
NEW TITLES

History

**A HISTORY OF
PRIVATE LIFE**
**Volume I: From Pagan
Rome to Byzantium**
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"I found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble." So boasted Augustus Caesar, whom the Senate in 27 B.C. appointed as the first Roman emperor. But marble and military prowess were only a part of the story of the Empire. What was everyday existence like for its inhabitants? Here, five historians—four French, one British—describe the tone and texture of life, leisure, and mores during the Empire's pre- and early Christian era, circa 50 B.C. to A.D. 1100.

Editor Veyne analyzes social institutions, such as marriage and slavery, at the Empire's peak. Peter Brown tells how pagans came to embrace Christianity's austere monotheism. Yvon Thébert deals with architecture; Michel Rouche and Evelyne Patlagean describe personal conduct in the divided Empire of Byzantium's later years.

Of these, Brown, author of *Augustine of Hippo* (1967) and *The Making of Late Antiquity* (1978), goes furthest beyond merely assembling engaging facts. In late antiquity, he notes, only a "wellborn few" enjoyed the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship. But Christianity, dedicated to universal solidarity, encompassed all. The disenfranchised flocked to the Church; even women could earn respect through good works. Eventually, compassion due the poor by the rich—analogue to God's relation to man—replaced civic duty as the guiding moral principle of Mediterranean life.

Christianity also affected relations between the sexes. Yearning for "singleheartedness" in God's service, many fifth-century believers became monks or hermits. Celibacy and sexual passion, no big issues to pagans, became theological obsessions in the Western church. Discarding the pagan notion that only hot (to "cook" the fetus) and pleasurable lovemaking produced good children, early Catholicism's major theologian, St. Augustine (354–430), saw the sexual urge as uncontrollable and antisocial—a curse which, like death, had plagued mankind since the Fall. His ideas stuck. "Of all the battles," wrote a Christian in 1200, "the struggle for chastity is the most great. Combat is constant and victory rare."