

Review

PETER BROWN, *JOURNEYS OF THE MIND: A LIFE IN HISTORY*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2023. Pp. xv + 713 pages. ISBN 9780691242286 (hbk); 9780691242293 (ebook). £38.00.

Peter Brown is well known for his ability to weave together a good story in both his scholarly works and personable encounters. He often speaks and writes of the past as if we are walking beside him in the wake of the late ancient world. In a similar manner, he has crafted an autobiographical narrative that gathers personal stories and images, producing a pattern of a man lost in the nostalgia of an equally foreign past. This reflection on his life both links him to the previous century and pulls him reluctantly into a world he no longer recognises.

The collection of memories found in *Journeys of The Mind* is a style of writing not often replicated in our twenty-first-century moment. B.'s life and career are long, as is this book. But his life and career were not typical. One detail not many scholars of Late Antiquity are aware of is that B. never received his doctorate, yet he is credited with not only inventing a field of study (which he humbly states was not his invention alone — a truth too many have failed to remember) but also shifting the Protestant Patristic obsession with the West to the East. His journey was an unorthodox one and will be of interest for those invested in historicising one version of the politics and influences of the field.

B. charts his path through an uncertain historical moment and serves as a guide on a journey between spaces where he never felt he quite belonged. He was a perpetual outsider even in those locations he was meant to call home. For example, as a Protestant Irishman from Dublin, he stepped between colonial worlds. The embattled Northern Green Isle finds connections to the uncertain landscape of former British-controlled Sudan. While his reflections only graze these embattled territories, the looming presence of elite English dominance undeniably shaped B.'s eclectic and learned upbringing in Great Britain. And while he has spent a large portion of his career in the United States, the British colonial past remain ever-present in his reflections on his distant relatives, his educational opportunities, and the most formative periods of his academic training.

One of the more insightful points that might begin to reveal B.'s intentions for writing this memoir can be found in the earliest sections where he reflects on his frequently lonely adolescent pursuits (1–79). There he states he found the tools that helped him to understand better what would become his life's work: Late Antiquity. The many connections between the illusion of great empires and the discovery of 'little big men' would ultimately alter his worldview. With 'dignity and good nature' the figures he uncovered, like many of his relatives, were living through and reflecting on a moment of transition. They, too, watched the world as they knew it crumble around them and give life to something altogether strange and uncertain.

It is without a doubt the stories, and many, many influential names that stand out in his adult life, that will be of interest to those who have been significantly influenced by B.'s work. In many ways, the path through his academic success appears almost accidental or determined by chance encounters with generous contacts. It was a series of moves that is almost unheard of today. His experiences and, dare I say, privileged appointments in some of the United States' most elite circles feel almost as foreign as his descriptions of his father's years in the Sudan. It is a world and series of experiences that simply no longer exist. In many ways, I was left wondering if Professor Brown ever applied for any of his positions, let alone was required to develop a DEI statement or produce numerous research or teaching statements, which are standard practice in today's bleak job market. It was certainly a different time and different path that not many (if anyone) will ever replicate.

B. remains charmingly humble throughout these ruminations on his various prestigious posts, and almost always credits the brilliance of his interlocutors for any new idea that inspired his next great work. The most jarring moments, at least for this reader, are found in his descriptions of women and their influence upon his life. One wonders if many of the all-male early environments B. inhabited trained him to see and write about women in a very particular way. To be clear, his vantage point is never exploitative or cruel, but worth paying attention to as you move along.

To conclude this very brief reflection on an expansive work, I will use B.'s explicit reference to his change in approach to Augustine to gesture to what I believe he hopes his readers will take with them at the end of these reflections. The intellectual biography B. originally produced on Augustine was a

narrow presentation of the scholar. Scholarly works, however, can only say so much. It was only when B. discovered the *Divjak Letters* that he says he truly began to discover 'the full measure of the man' (291). I suspect these reflections aim to re-orient how readers perceive the differences between the scholar and the man Peter Brown. We do not need a collection of letters to take his measure. Here he has asked us to join him through a carefully curated and entertaining *Journey of the Mind*.

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