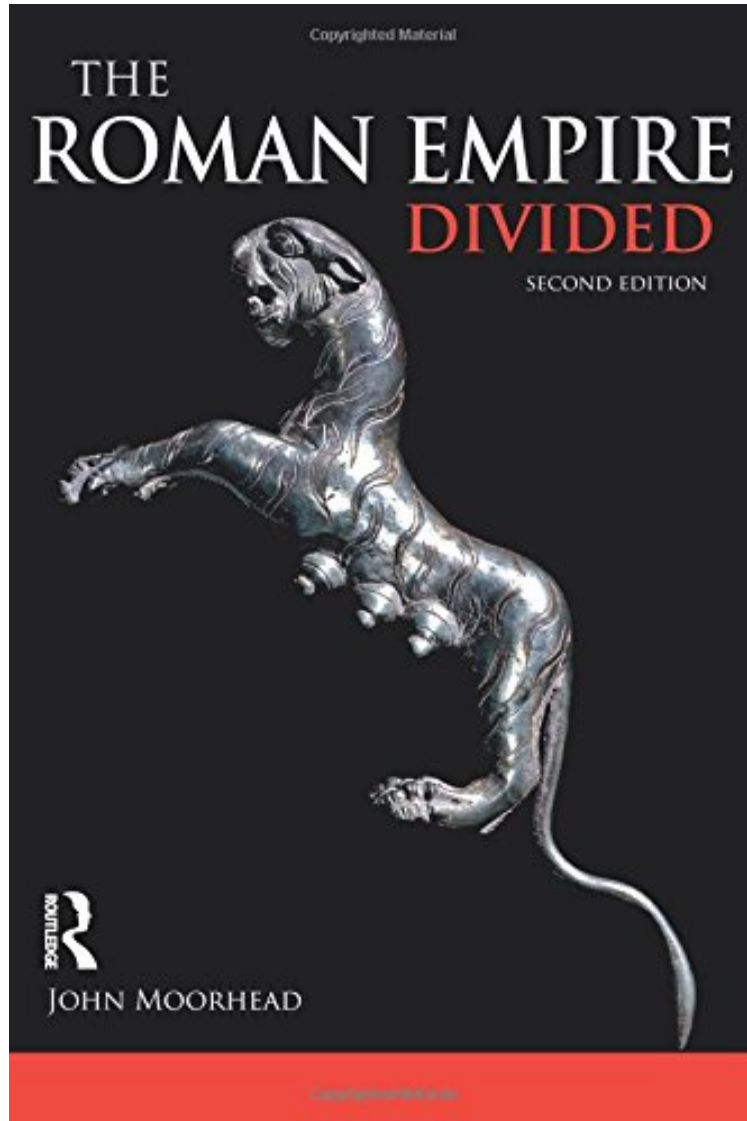


(Mobile ebook) The Roman Empire Divided: 400-700 AD

The Roman Empire Divided: 400-700 AD

John Moorhead

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John Moorhead : The Roman Empire Divided: 400-700 AD before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Roman Empire Divided: 400-700 AD:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Another case for "Late Antiquity"By JPSThis is essentially a well-structured textbook for students, but also for the so-called "general reader" with an interest in so-called "Late Antiquity", a period that the author defines as covering three centuries from about AD 400 to about AD 700 and focusing of the lands that were once part of the Roman Empire and its immediate neighbours.The emphasis is very

much about continuity and slow change, with the author arguing that the main change occurred in the 7th century with the irruption of the Arabs and the Muslim conquests which shattered the unity of the Mediterranean world. A related point was a slow drift in economic and political pre-eminence from West to East, with Constantinople supplanting Rome and being itself superseded by Damascus and then by Baghdad. A related effect of these slow and long-term dislocations was that Western Europe allegedly turned to the North under the Frankish Empire while the Caliphate turned to the East. In both cases, the focuses of power moved away from the Mediterranean. A related key point which is made by the author is to emphasise the basic unity that the Mediterranean brought to all of the countries bordering it until the southern coasts were lost to Islam. To some extent, the thesis is unsurprising coming from the author, who happens to be a "gradualist" and who believes, like most historians of the period nowadays, is continuity and slow change, rather than in the major upheavals symbolised by the so-called "Fall of the Roman Empire". The book is interesting and often fascinating when making the case for continuity through multiple examples, including the Roman army itself which had included large numbers of soldiers from the frontier regions at least since the third century. The point here is that the so-called "barbarisation" of the Roman army is unlikely to have been a major cause of the Empire's decline. A related point is that in a multi-ethnic Empire, the possibility of assimilating and integrating ethnically foreign populations tended to blur identities between what it meant to be "Roman" and "Barbarian", hence the actual vogue of studies and monographs on Roman identities during the Empire and after the conquest of specific provinces (for instance Gaul or Africa) and the demise of the last Emperor in the West. Another major strongpoint of this book, first published in 2001, is that this is the second edition, very recently published. Accordingly, it includes a number of interesting additions that build on works published during the previous decade or so and an up to date bibliography. There are a number of instances, however, where the author's "enthusiasm" in making his points may lead him to get somewhat carried away. I will not discuss the relative importance of (mostly) Muslim piracy in the Mediterranean versus the impoverishment and shrinking of the Eastern half of the Roman Empire when trying to explain the clear decline in seaborne trade. Both factors clearly had their importance and they even interacted with each other to the extent that the reduced resources of the Empire (the loss of Egypt alone deprived the Eastern Empire of as much as a third of its financial resources, for instance), its fight for survival and the loss of its formally unquestioned naval supremacy clearly allowed Muslim piracy to expand. However, they also lead to trade routes that bypassed and rivalled the traditional ones from Constantinople, Cyprus, Alexandria and Lebanon to the West. However, in his eagerness to emphasise continuity, the author does at times go a bit "overboard". One example, although there are a few others, is the statement that the Goths' settled society in the plains North of the Black Sea (in what is now modern Ukraine) just before the Hunnic onslaught was "by no means warlike", on the grounds that very few tombs contained weapons and that the Goths were, at the time, prospering through agriculture and pastoralism. A few lines later, a similar comment is made with the Goths portrayed as being "refugee peasants rather than soldiers". At a minimum, this rather sweeping statement would have merited a much more thorough discussion, especially in the light of the previous performances of Gothic war bands during the 3rd century, and their subsequent performances within the Roman Empire after crossing the Danube. While, in the latter case, part of their successes may be attributed to a mix of Roman greed, arrogance and perhaps even incompetence, and even allowing that the refugees were desperate and quick learners, the idea that these "peaceful farmers" turned into fearsome warriors within just a few years and were able to destroy an Emperor and his elite army before holding out for several years against the whole might of the Eastern Empire seems to stretch credulity to breaking point. To cut a long story short, and despite its numerous qualities and many interesting features, including a bibliography that should allow any reader to go much further, this book is worth four stars, but not five. This is because, as another reviewer put it, it is "good, but not great" even if, at times, it is very good indeed. 0 of 9 people found the following review helpful. The author is very biased. By mademoiselle The author is very biased, opinionated, slanted.

In 400 the mighty Roman Empire was almost as large as it had ever been; within three centuries, advances by Germanic peoples in western Europe, Slavs in eastern Europe and Arabs around the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean had brought about the loss of most of its territory. Ranging from Britain to Mesopotamia, this book explores the changes that resulted from these movements. It shows the different paths away from the classical past that were taken, and how the relatively unified civilization of the ancient Mediterranean gave place to the very different civilizations that cluster around the sea today. This comprehensive and authoritative second edition has been thoroughly revised and updated line-by-line, and contains several new sections dealing for instance with the new evidence provided by recent finds like the Staffordshire Treasure and the widespread effects of the plague. As well as a completely new bibliographical essay, *The Roman Empire Divided* now also includes six maps and an expanded selection of illustrations fully integrated in the text.

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