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The Mediterranean Seminar Review

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Review Editor: Andrew Devereux (History: University of California San Diego)

Editorial Assistant: Aaron Stamper (History: Princeton University)

Kaiser, Reinhold. *Le Monde méditerranéen et l'Europe au Bas-Empire et au haut Moyen Âge (IV<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*. Marie-Thérèse Kaiser-Guyot, trans., Bibliothèque d'Histoire Médiévale, 29. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021. [*Neue Fischer Weltgeschichte Band 3: Die Mittelmeerwelt und Europa in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter* (Fischer, 2014)] Pp. 586. Cloth \$123; Paper \$74. ISBN 978-2406119418.

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For readers who have come to expect scholarship on the Medieval Mediterranean to be innovative and interdisciplinary, to push the boundaries of established chronologies and paradigms, and look beyond the Eurocentric focus of canonical meta-narratives, Reinhold Kaiser's *Le Monde méditerranéen et l'Europe* is likely to be come as something of a surprise. This is a Mediterranean "world" that is essentially limited to the sea's northern shores and continental Europe: the world of those parts of the Roman Empire that remained under Christian dominion or were added to its post-Classical western European reincarnations in the Early Middle Ages. It is a book on the Mediterranean that does not seem to dip a toe in the waters of the sea. The book is, in essence, a history of the Carolingian and Ottonian empires on the one hand, and Byzantium, presented as an accessory, on the other. Of the 493 pages of text, a total of four are dedicated to "Le monde arabe et les conquêtes arabes d'environ 600 au début du VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," fewer than two pages to "Byzance et les Sarrasins de la Méditerranée," three on "Musulmanes et Chrétiens en Espagne," and another three on "Byzance et ses voisins" (which also includes the Bulgars). The Arabo-Islamic world rates only part of a paragraph relating to "Influence des cours princières et contact interculturels" and nary a mention on "Littérature, science et historiographie." Women get three pages ("Le pouvoir des femmes"). Kaiser recounts a rather conventional history very much focused on state and Church. In other words, it is clearly a project that reflects the most conventional perspectives of central-western Europe in the age of German ascendancy within the post-war European order. Nevertheless, the insularity and Eurocentrism of this vision is somewhat startling in a book written well into the twenty-first century.

The bibliography relating to the Carolingian and Ottonian realms is impressively up-to-date – but the cutting-edge Mediterranean scholarship carried out by European historians over the last several decades is glaringly absent. The approach is conventional, positivistic, and text-based with little evidence of interdisciplinary perspectives. As a reviewer one ought to judge a book on its own terms, but here the issue is that the title is inaccurate and misleading, unless the intended implication was that the Mediterranean world was not only unimportant, but did not in fact exist. As for the readership, scholars will find little new in this synthesis, which treads well-worn paths. Perhaps it is intended as a university textbook. This is even more concerning, as one hopes

that tomorrow's educated Europeans will not be inculcated with a vision of European and Western history that is so intuitively and unremittingly introspective and narrow. There are no maps or illustrations.



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## Author's Response

The author was provided with an opportunity to respond to the review, but declined.