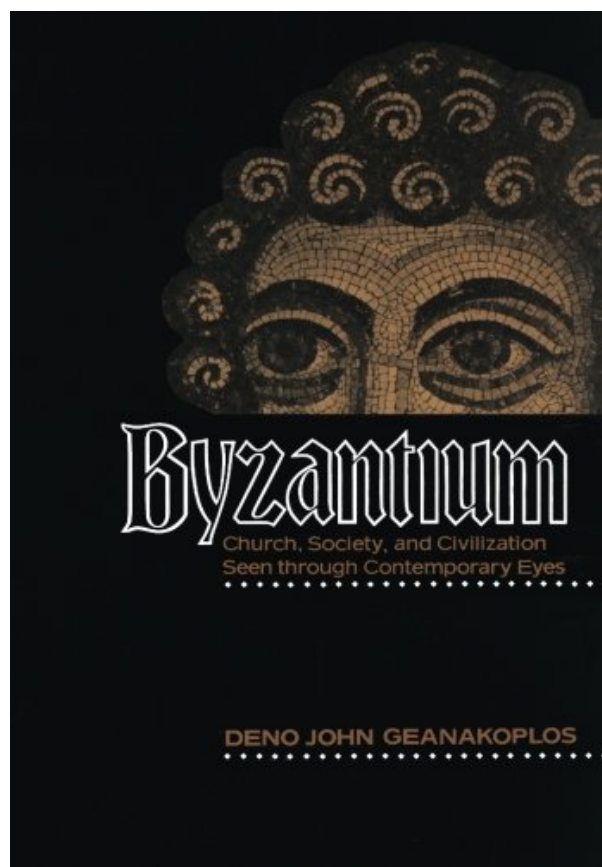


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Deno John Geanakoplos here offers a prodigious collection of source materials on the Byzantine church, society, and civilization (many translated for the first time into English), arranged chronologically and topically, and knit together with an analytical historical commentary. His selections from Byzantine writers as well as from more obscure documents and chronicles in Latin, Arabic, Slavic, Italian, Armenian, and French reflect all the diversity of Byzantine life—the military tactics of the long-invincible cataphract cavalry and the warships armed with Greek fire, the mysticism of Hesychast monks, the duties of imperial officers, the activities of daily life from the Hippodrome and Hagia Sophia to the marketplaces, baths, and brothels. Geanakoplos not only covers the traditional areas of political, ecclesiastical, socioeconomic, administrative, and military life, but also provides a vivid picture of Byzantine culture—education, philosophy, literature, theology, medicine, and science. Of particular interest are the insights into the empire's relations with the Latin West, the Slavs, the Arabs, the Turks, and other neighboring peoples.

Byzantium is much more than a sourcebook. The running commentary reflects the most recent scholarly research in Byzantine studies and places each translated source in its precise historical context. Through the use of both primary sources and commentary, Geanakoplos has represented in all its richness and complexity one of the world's great civilizations. There is no comparable book on Byzantine history and civilization in any language.

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Wonderful Original source material

By A Customer

This is an excellently compiled collection of translated original source material regarding the Byzantine Empire. Here you can read about what the Byzantines thought about Byzantine. It's got wonderful sections about relations with the West, the Turks, Culture and Life, Politics, Christianity, etc. If you have any interest in Byzantine, you've got to get this book. Great for not only the serious scholar but the general reader as well. Don't rely on historians to translate history for you; Do it yourself

4 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Contemporary writings make the best historical source material

By Dayle Smith

This book gathers together much of the same kind of contemporary writings surrounding the Eastern Roman Empire in Constantinople, as opposed to the western Roman Empire that seems to have expired almost 1000 years earlier. Like Rome, the Byzantine Empire was a polyglot collation of raw power, absolutism, religious freedom, religious tolerance (except towards each other) and extraordinary bursts of energy (see for example the building program carried out by Justinian and the brilliant general ship shown by Belisarius, Justinians most competent general).

Leaving aside some of Justinians scribe, Procopius, and his extraordinary accounts of the Empress Theodora bizarre personal habits, this series of contemporary collation is a rewarding series of observations of important religious, political and military episodes which also deals with important theological differences between Rome and The Patriarch of Constantinople, leading up to the great schism between the two: a more farcical schism I have yet to read about. The work allows the reader to select the sections of Byzantine history that are required and allows a fresh voice to that of the more usual historical texts which tell you what the authors believes to have occurred, and allows a better dissection of what the contemporary writers actually wrote at the relevant time.

Although it is not easy going I commend it to any serious student of the religious disputes that broke out from time to time, such as the dispute between iconoclasts and iconophobes, the results of some of which are still visible today in that brilliant piece of Byzantine church building under Justinian, the Hagia Sofiya (or Aya Sofia, however spelled), the manner in which the Byzantine state was governed, how big the changes were between emperors on such fascinating topics as tax farming, and the remarkable richness of Byzantine society (in good times) and its poverty (in bad times.) Of course some adjustments may need to be made from time to time by comparing the writings by two writes on the same subject, but history is always a subject that requires a balanced approach. In my opinion, this book compilation allows some quite good arguments to be mounted against accepted church (Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox) doctrines based on what was written rather than what people some hundreds of year later assert actually occurred.

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