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Through the eye of a needle: wealth, the fall of Rome, and the making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD, Peter Brown (book review)

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Christianity's Growth

Brown, Peter. *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD.* Princeton Univ. Oct. 2012. c.806p. illus. maps. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780691152905. \$39.95. REL

Well known for his biography of Augustine of Hippo and his other books on religion in the era of late antiquity, Brown (history, emeritus, Princeton Univ.) traces in this newest work the establishment of the early Christian Church and its tense, complicated relationship with money in the western Roman Empire. Beginning just after the rule of the first Christian emperor, Constantine, and with extensive references to the lives and writings of major Christian writers, Brown traces the growth of the Church and the evolution of what it meant to be a Christian in this era—in particular, the religion's gradual impact on the social ideas of privilege and philanthropy, and how these ideas affected the people of the empire in ways both material and spiritual. **VERDICT** The sheer scope

PETER BROWN
THROUGH
THE EYE
OF
A NEEDLE

Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and
the Making of Christianity
in the West, 350-550 AD

of this history is daunting, but scholars, theologians, and anyone interested in late Roman history or early Christianity will find this a fascinating view not only of the Church's development, but also of the changing concepts of wealth and poverty in the last centuries of the Roman empire.—

Kathleen McCallister, Univ. of South Carolina Lib., Columbia

Wilken, Robert Louis. *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity.* Yale Univ. Nov. 2012. c.416p. illus. maps. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780300118841. \$35. REL
In this ambitious book,

Wilken (history, Univ. of Virginia; *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*) aims to present not just the history of a religion but rather the history and development of a "religious community." A major theme is that Christianity is a "culture-forming religion." It is because of its transformative force that Wilken extends his account beyond the early Church to a millennium; many of the transformations did not reach fruition until that much time had passed. **VERDICT** Given the vast scope of material covered, it is perhaps unavoidable that the book becomes dizzying and superficial at times, leaving readers asking questions and, most likely, looking to other books for further detail. However Wilken's descriptions, particularly of the often-neglected locations of early Christianity (e.g., Armenia, China, India), make this a worthwhile read. Serious readers seeking an introduction to early Christianity or seeking to contextualize its global growth will find this useful.—Fred Poling, Long Beach City Coll. Lib., CA

sance, including but not limited to Donatello, Nanni di Banco, Filippo Brunelleschi, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Andrea Pisano, and Andrea del Verrocchio, were commissioned by the Florentine guilds to contribute masterpieces to the building. **VERDICT** Of significant interest to students, scholars, museum professionals, and others, this meticulously researched and well-presented, scholarly publication is very highly recommended.—Cheryl Ann Lajos, Free Lib. of Philadelphia

Schiaparelli & Prada: Impossible Conversations. Metropolitan Museum of Art, dist. by Yale Univ. 2012. 324p. ed. by Andrew Bolton & Harold Koda. photogs. ISBN 9780300179552. \$45. FINE ARTS

Compiled and edited by Bolton and Koda (curators, Costume Inst., Metropolitan Museum of Art) and with an introduction by literary critic and biographer Judith Thurman, this book accompanies the exhibition of the same name at the Metropolitan Museum. The work of fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli, who designed from the 1920s to the 1950s, is compared and contrasted with that of fellow designer Miuccia Prada, who began designing in the 1980s and continues to the present. Both Italian women share a nonconformist and avant-garde attitude in their approaches to fashion design. The book contains direct quotes from the designers, along with new photographs of Prada designs and vintage images of Schiaparelli's clothes. The content is divided thematically, exploring the formal and conceptual affinities between the designers' work under such categories as Ugly Chic and the Surreal Body. **VERDICT** Beautifully designed with striking color and black-and-white images, this book is recommended for readers interested in 20th-century fashion.—Sandra Rothenberg, Framingham State Univ., MA

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is broader in range than Glenn Harper and Twylene Moyer's *A Sculpture Reader: Contemporary Sculpture Since 1980*, published in 2006. Like many readers, this book contains no illustrations, which makes some of the essays hard to interpret. Still, it is an extremely useful compilation of writings from many sources. Recommended.—Jack Perry Brown, Art Inst. of Chicago Libs.

★**Orsanmichele and the History and Preservation of the Civic Monument.** National Gallery of Art, dist. by Yale Univ. (Studies in the History of Art). 2012. 416p. ed. by Carl Brandon Strehlke. illus. index. ISBN 9780300135893. \$75. FINE ARTS
Edited by Strehlke (adjunct curator, John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum

of Art), this scholarly exploration of the Orsanmichele, a church in Florence, Italy, is the first since 1996, when Diane Zervas published both *Orsanmichele in Florence* and *Orsanmichele: Documents 1336-1452*. In this generously illustrated (145 color plates and 176 black-and-white reproductions) collection of 22 original essays, leading art and architectural historians, preservationists, conservators, and other scholars discuss various aspects of the civic and religious hub. Located in the center of Florence, the building originally served as a grain market. During the 14th century, its exterior and interior spaces were decorated with sculptures, frescoes, and paintings reflecting the repurposing of the structure as an oratory and then a church. Some of the greatest architects, artists, and sculptors of the Italian Renais-

Selwyn Pullan: Photographing Mid-Century West Coast Modernism. West Vancouver Museum, dist. by Douglas & McIntyre. Oct. 2012. c.160p. ed. by Adele Weder & others. ISBN 9781553659471. \$45. ARCHITECTURE

Architectural writer Weder, along with longtime Selwyn Pullan associate Barry Downs, architectural historian Donald Luxton (*Building the West: The Early Architects of British Columbia*), and Kiriko Watanabe (assistant curator, West Vancouver Museum), each contribute an essay to this companion to the West Vancouver Museum's forthcoming fall exhibit on Pullan, who was known for work that was well composed and quite planar, celebrating the abstraction of North American modern architecture before postmodernism took the stage in the 1980s. The volume chronicles

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