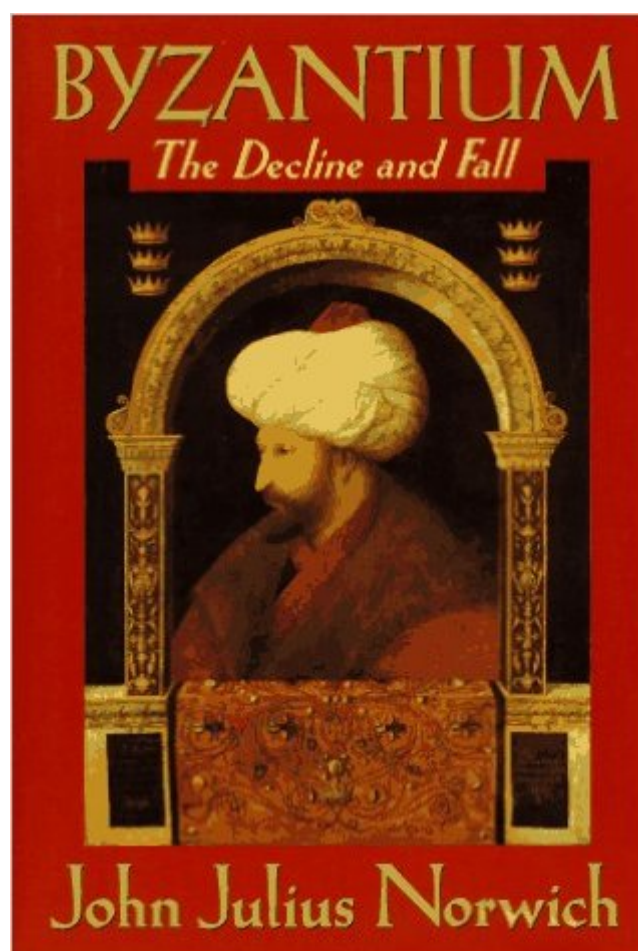


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Byzantium: The Decline And Fall



Synopsis

Third volume in the series. With 32 pages of illustrations and 10 maps and tables.

Book Information

Series: Byzantium (Book 3)

Hardcover: 528 pages

Publisher: Knopf (November 7, 1995)

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Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (81 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

If you love history, and exploring unknown territory, this book is a winner! This historical narrative, complete with excellent and detailed maps, useful family trees, an extensive bibliography, and even a "List of Byzantine monuments surviving in Istanbul" (!) makes one feel like one is awaking from a coma. John Julius Norwich states: "During my five years at one of England's oldest and finest public schools, Byzantium seems to have been the victim of a conspiracy of silence. I cannot remember its being mentioned, far less studied..." This book is the cure! ---- Norwich's narrative is witty, fascinating, and informative and makes clear the huge debt Western European civilization owes to Byzantium, which shielded Europe first from the Persians, and then from Islam. (Look at your maps!) The first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great founded The Eastern Roman Empire (aka Byzantium) in 330. The Eastern Empire fell -- 1,123 years later -- in 1453 (quite a big educational gap!) This first volume (Byzantium is a trilogy!) ends at the coronation of Charlemagne as Roman Emperor of the West in the year 800. Norwich demonstrates that the Roman Empire never fell; it divided. His story is that of the Eastern Empire, but he fully examines Byzantine relations with the Papacy, Byzantium's presence in Italy, and military and diplomatic actions involving the remnants of the Western Roman Empire ----- Lord Norwich's writing style could be likened to a thread of gold (narrative) strung with countless jewels (anecdotes). This book covers five centuries and 88 rulers -

and it is full of fascinating vignettes. It recapitulates the adoption of Christianity by the Roman Empire.

I found "Byzantium - The Early Centuries" a difficult book to review and waffled continually between 3 and 4 stars, but ultimately settled on the former in the hopes that it would attract more scrutiny from fellow customers. Do realize, however, that my complaints with Lord Norwich's book might not bother a different reader; as these other reviews show, this is certainly a 4-star book for many people. I suggest you read my review, and based on the points I raise, decide for yourself if this is the type of book you might enjoy. It first must be said that there is much to praise in the initial volume of this trilogy. Norwich writes in a very clear and entertaining style, never condescending or unnecessarily florid. His tone allows him to successfully create any number of emotions: excitement and anxiety during the siege of Constantinople by the Persians and the campaigns of Heraclius (p. 295-299); awe at the unmatched speed of the rise of Islam (p.302); disgust at the brutality of Emperors like Constantine VI who had one of his uncles blinded and cut out the tongues of the other four (p. 373). In addition to all this, Norwich is quite humorous when situation demands it. For example, while discussing the advent of "Greek Fire," Norwich quotes a contemporary author and provides this commentary: " 'The conflagration will spread and can be extinguished only by urine, vinegar or sand' - a property which, if true, would give a completely new dimension to the technique of fire-fighting" (p. 323). But Norwich's style does not save this book from what I consider two major problems with the content. (I say two problems, but in all fairness they are simply opposite sides of the same coin.

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