western parts of the Empire, that "this is a question which needs investigation," that "this again must be demonstrated" (II, 1027). Far more, it is the inimitable manner with which he will approach any problem: a mastery of the available material, a sense of the concrete, an inspired commonsense will unfailingly dissolve the cruder outlines of the textbooks into an exquisitely shaded mosaic of known facts. One masterly example, among many, is his analysis of the structure of landholding and of the legal categories and actual living-conditions of the peasantry: it is outstanding not only for its felicity of interpretation, but for its humane sense, when handling a subject known to us

¹ See F. W. Walbank, *The Decline of the Roman Empire in the West* (1946). Contrast *L.R.E.* II, 844-72 and 1038-9.

² See Lot, *La fin du monde antique*, 115-46. Contrast *L.R.E.* II, 1047-53.

³ See A. E. R. Boak, *Man Power Shortage and the Fate of the Roman Empire in the West* (1955). Contrast *L.R.E.* II, 1040-5.

⁴ See *L.R.E.* II, 619-23 and 1036-8. Compare, most recently, R. MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (1963), esp. pp. 119-77. On the Romanization of Germanic generals, see especially K. Stroheker, 'Zur Rolle der Heermeister fränkischer Abstammung im späten 4. Jahrhundert', *Historia*, IV (1955), 314-30 (= *Germanentum und Spätantike*, 1966, 9-29). On the co-operation of general and Roman landowner to maintain the agrarian system of the Empire, see A. D. Momigliano, in *Rivista storica italiana*, LXIX (1957), 282, and E. A. Thompson, 'The Settlement of the Barbarians in Southern Gaul', *Journal of Roman Studies*, XLV (1956), 65-75.

⁵ See Brătianu, 'La distribution de l'or et les raisons économiques de la division de l'empire romain', *Etudes Byzantines*, 59-91, and E. Demougeot, *De l'unité à la division de l'empire romain, 395-410* (1951), esp. pp. 33-89. See *L.R.E.* II, 1064-8.

⁶ See especially A. Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas in the Later Roman Empire. The clash between the Senate and Valentinian I* (1952). F. Paschoud, 'Réflexions sur l'idéal religieux de Symmaque', *Historia*, XIV (1965), 215-35, is a recent example.

⁷ See the excellent studies of E. A. Thompson, *The Historical Work of Ammianus Marcellinus* (1947) and A. D. Momigliano, 'Cassiodorus and the Italian Culture of his time', *Proc. Brit. Acad.* XLI (1955), 207-45 (= *Studies in Historiography* (1966), 181-210), and 'Gli Anicii e la storiografia del VI. sec. d. Cr.', *Rend. Accad. Lincei*, ser. 8, XI (1956), 279-97. Unfortunately studies of East Roman historiography are notably less satisfactory: see R. Rubin, *Prokopius von Kaisareia* (1954), cols. 75-80 (= *Pauly-Wissowa-Reallexikon*, XXIII, I (1957), cols. 349-54) and *Das Zeitalter Justinians*, I (1960), 168-244; M. V. Levčenko, 'Vizantijskij istorik Agafii Mirinejskij i ego mirovozzrenie', *Vizantijskij Vremennik*, III (1950), 62-84; and O. Veh, *Zur Geschichtsschreibung und Weltauffassung des Prokops von Caesarea: 3. Teil, Der Geschichtsschreiber Agathias von Myrina* (1953).

⁸ See most recently J. Straub, *Heidnische Geschichtsapologetik in der christlichen Spätantike. Untersuchungen über Zeit und Tendenz der S.H.A. Antiquitas 4*, I (1963) and *Historia Augusta-Colloquium, Bonn, Antiquitas 4*, 2 (1964).

largely from juridical sources, of the manifold loopholes and small compensations of real life in an agricultural community.¹ It deserves the attention and gratitude of ancient and medieval historians alike. Altogether, in the present state of Late Roman studies, this book is like the arrival of a steel-plant in a region that has, of late, been given over to light industries.

Behind this *Survey* there lies an amazing work of digestion. Jones has attempted to make all the evidence his own. Inevitably, this means that Jones's evidence is the sort of evidence that one man can make his own. It is confined almost exclusively to texts (including papyri); secondary literature, archaeological reports on Late Roman sites, numismatic evidence, and the flotsam and jetsam of inscriptions ("since many are so cunningly concealed in the *corpora* and periodicals" [p. vii]), cannot be handled with such certainty, and so they appear only subliminally in Jones's study.

The most lasting impression of the central chapters of this *Survey* is that the study of Late Roman society began in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the study of the Roman law codes of Theodosius II and Justinian,² and that it is likely to end with them. Quite crucial considerations have to be deduced from such administrative documents: the impression that agriculture, and not the trade and industry of the towns, contributed the overwhelming bulk of the national income, has to be based, largely, on a belief that "the apportionment of the burden of taxation probably corresponded roughly to the economic structure of the empire" (II, 1039). If Jones's overall picture of Late Roman society is to be reversed, this must be done along the lines taught us by Jones himself, by the patient re-examination and resetting of every piece of his vast mosaic of legislative texts.³

The reliance on such material is the most obvious feature of this *Survey*. It is not, however, the most original.⁴ For Jones has gone on to exploit the immense reserves of the Christian literature of this period, as no other author has done before him. The popular literature of the Christian Church has ensured that the "man in the street" exists for us, in the Later Empire, as in no other period of ancient history.⁵ And in the letter-books of the Fathers of the Church and in the acts and canons of its councils, Jones has found lush pasture for his evident fascination with the mechanisms of organization. As a result, this *Survey* is the first social his-

¹ *L.R.E.* II, ch. xx, 'The Land', esp. 773-812.

² On the origins of Byzantine scholarship, see most recently, A. Pertusi, 'Le siècle de l'érudition', *Jahrbuch der österreichischen byzantinischen Gesellschaft*, xv (1966), 3-25, and in *Quaderni dell' Istituto di filologia greca dell' Università di Palermo*, III (1966).

³ Hence the importance, for instance, of Jones's views on the *Notitia Dignitatum* (*L.R.E.* III, 347-80), for his assessment of the military weaknesses of the Western Empire at the time of the barbarian invasions (*L.R.E.* I, 194-9). Disagreement with Jones has tended to concentrate on his interpretation of administrative texts: see, for example, L. Ruggini, 'A proposito del follis nel IV secolo', *Rend. Accad. Lincei*, ser. 8, xvi (1961), 306-19, and in *Rivista storica italiana*, LXXVII (1965), 201-11, and A. Chastagnol, in *Rev. études latines*, XLII (1965), 159-65, esp. 162-5.

⁴ See most recently J. Karayannopoulos, *Das Finanzwesen des frühbyzantinischen Staates* (1958), and W. Seyfarth, *Soziale Fragen der spätromischen Kaiserzeit im Spiegel des Theodosianus* (1963).

⁵ Brilliantly demonstrated by N. H. Baynes: for example, 'The *Pratum Spirituale*', *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (1955), 261-70, and E. Dawes and N. H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* (1955), xi-xiv. See most recently, F. Halkin, 'L'hagiographie byzantine au service de l'histoire', *Thirteenth International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, Oxford 1966. The one serious omission in the *L.R.E.* is the evidence of the *Talmud*, well exploited by M. Avi-Yonah, *Geschichte der Juden im Zeitalter der Talmud* (1962).

tory of the established Christian Church.¹ Invaluable pages on the wealth and social origins of the clergy culminate in a remarkable conclusion: the Christian Church is caught, *in flagrante delicto*, as an institution harbouring more idle mouths, taking a larger share of the national wealth than the notorious Imperial bureaucracy, and equally accomplished in extracting wealth from the peasantry.² Any further study of the role of Christianity in Late Roman society must begin with these lucid pages.

To attempt to mould so much evidence is, inevitably, to be partly moulded by it. Jones presents this book, quite candidly, as a *Survey*. It is most effective in describing the way in which Late Roman people organized their lives—the structures of their administration, the organization of their army, the mechanisms of legislation, the collection of rents and taxes, the sources from which the state and the wealthier classes drew their wealth. One must read Jones often to realize how rich and how amazingly differentiated is his presentation of these aspects of Late Roman life. But it must be remembered, that not only are these precisely the aspects of the Later Empire that have been rendered most explicit for us in contemporary evidence: this evidence, itself, is the only evidence that can lend itself to unambiguous canons of interpretation, to the clinching of an argument through the sifting of “proof texts”. They are the aspects of Late Roman social history that are, as it were, the most easy to “verbalize”. But just because they are the most obvious, they are not always the most important: for what one often misses is a sense of the subtlety and the dynamic quality of the relation of change and continuity in these last centuries of the classical Roman Empire.

Jones's conclusions on the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, and on the quality of the Roman State that survived in the East, faithfully mirror the scope of the evidence he has handled. He maintains that his evidence “suggests that the simple but rather unfashionable view that the barbarians played a considerable part in the decline and fall of the empire may have some truth in it”, indeed, that “barbarian attacks probably played a major part in the fall of the West” (II, 1027); while, in his description of the internal condition of the Empire, he emphasizes a theme that he has pursued relentlessly and demonstrated with amazing skill from a variety of sources throughout his *Survey*, that “the basic economic weakness of the Empire was that too few producers supported too many idle mouths” (II, 1045). Such conclusions have the irrefutable merit of being intelligible to any Late Roman reader. Whether we accept them as sufficient and comprehensive, depends largely on what we think of the degree of awareness of Late Roman men. I would suggest that certain crucial developments have been passed over lightly by this *Survey*, because the evidence for them, being less explicit, has to be mobilized and assessed by different methods from those used by Jones. These concern: (i) changes in the attitude of the civilian population to the barbarian; (ii) the degree to which the continuity of the basic orientations of the economic and cultural life of the Roman Empire, from the age of the Severi to Theodosius I, excluded a necessary adjustment to the new form of

¹ *L.R.E.* II, 920–9; a necessary complement to J. Gaudemet, *L'Eglise dans l'Empire romain* (IV–V. s.), *Histoire du droit et des institutions de l'Eglise en Occident*, III (1958).

² *L.R.E.* II, 894–914 and 933–4.

the barbarian menace, created by new conditions along the Roman frontier; (iii) the extent to which the continuity of traditional social groupings hindered the initiative of the Roman state, by preventing the growth of a distinct bureaucratic class; (iv) the relation, in certain areas and in certain periods of the Later Empire, between the accumulation of the national wealth by the state, the church and private persons, and the rate of growth in trade and agriculture.

II

In his chapter on "Religion and Morals" (xxiii), Jones limits himself to estimating the precise effect of Christian teaching on the behaviour of the average man. We have brilliant pages on the use of wealth,¹ on the survival of secular attitudes to divorce,² a salutary emphasis on the slowness with which Christianity abandoned the mentality of a minority-religion,³ and a shrewd estimate of the Church's failure.⁴ What is ignored, is the slow merging of pagan prejudice with Christian intolerance.

This merging took very different forms in the Eastern and the Western provinces of the Empire. In the West, Christian opinion, in the late fourth century, was prepared neither to respect those who kept the barbarian outside the Empire, nor to tolerate and absorb the barbarian, once inside. Western Christianity was not "pacifist". Rather, it became respectable through crystallizing the latent anti-militarism of the civilian population:⁵ this is already evident in the "senatorial" apologetic of Lactantius.⁶ Unlike the medieval Byzantine Empire, Western society of the early Middle Ages failed notably to find an honourable place for the Roman soldier.⁷

At one and the same time, to be respectable involved keeping the barbarian at arm's length. Ambrose, for instance, will expect his readers to assume that the barbarian must be a heretic, and the heretic a barbarian.⁸

The barbarian raids and settlements in the Western Empire were a protracted, piecemeal process. They might have taken on a very different meaning, if they had not been consistently experienced, by the most influential and articulate leaders of the civilian population, as the arrival of men condemned forever to remain "outsiders"—men of war and heretics.⁹ One cannot resist the impres-

¹ *L.R.E.* II, 970-2. ² *Ibid.* 973-6.

³ *Ibid.* 984-5. The existence of a pagan tradition critical of ideas of a 'Heavenly City' and concerned with the practical responsibilities of government has been traced in Arabic sources by R. Walzer, 'Aspects of Islamic Political Thought', *Oriens*, XVI (1963), 40-60, esp. 44 and 55.

⁴ *Ibid.* 979-82.

⁵ *Ibid.* 922-4 shows that the bishops on the whole were drawn from the average civilian middle classes of the Empire.

⁶ See J. Moreau, *Lactance : De la mort des persécuteurs*, I, Sources chrétiennes, 39 (1954), 51-5.

⁷ See H. Delhaye, *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires* (1909).

⁸ Clearly seen by M. Meslin, 'Nationalisme, Etat et religion à la fin du IV^e siècle', *Archives de Sociologie des Religions*, XVIII (1964), 3-20. St Patrick had to excuse himself for trying to convert the Irish: see *Confessio*, esp. c. xv (*Patrol. Lat.* LIII, 808-9). There was no attempt to evangelize beyond the Roman frontier: see E. A. Thompson, 'Christianity and the Northern Barbarians', *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century A.D.*, ed. Momigliano (1963), 56-78, esp. 62-4. This contrasts with later Byzantine diplomatic practice: see G. Moravcsik, 'Byzantinische Mission im Kreis der Türkvolker an der Nordküste des Schwarzen Meeres', *Thirteenth International Conference of Byzantine Studies*, Oxford 1966.

⁹ For example, E. Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae veteres*, I (1961), no. 1516, implies that a barbarian was delivered by Catholic baptism both from original sin and from his "barbaric race".

sion that it was the new intolerance of the "respectable" Catholicism of the later fourth century which kept the barbarian kingdoms "barbaric": it forced the Visigothic Vandal and Ostrogothic ruling classes in on themselves; it fostered their Arianism; it checked their "detrribalization", and so it ringed the Mediterranean of the late fifth and sixth centuries with precarious, encapsulated minorities, the *regna gentium*.¹

The feature of East Roman society that contrasts most significantly with Western developments passes unnoticed in Jones's *Survey*. His insistence, in the face of much fashionable opinion, that the great theological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries did not act as a cover for the "separatist" aspirations of the Eastern provinces, but "were in reality what they appeared to be" (II, 970), masks a whole judgment on the quality of the Christian culture of the Greek world. This culture was remarkably homogeneous. The Monophysite controversy is inconceivable without such a cultural framework: it is a "centripetal" controversy, *par excellence*, in which the experts disagreed so vehemently precisely because each was convinced that it was possible to achieve agreement on a shared body of doctrine.² Nor was this rancorous creativity ever limited to theology: the Alexandrian Monophysite John Philoponos found time to drub opponents on subjects as diverse as the perishable nature of the stars (thus anticipating Galileo)³ and the spherical nature of the earth.⁴

By the end of the sixth century, the inhabitants of the Eastern Empire had come to feel themselves to be members of a totally Christian community, whose governing classes were attached to the same forms of religious life as the populace. The change is anticipated by the all-embracing character of the religious legislation of Justinian;⁵ it is confirmed in the savage treatment of the "outsider" *par excellence* in a Christian society, the Jew;⁶ it is shown in the new quality of popular devotion to images,⁷ and in the fact that the early seventh century is the golden age of hagiography.⁸

We miss this development if we concentrate exclusively on the theological divisions of the Eastern Empire. In theology, for instance, Egypt is "perhaps the supreme example in human history of the triumph of non-co-operation".⁹ Yet

¹ E. A. Thompson, 'The Conversion of the Visigoths to Catholicism', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, IV (1960), 4-35, esp. 29-33, and M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Gothia and Romania', *The Long-Haired Kings* (1962), 45-6.

² C. Moeller, 'Le chalcédonisme et le néo-chalcédonisme en Orient de 451 à la fin du VI^e siècle', *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, I (1953), 637-720.

³ S. Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity* (1962), 154-75.

⁴ W. Wolska, *La Topographie chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustes*, Théologie et science au VI^e siècle (1962), 147-92. See also B. Tatakis, *La philosophie byzantine*, Histoire de la philosophie, fasc. supplém. 2 (1949), 1-95, and G. L. Huxley, *Anthemius of Tralles. A Study in Late Greek Geometry*, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Monographs, I (1959).

⁵ See *L.R.E.* I, 285-6 and A. Berger, 'La concezione di eretico nelle fonti giustiniane', *Rend. Accad. Lincei*, ser. 8, X (1955), 353-68.

⁶ *L.R.E.* II, 949-50.

⁷ E. Kitzinger, 'The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, VIII (1954), 83-149, esp. 127-8, and A. Frolow, 'Le culte de la relique de la Vraie Croix à la fin du VI^e siècle', *Byzantino-Slavica*, XXII (1961), 320-39.

⁸ H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft, XII, 2, I (1959), 402-13.

⁹ N. H. Baynes, 'Alexandria and Constantinople. A Study in Ecclesiastical Diplomacy', *Byzantine Studies*, 101.

we are only beginning to appreciate how this province contributed more to the general cultural life of the Empire than at any previous period of Roman rule,¹ and the extent to which its inhabitants remained united against the outsider, the pagan barbarian, praying in Greek and Coptic for the success of the Roman army, now thought of as the host of the people of Israel.²

This contrast must be taken into account in considering the divergent fate of the Eastern and Western provinces of the Empire in the early Middle Ages.

For Jones the problem of the decline of the Roman Empire appears deceptively simple: in the East, it did not decline, it survived very well.³ Jones's point is reinforced by recent studies of Byzantine society in the later seventh century.⁴ These show that the Empire survived the Arab and Slav invasions of that time on an administrative, social, and military framework, that was not altogether different from that described by Jones for the reigns of Justinian and Maurice; there was no radical "renewal" of the structure of East Roman society, such as had once been ascribed to the reign of Heraclius.⁵ The decisive factor, perhaps, was the new homogeneity: it ensured that a population that was always ready to submit to catastrophic barbarian raids as a "scourge of God" might also rally to repel the invader with something like the spirit of a crusade.

In the West, the fate of the Empire was sealed by Christian prejudice. Judged by "Byzantine" standards, the barbarian kingdoms of the West must appear vaguely disgusting: the Merovingians granted tax-exemptions (I, pp. 261-2) and sold bishoprics (II, 920). But it is only too easy to underestimate the primitive bedrock of Roman law and administrative practice in the West, and to fail to appreciate the determination with which the Frankish kings and the mixed aristocracy of their court continued to rule a sub-Roman society effectively far into the seventh century.⁶ The problem, therefore, for the Western medievalist is not only why the Western Empire "fell", but why it could not be recreated, like the many "barbarian" Empires established in Northern China in the early Middle Ages. Part of the answer may be found in the history of intolerance in the fifth and sixth centuries.

III

The study of Later Roman history had, once, been content to concentrate exclusively on those features that separated Late Roman society from its classical roots. The views of Lot and Rostovtzeff are what a theologian would call "sublapsarian": the "fall" of the "crisis" of the third century ensured that the Roman Empire as reorganized by Diocletian and Constantine bore only a superficial resemblance to an ancient society. Jones's *Survey* is an implicit rebuttal of this

¹ See A. Cameron, 'Wandering Poets: A Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt', *Historia*, xiv (1965), 470-509, and C. Detlef G. Müller, 'Die koptische Kirche zwischen Chalkedon und dem Arabereinmarsch', *Zeitschr. für Kirchengeschichte*, lxxv (1964), 271-308.

² P. J. Photiades, 'A semi-Greek, semi-Coptic Parchment', *Klio*, xli (1963), 234-5.

³ *L.R.E.* II, 1026-7.

⁴ See especially A. Pertusi, 'La formation des thèmes byzantins', *Berichte zum XI. internationalen Byzantinistenkongress*, 1958 (1960), 1-40, and J. Karayannopoulos, *Die Entstehung der byzantinischen Themenordnung*, *Byzantinische Archiv* 10 (1959).

⁵ P. Lemerle, 'Quelques remarques sur le règne d'Héraclius', *Studi medievali*, 3rd ser. 1 (1960), 347-61.

⁶ See esp. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings*, 185-223, and R. Sprandel, 'Struktur und Geschichte des merowingischen Adels', *Histor. Zeitschr.* cxcii (1961), 33-71.

view. It comes after a generation of research that has been stimulated, above all, by surprising discoveries of the degree to which the ancient forms of life survived the "crisis" of the third century. The transformations of urban life, in the Later Empire, have been found to be far more paradoxical than had once been thought.¹ A realization of the continuing role of a monetary economy has altered our picture of the "style" of Late Roman society.² The traditional elements in the ideology of the Imperial power have come to be recognized.³ Above all, the intellectual transformation of Late Antiquity can be seen as a continuous arc, linking the age of Marcus Aurelius to that of Constantine, and quietly overspanning the spectacular external events of the third century:⁴ it is no longer surprising to find Plotinus and his senatorial circle in the Rome of Gallienus,⁵ and an Italian gentleman portrayed in the "Asiatic" manner of the Antonines, on the eve of the accession of Diocletian.⁶

It is, precisely, a balance sheet of the speed and direction of change in the third and fourth centuries that we need to understand the problems facing the Roman Empire.⁷

For the problem posed by this continuity is, in part, a psychological one. One cannot understand the mentality of the governing classes of the fourth century, if one does not realize the extent to which they seemed to themselves to have coped successfully with the disorders of the mid-third century, in terms of ideals of government and society that merely continued the aspirations of the prosperous days of the Severi: Dio Cassius already wanted "a stable, centrally governed, sharply graded society of which the primary object is to avoid at all costs disorder and change";⁸ Jones's *Survey*, with its great emphasis on the achievement of just these qualities in Dio's native, Eastern provinces, would have reassured him. Dio and his senatorial colleagues, of course, would have less of a hand in bringing about that state of affairs than they had hoped; but the inscriptions of the Later Empire show that men who shared his attitudes continued to govern the Greek provinces, from the late third to the late sixth century.⁹

It has always been dangerous to govern the Mediterranean with attitudes that

¹ For example, S. Mazzarino, *Aspetti sociali del quarto secolo* (1951), 217-69; A. P. Fevrier, 'Ostie et Porto à la fin de l'Antiquité', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, LXX (1957-8), 295-330; and P. Petit, *Libanius et la vie municipale à Antioche* (1955).

² For example, H. Geiss, *Geld- und naturalwirtschaftliche Erscheinungsformen im staatlichen Aufbau Italiens während der Gotenzeit*, Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, Beiheft 27 (1931); G. Mickwitz, *Geld und Wirtschaft im römischen Reich des vierten Jahrhunderts* (1932); A. Piganiol, 'Le problème de l'or au IV^e siècle', *Annales d'histoire sociale* (1945), 47-53; and Mazzarino, *Aspetti sociali*, 169-216.

³ For example, H. Gelzer, 'Altertumswissenschaft und Spätantike', *Histor. Zeitschr.* CXXXV (1926), 173-87. J. Karayannopoulos, 'Der frühbyzantinische Kaiser', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, XLIX (1956), 369-84, provides a useful survey.

⁴ See E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (1965).

⁵ R. Harder, 'Plotins Leben', *Kleine Schriften* (1960), 257-95.

⁶ C. E. Vermeule, 'A Graeco-Roman portrait of the 3rd century A.D.', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, xv (1961), 1-22.

⁷ *L.R.E.* 1, 25-32, is particularly sane on the economic crisis. See especially G. Walser, T. Pekary, *Die Krise des römischen Reiches. Bericht über die Forschungen zur Geschichte des 3. Jahrhunderts (193-284 n. chr.) von 1939 bis 1959* (1962), and the excellent survey of R. Rémondon, *La crise de l'empire romain* (1964), 97-114, esp. 102-5, and F. Millar, *Das römische Reich und sein Nachbarn. Die Mittelmeerwelt im Altertum*, IV. Fischer Weltgeschichte (1966), esp. 146-7, 217-20, and 241-9.

⁸ F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (1964), 108.

⁹ L. Robert, 'Epigrammes du Bas-Empire, II: Epigrammes relatifs à des gouverneurs', *Hellenica*, iv (1948), 35-110, esp. 108.

have become fixed with success. One has only to read Jones's sober pages on the cost of transport, "the greatest incubus on the empire" (II, 1048),¹ and to compare this with the abundant literature on the famines of Rome in the fourth century, in which all parties emphasize that the solution of their ills was *only* a matter of transport,² to realize this. As for the relations of these men with the barbarians: from the battle of Adrianople to the reign of Justinian II,³ the worst catastrophes of the Roman Empire were precipitated by the belief that the primitive methods applied to the inhabitants of the Empire by its bureaucracy—the eternal short-cut of the coercion of social groups (II, 1051)—could be successfully extended to embrace the transfer of barbarian populations.

The Roman Empire of the fourth century, therefore, was an empire that had successfully maintained itself around the Mediterranean. Jones's explanation of the fall of this Empire in the West merely reflects faithfully the great blind spot of such a society: the northern barbarian is the unwelcome intruder, seemingly more importunate than ever, but of whom nothing is known. Most students of Ammianus Marcellinus, for instance, are merely following the grain of their author, by piling up studies of the affluent "Mediterranean" societies of Rome and Antioch, and passing over what he has to say about the northern barbarians.⁴ He has, indeed, far less to say than he should: he and his audience plainly sympathized with the Emperor Julian in dismissing the Visigoths as a mere backward tribe, ravaged by slave-traders, and in regarding Persia as the traditional enemy.⁵ A complete study of the social and diplomatic relations between *Germania* and *Romania* on the eve of the invasions has yet to be written, for the simple and depressing reason that few people thought about such things at the time. The Byzantine Empire of the early Middle Ages, a state chastened by bitter experience, is infinitely superior in this respect to the omnipotent and obtuse colossus of the fourth century: "in these centuries was forged, in reply to the northern challenge, by steadfast faith and lucid thinking, by careful study and observation, by trial and error, that essential weapon of East Roman policy—the imperial diplomacy which remains one of Byzantium's lasting contributions to the history of Europe."⁶

This is not to be isolated as a purely political failure. It reflects a tension in the orientation of Late Roman society, between the Mediterranean and the northern provinces of the Western Empire. For one of the most remarkable developments

¹ *L.R.E.* II, 827–34 and 841–4. See also J. Rougé, 'Quelques aspects de la navigation en Méditerranée du Ve siècle et dans la première moitié du VIe siècle', *Cahiers d'Histoire*, VI (1961), 131–54, and his *Recherches sur l'organisation du commerce maritime en Méditerranée sous l'empire romain* (Ecole pratique des Hautes Études. Ports, Routes, Traffics, 21, 1966).

² See H. Kohns, *Versorgungskrisen und Hungerrevolte im spätantiken Rom* (Antiquitas 6, 1961), esp. 63–77.

³ See Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, and Theophanes, *Chron.* ad ann. mundi 6183 (Bonn Corpus, pp. 559–61). See P. Charanis, 'The Transfer of Populations as a Policy in the Byzantine Empire', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, III (1961).

⁴ Most recently, for example, A. Demandt, *Zeitkritik und Geschichtsbild im Werk des Ammianus* (1965). E. A. Thompson, *The Early Germans* (1965), esp. 72–108, 'Roman Diplomacy and the Barbarians', and *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfilas* (1966) are brilliant exceptions.

⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, XXII, 7.8. Compare P. Petit, *Libanius*. . . 182–7, for an excellent characterization of the horizons of his compatriot, Libanius.

⁶ D. Obolensky, 'The Empire and its Northern Neighbours, 565–1018', *The Cambridge Medieval History*, IV. *The Byzantine Empire: I. Byzantium and its Neighbours* (1966), 473.

of the third and fourth centuries is the fact that for the first time, Roman civilization—Roman urban life, Roman villas, a Roman style of life, and a Roman standard of living—had reached the political frontier of the Empire in just those areas that faced the most restless parts of the barbaric world. In the Balkan peninsula, for instance, in the second and early third century, the “barbarian” could exist inside the Empire. By the fourth century the frontier provinces of the Danube were as much part of *Romania* as any other; and so the only “barbarian” was the one across the military frontier,¹ faced directly, for the first time, with a society whose higher standard of living and intolerance of his own way of life must have seemed to increase with every development of the third and fourth centuries. “Envy”, not the aimless motion of tribes,² drew the barbarians on to a land where the bait—the great villas and Imperial residences of Pannonia³ and the Rhineland⁴—dangled provocatively close.

Yet, at just this time, the personnel of the Late Roman government continued to come, predominantly, from the Mediterranean.⁵ Their style of life remained Mediterranean, based on the laborious transport of grain to the traditional urban centres of the ancient world.⁶ Their armies had to be fed from Aquitaine;⁷ and, in the end, they will both abandon their Romanized colleagues in Britain, and will shroud this withdrawal from the northern world in a silence that becomes ever more shocking the more we learn of the high quality of the Late Roman life of that province.⁸ Two studies are still vital to our understanding of the failure of the Western Empire: that of C. E. Stevens, which emphasizes the technological failure to develop a “Northern” agrarian society, as an alternative to that of the Mediterranean,⁹ and that of W. H. C. Frend, which stresses a parallel failure to absorb a non-Mediterranean society in the hinterland of Africa.¹⁰ The medievalist, who is aware of the degree to which the agrarian society of Northern France was able, seven centuries later, to bear the weight of an architecture as ambitious and a nobility as parasitic and given over to “pot-latch” behaviour as the urban aris-

¹ Compare Dio Cassius, in the early third century, on Pannonia—“The Pannonians. . . lead the most miserable existence of all mankind. For they are not well off as regards either soil or climate; they cultivate no olives and no wine. . .” (*Dios’ Roman History*, transl. Cary, Loeb, v, 415), with a fourth-century source: ‘. . . Pannoniae regio, terra dives in omnibus, non solum fructibus et iumentis, sed et negotiis et mancipiis, in qua semper imperatorum est habitatio delectabilis’ (*Totius Orbis Descriptio*, c. 57, *Geographi Graeci Minores*, II, 525 and ed. J. Rougé, *Exposito Totius Mundi et Gentium*, Sources chrétiennes, 1967, 124).

² Ambros. *Ep.* xviii, 21: the good harvest of Rhaetia Secunda had “lured the enemy upon her”.

³ A. Mocsy, s.v. ‘Pannonia’, *Pauly-Wissowa-Reallexikon*, Suppl. ix (1962), cols. 516–776, esp. 667–701 and E. B. Thomas, *Römische Villen in Pannonien*, 1964.

⁴ For the high standard of urban life in fourth-century Trier, see, for example, H. Eiden, ‘Spättrömische Figurenmosaik im Kornmarkt in Trier’, *Aus der Schatzkammer der antiken Trier. Neue Forschungen und Ausgrabungen* (1959), 54–93. For the frontier policy, see most recently, E. Demougeot, ‘La Gaule nord-orientale à la veille de l’invasion germanique’, *Revue historique*, ccxxxvi (1966), 17–46.

⁵ One such resident was even taken home, to be buried in Italy: E. Gabba-G. Tibiletti, ‘Una signora di Treviri sepolta a Pavia’, *Athenaeum*, n.s. xxxviii (1960), 253–62, at p. 254.

⁶ See J. Teall, ‘The Grain-Supply of the Byzantine Empire’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, xiii (1959), 137–8, on the continuance of a grain-trade between Mediterranean cities as late as the seventh century.

⁷ *L.R.E.*, II, 1064–5.

⁸ See most recently studies of Pelagianism that imply a high standard of culture and theological life in early fifth-century Britain: J. N. L. Myres, ‘Pelagius and the End of Roman Rule in Britain’, *Journ. Rom. Studies*, L (1960), 21–36, and J. Morris, ‘Pelagian Literature’, *Journ. Theolog. Studies*, n.s. xvi (1965), 26–60.

⁹ C. E. Stevens, ‘Agriculture and Rural Life in the Later Roman Empire’, *The Cambridge Economic History*, I (1942), 89–117.

¹⁰ W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church* (1952), esp. 25–59.

tocracies of the age of the Antonines,¹ must conclude that, in the conditions of the fourth and early fifth centuries, the Mediterranean was a *damnosa haereditas*, tying the Roman governing class of the West to the double rigidity of a Mediterranean style of life and the intolerance of a Mediterranean, urban religion.

IV

The social history of the Later Roman Empire must be studied, largely, in terms of the role of the State in Late Roman society. Jones shows healthy scepticism on the extent to which the Imperial laws either intended to impose, much less succeeded in imposing, a rigid control on the social system of the Empire.² The more precise problem remains: the place which a newly created and powerful bureaucracy had gained in Roman society from the fourth century onwards: to what extent, for instance, its regulations on the colonate colluded with the needs of the great landowners;³ to what extent its demand for payment in kind damaged the interests of important classes;⁴ to what extent the structure and methods of the tax system encouraged the rapid accumulation of wealth through profiteering by privileged members of the bureaucracy;⁵ to what extent the salaries and standards of living of public servants could compete with those of private individuals;⁶ to what extent, generally, it is possible to regard the Late Roman period as marked by the formation of a new class, a "nobility of service", sensitive to the initiative of the Emperors, and so providing the sociological foundations of the Imperial absolutism.

Jones's views on this subject are of the greatest interest. The Later Roman Empire, in his opinion, was marked by an exceptional degree of social mobility. In the Eastern Empire, this social mobility favoured the growth of a loyal administrative class; while, in the West, this mobility was brought to a halt by the power of the senatorial aristocracy, who, by the middle of the fifth century, enjoyed a monopoly of high office.⁷ The amazing spread of Christianity after the conversion of Constantine illustrates this clearly: for this "the most audacious act ever committed by an autocrat in disregard and defiance of the vast majority of his subjects",⁸ is now seen to coincide with a regrouping of the Roman social hierarchy around the Imperial court.⁹

Continued study of the "speed" and the "area" of such mobility is not only vital to our understanding of the general "sensitivity" of the upper classes of the Empire to the initiative of the Emperor: it affects our view of the religion and culture of the age;¹⁰ it can be invoked to explain both the "classicizing" of Chris-

¹ Lynn White Jr. *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (1962), 39-78.

² *L.R.E.* I, viii, and II, 1051. See R. MacMullen, 'Social Mobility and the Theodosian Code', *Journal of Roman Studies*, LIV (1964), 49-53—a dossier of successful evasions.

³ *L.R.E.* II, esp. 796. ⁴ Mickwitz, *Geld u. Wirtschaft*.

⁵ Mazzarino, *Aspetti sociali*, 110-18 and 169-216.

⁶ *L.R.E.* II, ch. xvi, 'The Civil Service', and 1055-8. ⁷ *L.R.E.* I, 207, and II, 1066.

⁸ J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* (1923), I, 366.

⁹ Jones, 'The Social Background of the Struggle between Paganism and Christianity', *The Conflict between Christianity and Paganism* (1963), 17-37, esp. 35-7. Compare, Mazzarino, *Aspetti sociali*, esp. 114.

¹⁰ See the excellent studies of K. M. Hopkins, 'Social Mobility in the Later Roman Empire: the evidence of Ausonius', *Classical Quarterly*, n.s. XI (1961), 239-48, and 'Elite Mobility in the Roman Empire', *Past and Present*, XXXII (1965), 12-26.

tianity,¹ and the corresponding cheapening of classical culture, as a mark of status hastily acquired by the new professional classes.²

Such a study requires caution and due attention to the nuances implied in this *Survey*. There is the very difficult problem of the continuity of the provincial aristocracies in the third and fourth centuries. I find it difficult to believe that the "crisis" of the third century created a *tabula rasa* in every province of the Empire. The platitude of Late Roman authors, that "nobility" was merely newly amassed riches should not be taken too seriously:³ Jones is, surely, right to suggest that the vast properties of some Roman senatorial families had "snowballed" slowly, since the High Empire.⁴ The only provincial aristocracy that has been studied in detail—that of Gaul—may be the least representative;⁵ in that this was an area where the insecurity of the third century had been at its greatest, and where the residence of the Emperors at Trier encouraged exceptional fluidity. In Italy, by contrast, it is possible to find families who continue from the age of Marcus Aurelius to beyond the end of the Western Empire.⁶ Such families may have covered many provinces of the Western Empire like ground ivy. If anything, it was the power of the State and not the traditional way of life of the provincial upper classes of the Western Empire which had been weakened by the "crisis" of the third century,⁷ and, for this reason, the sinister efflorescence of aristocratic government and of traditional culture in fifth-century Italy may have very deep roots indeed.⁸

Even in the Eastern Empire, the creation of a continuous "administrative" governing class was a "dam' close-run thing".⁹ Spectacular instances of social mobility and genuine administrative efficiency among the Praetorian Prefects should not blind us to the slow and unremitting pressure of the average, well-educated member of the Greek urban upper classes on the lower reaches of the bureaucracy and on the provincial administration. As governors and officials, these men received epigrams that hardly changed throughout this period.¹⁰ They may not have been landowners on the same scale as the Western senators, but they shared a common human wish to avoid high taxation, and knew well enough

¹ See P. R. L. Brown, 'Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman Aristocracy', *Journal of Roman Studies*, LI (1961), esp. 9–11.

² See the excellent remarks of Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas*, 96–124 and Momigliano, 'Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D.', *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity*, esp. 85–6.

³ Gaudentius, *Sermo*, xv (*Patrol. Lat.* xx, col. 949), and Salvian, *de gubernatione Dei*, III, 10 (*Patrol. Lat.* LIII, col. 68).

⁴ *L.R.E.* II, 555.

⁵ See K. Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel im spätantiken Gallien* (1948).

⁶ E.g. the Naeratii of Saepinum, near Beneventum; see s.v. Naeratus, *Pauly-Wissowa-Reallexikon*, xvi, 2539 ff. We can anticipate a study of such a family, the Rufii Festi of Volsinii, by J. F. Matthews. See also, J. Morris, 'Munatius Plancus Paulinus', *Bonner Jahrbücher*, CLXV (1965), 88–96, esp. the remarks on p. 96.

⁷ Studies of the forms of political influence in the Roman world rightly emphasize that these forms were continuous, while it was the needs of the State which changed in the third century: G. E. M. de Ste Croix, 'Suffragium: from Vote to Patronage', *British Journal of Sociology*, v (1954), 33–47, and L. Harmand, *Le Patronat sur les collectivités publiques des origines aux Bas-Empire* (1957).

⁸ *L.R.E.* I, 204–7. See A. Cameron, 'The Date and Identity of Macrobius', *Journal of Roman Studies*, LVII (1966), 25–38.

⁹ Outbursts of professionalism were the exception, the rule was a victory of the aristocratic ethos', Hopkins, 'Elite Mobility', *Past and Present*, xxxii (1965), 19. The only truly distinctive "administrative" class was formed by the eunuchs: see Hopkins, 'Eunuchs in Politics in the Later Roman Empire', *Proc. Cambridge Philological Soc.*, CLXXXIX (1963).

¹⁰ See Robert, 'Epigrammes du Bas-Empire', *Hellenica*, IV (1948), and Gervase Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (1963), esp. 54–77—a brilliant characterization.

how to protect themselves against its incidence. Their culture had impressive elements of continuity with the classical past, which rendered them "sound-proof" to the religious preoccupations of their masters.¹

It is a pity that studies of the traditional aristocracies of the Later Empire should have concentrated almost exclusively on the Western Empire.² It means that it is difficult to know what to look for, to find their equivalent in the East. To seek a Symmachus or a Sidonius Apollinaris among the Cappadocian Fathers is to court disappointment.³ But patient work along the fringes of the bureaucracy at Constantinople, on the poetry, for instance, patronized by officials and private persons, can reveal the extent of a more stable, more backward-looking, more amateurish world.⁴

Altogether, the Late Roman bureaucracy remained dangerously embedded in the aristocratic values of the ancient world. This new class had to compete with long-established ideas of status. The standard of living of its members always fell below that of the possessors of inherited wealth. Its inflated titles⁵ and notorious corruption⁶ merely reflect an uphill struggle to maintain its position. Its frontiers were never, for a moment, secure against the encroachments of the traditional upper classes of the Empire;⁷ as the Emperor was forced to admit, "the collection of [tax] arrears flags when the exactor pays deference to the debtor."⁸

V

Jones characterizes the Later Roman Empire as an increasingly "top-heavy" society. For, to the traditional accumulations of landed wealth and the traditional demands of an urban civilization, that had already reached sinister proportions under the Antonines, the Late Roman Emperors added a vastly increased army and bureaucracy, and patronized an established church that absorbed men and wealth like a sponge. The long-term effects of this imbalance were, briefly, that land fell out of cultivation and the population slowly receded, because the combined weight of rents and taxes left the peasants unable to rear sufficient children to counterbalance the very high death-rate.⁹ Few pre-modern societies have been described, in cross-section, with such patient detail, and their weaknesses revealed with such austerity, as in this *Survey* of the Roman Empire.

The precise extent and progress of the imbalance which Jones senses can never,

¹ See most recently Averil and Alan Cameron, 'Christianity and Tradition in the Historiography of the Late Empire', *Classical Quarterly*, n.s. xiv (1964), 316-28, and Averil Cameron, 'The "Scepticism" of Procopius', *Historia*, xv (1966), 466-82.

² See the excellent studies of A. Chastagnol, *La Préfecture urbaine à Rome sous le Bas-Empire* (1960), *Les Fastes de la Préfecture urbaine* (1962), and *Le Sénat romain sous le règne d'Odoacre* (1966).

³ For example, B. Treucker, *Politische und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zu den Basilien-Briefen* (1961), criticized by S. Giet, 'Basile, était-il sénateur?' *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, LX (1965), 429-43.

⁴ Averil and Alan Cameron, 'The Cycle of Agathias', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, LXXXVI (1966), 6-25. For a pre-Constantinian administrative family, still active in the fifth century, see L. C. Cantarelli, 'L'iscrizione onoraria di Giunio Quinto Palladio', *Bulletino Comunale di Roma*, LIV (1926), 35-41, and W. M. Ramsey, 'A noble Anatolian family of the Fourth Century', *Classical Review*, xxxiii (1919), 1-9.

⁵ R. Guillard, 'Etudes sur l'histoire administrative de l'Empire byzantin. Les titres nobiliaires de la haute époque (IVe-VIe siècles)', *Mélanges G. Ostrogorsky*, I (1963), 117-33, for the inflation of honours.

⁶ *L.R.E.* II, 1054-6.

⁷ As is shown in attitudes to influence: W. Liebeschuetz, 'Did the Palagian Movement have Social Aims?' *Historia*, xii (1963), 227-41, esp. 228-32, and O. Collet, 'La pratique et l'institution du suffragium au Bas-Empire', *Revue historique de droit français et étranger*, 4 ser. XLIII (1965), 185-221.

⁸ *L.R.E.* II, 545. ⁹ *Ibid.* 810-23 and 1038-47.

of course, be measured statistically. Such a characterization of the Later Empire is bound, therefore, to remain "impressionistic". More important, this characterization is tied to the level of consciousness of contemporary writers, and is determined by the angle of vision permitted by the material that Jones handles.

Given the rigid structure of any pre-industrial Mediterranean society, from fourth-century Rome to eighteenth-century Naples, many of the phenomena which Jones deplores—notably the accumulation of property and the high consumption and conspicuous waste of the Late Roman aristocracy—are inevitable.¹ The culprits may merely have changed without necessarily increasing: in the early third century, contemporaries blamed the extravagances of the Greek cities;² by the early fourth century, they were blaming the army and the bureaucracy.³ As for the Christian Church, contemporaries, on the whole, welcomed its growth to affluence, and so let it pass largely unnoticed. We may never know whether a Christian basilica of the Late Roman period was as expensive as a portico of the age of Marcus Aurelius. What we do know, from Late Roman sources, is that the basilica was welcomed as an avatar of the forum.

For the anatomy of any "top-heavy" society cannot be divorced from a study of the "vertical" links between classes. In the Later Empire, people felt that they needed protectors. They even sought them in Heaven as well as on earth.⁴ Our judgment on Late Roman society, in many cases, depends largely on our estimate as to how effective this protection was. The Gaul of the fifth and sixth centuries, for instance, provides an example of the strengthening of the local, "vertical" links of society around an effective aristocracy, whose role is summed up, with justifiable self-congratulation, in the works of Gregory of Tours.⁵ Such men provided some degree of security for the civilian population in the time of the barbarian kingdoms.⁶ There was always a need, in East and West, for such people: "a man who could do harm to his enemies and good to his friends".⁷ Yet more patient work on the agrarian history of the age may reveal, for instance, that absenteeism and a lack of interest in one's estate were not as common among Late Roman landowners as Jones's picture suggests. The *agricola bonus* may have been unfashionable in the literature of the time: but we do catch frequent glimpses of him in less refined sources—in sermons and in the lives of saints.⁸

Ultimately Jones's brilliant anatomy suffers from the nature of the evidence. An economic historian of this period is condemned to remain at a "pre-Harleyan"

¹ R. P. Duncan-Jones, 'Wealth and Munificence in Roman Africa', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, xxxi (1963), esp. 161–2. Compare Patrick Chorley, *Oil, Silk and Enlightenment. Economic Problems in XVIIIth Century Naples* (1965), esp. 11–15.

² Millar, *Cassius Dio*, 109.

³ Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, vii (ed. Moreau, *Lactance*, 84–5).

⁴ See most recently František Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger. Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit* (Cesk. akad. věd. 1965).

⁵ On the reputation enjoyed by the family of Ecdicius on account of his organization of famine relief: Gregory of Tours, *Hist. Francorum*, ii, 24. For the role of the bishop in the life of the towns, for instance, see R. Latouche, *The Birth of the Western Economy*, trans. Wilkinson (1961), esp. 103–6.

⁶ For a wholesale ransoming and resettlement of the agricultural population of Liguria after a barbarian invasion, see Ennodius, *Vita Epifani*, esp. cc. 171–7 (Mon. Germ. Hist. Auct. Antiq. vii, 1885, 105–6.)

⁷ *L.R.E.* ii, 915.

⁸ See, for instance, Augustine, *Enarratio in Ps.* 136, 5, and Teall, 'The Grain Supply of the Byzantine Empire', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, xiii (1959), 130–1, for the considerable evidence in Byzantine lives of saints.

stage: he can trace the veins and arteries of the society; he has only a hint of capillaries (banking, for instance, appears in only one document);¹ he has to refuse to know how the blood may have circulated.

Jones's picture of the Later Roman Empire is deliberately static. He sees no areas in which substantial changes in the national wealth could happen. He insists, for instance, that trade and industry never played an important role in Roman society.² The economic and social history of the Later Roman Empire, therefore, turns on the fate of agriculture; and, as Jones can see no change in agriculture more significant than a general recession partially offset by isolated instances of a gain in cultivation, he must concentrate on the depressing efficiency of the mechanisms by which money and food passed from the overwhelming majority of the population to the houses of the few. Furthermore, the *Survey*, in treating taxation, the cities, and the land in strictly separate chapters, implicitly denies that the functional relationship between the different areas of Late Roman economic life was any more complicated than this sad process. Altogether this *Survey* shows that we still know very little about what it was like to live in a Late Roman town,³ or a Late Roman village, and, even less, about the full complexity of the relations between the two.

The form of Jones's *Survey* is, indeed, a tacit rebuttal of an alternative approach to Late Roman economic history.⁴ This other approach concentrates on the economic development of specific regions of the empire; it is based on an exhaustive analysis of whatever material throws light on the relations between the various facets of the economic life of a region, on the varied participation and role of classes, and on the shifts in these relationships throughout the Late Roman period. The fragmentary nature of the evidence for any single region in this period makes such studies hazardous in the extreme; but the conclusions of some such regional studies may not only qualify, but transmute Jones's judgment on the general structure of Late Roman society. In Northern Italy in the late fourth century, for instance, there is some evidence for the role of the towns and of the Imperial bureaucracy, resident in Milan, and of the army, stationed in the area, as factors promoting the growth of agriculture.⁵ It has been suggested, less plausibly, that high taxation might even have encouraged more efficient farming;⁶ while the existence of large centres of consumption stimulated a trade in agricultural produce whose importance in the economic life of the Later Empire may have been unduly minimized by Jones.⁷ Similar conclusions may be reached for

¹ See Rémondon, *La crise de l'empire romain*, 309–10, who points to the possible role of the church in banking.

² See *L.R.E.* II, esp. 841–50 and 855–8.

³ *Ibid.* 1018–20, for instance, tacitly dismisses the view that the activities of the circus-factions are in any way symptomatic of the social structure of the East Roman cities: see Manojlović, 'Le peuple de Constantinople', *Byzantion*, XI (1936), 617–716, criticized by J. Jarry, 'Hérésies et factions de cirque à Constantinople du Ve au VIIe siècle', *Syria*, XXXVII (1960), 348–71, esp. 349–59, whose alternative view, however, is less convincing, and, most recently, Ch. Pietri, 'Le Sénat, le peuple chrétien et les partis de cirque à Rome, sous le pape Symmaque (498–514)', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, LXXVIII (1966), 123–39.

⁴ Most notably, the studies of L. Ruggini, 'Ebrei e Orientali nell'Italia settentrionale tra il IV. e il VI. secolo d. Cr.', *Studia et Documenta Historiae et Juris*, XXV (1959), 186–308; *Economica e Società nell'Italia Annonaria*, *Rapporti fra agricoltura e commercio dal IV. al VI. secolo d. Cr.* (1961); and 'Vicende rurali dell'Italia antica dall'età tetrarchica ai Langobardi', *Rivista storica italiana*, LXXVI (1964), 261–86.

⁵ Ruggini, *Economia e società*, esp. 19–56.

⁶ *Ibid.* 29–30.

⁷ *Ibid.* 84–152.

regions of the Eastern Empire in the fifth and sixth centuries. The villages of Syria, for instance, rose to unparalleled affluence in the Late Roman period because of a development of olive-plantations, made possible by the coexistence of great landed wealth and increased consumption by the cities, the bureaucracy, and the army.¹ Archaeological surveys of Palestine, also, may yet reveal a Late Roman society whose thriving agriculture and high technical achievements were directly related to the progressive accumulation of wealth and manpower around the Holy Places.²

Jones's firm, negative conclusion on the role of trade in the Later Roman Empire is based on a cross-section of a society that is assumed, rather than proved, to be static. The issue is not so much whether the merchant was an important figure in Late Roman society,³ nor whether, in the general tax system of the Empire, the towns were expected to contribute only a small proportion;⁴ it is, rather, the extent to which the role of trade varied from region to region, and fluctuated from century to century. In a society as rigid as that of the Roman Empire, even a small relative change in the sources of the national wealth might make a great difference. One cannot but be impressed, for instance, by the cumulative evidence for the greater degree of commercial activity in the Eastern Empire: it is reflected even in the difference between the industrious life of the first monastic communities of Egypt and Syria and that of their otiose equivalents in the West.⁵ By the age of Justinian, this commercial activity may have found more outlets than previously. The Western provinces have been suggested as one such outlet, where a wealthy aristocracy of cosmopolitan tastes survived throughout the sixth century.⁶ To the East, the renewed building activity of a city such as Jerash may betray a revival of the caravan trade.⁷ Altogether, a regional study of the economic life of the eastern frontier of the Empire in the sixth and early seventh centuries has yet to be written: further exploitation of archaeological material, and of the evidence of Syriac, Hebrew, and Arabic texts, might yet reveal the vigour of these local roots of the achievements of the sixth century.⁸

¹ G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord. Le massif du Bélus à l'époque romaine*, Institut français d'archéologie de Beyrouth, I, 3 vols. (1953–8). See M. Rodinson, 'De l'archéologie à la sociologie historique', *Syria*, xxxviii (1961), 170–200, esp. 194–9.

² M. Avi-Yonah, 'The Economics of Byzantine Palestine', *Israel Exploration Journal*, viii (1958), 39–51, esp. 48–51.

³ *L.R.E.* II, 864–72. The inhabitants of Edessa may have thought otherwise. During the plague of 501, they prayed for the continued good health of the merchant community, on whose presence they depended: Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle*, ed. Wright, 1882, c. 44.

⁴ *L.R.E.* I, 464–5 and 871–2. One should remark that the assessment and collection of a tax on agricultural produce was considerably more simple than that of a tax on industry and so the victimization of the small man was even more obvious in the latter case—as is shown by the passage of Libanius, cited in *L.R.E.* II, 872. On the exceptional mobility enjoyed by a merchant in the Later Empire, see also Augustine, *Enarratio in Ps.* 136, 3.

⁵ *L.R.E.* II, 931–2.

⁶ Suggested by Rémondon, *La Crise de l'Empire romain*, 310–12. See also H. L. Adelson, *Light Weight solidi and Byzantine Trade during the sixth and seventh centuries*, Numismatic Notes and Monographs, cxxxviii (1957), and, for China, S. Nai, 'Zolotaja vizantijskaja moneta, naidennaja v mogile perioda dinastij Sui', *Vizantijskij Vremennik*, xxi (1962), 178–82.

⁷ *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis*, ed. C. H. Kraeling (1938), esp. 62–7, and the most suggestive remarks of R. Paret, 'Les villes de la Syrie du Sud et les routes commerciales d'Arabie à la fin du VI^e siècle', *Akten des XI. Byzantinistenkongresses 1958* (1960), 438–44.

⁸ See most notably N. V. Pigulevskaja, *Vizantija na putjakh v Indiju* (1951) and *Arabi u granic vizantij i Irana v IV–VI vv* (1964).

VI

If further studies of the social and economic life of some provinces in the Later Empire reveal to us more of the "underpinning" of the society described in this *Survey*, they will serve to reinforce an impression already given by Jones—that, viewed against the background of the history of the Roman Empire, the "Later" Roman period could boast its own solid achievements.

The *Survey* resolutely refuses to describe the social and administrative conditions of the Later Empire in terms of causes of decline. For Jones approaches the Later Roman Empire with an unrivalled knowledge of the history of the classical world. This history has left him with few illusions. He is not concerned to single out catastrophic causes of decline, for the very good reason that he has never rated too highly any previous form of Roman society. A passionate identification with one feature or another of the classical world seems to be a prerequisite for grand hypotheses on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Jones withholds this identification: Gibbon's age of the Antonines is already suspect to him;¹ Rostovtzeff's urban bourgeoisie are revealed as idle rentiers, who continued to look after themselves only too well;² and, "As all readers of Tacitus know, the Roman army of the Principate was not impeccable" (II, 1036). Viewed in this perspective, the Later Roman period becomes a period of Roman history like any other, marked by distinctive advances: the fourth century saw a more reliable and more professional army;³ the Eastern Emperors prevented civil war in their domains for periods of over a century;⁴ Greco-Roman culture extended far wider than at any other time.⁵

Jones's perspective is "Byzantine". His material, his methods of interpretation, his love of organization, place Jones at the centre of affairs. He views Roman society from the elevated standpoint of the central government: like the great historians of the early Byzantine period, Jones keeps close to the court, and scans the world from Constantinople. We leave his *Survey*, therefore, with the great satisfaction of knowing that, up to A.D. 602, men in the Eastern Empire continued to rule like Romans—and to manage their matrimonial affairs like Romans. These men are the heroes of the *Survey*: Marinus the Syrian, for instance, "And at night also, he had a pen-and-ink stand hanging by his bedside, and a lamp burning by his pillow, so that he could write down his thoughts on a roll; and in the daytime he would tell them to the king, and advise him as to how he should act."⁶ In writing about such men, Jones has written, not a complete social history of the Later Roman Empire, but the first, irreplaceable chapter in the history of the Byzantine state. It is to Jones that we will continue to go in order to begin to understand the unique position of the medieval Byzantine Empire, "the complexity of an emperor's task, the vast extent of his rule, the infinite variety of that imperial forethought which was the sovran's duty".⁷

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¹ *L.R.E.* I, 3–14.

² *L.R.E.* II, 737–63 and 1053. On Rostovtzeff, see especially A. Momigliano, 'M. I. Rostovtzeff', now in *Studies in Historiography*, pp. 91–104, esp. 97–8.

³ *L.R.E.* II, 1036–8. ⁴ *Ibid.* 1033. ⁵ *Ibid.* 1008.

⁶ *The Chronicle of Zachariah of Mitylene*, VII, 9, trans. Hamilton and Brooks, 178.

⁷ N. H. Baynes, 'The Byzantine State,' *Byzantine Studies*, 47–66, at 54.