

A HISTORY
OF THE
LATER ROMAN EMPIRE

FROM ARCADIUS TO IRENE

(395 A.D. TO 800 A.D.)

BY
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VOL. I

PREFACE

THERE is no period of history which has been so much obscured by incorrect and misleading titles as the period of the later Roman Empire. It is, I believe, more due to improper names than one might at first be disposed to admit, that the import of that period is so constantly misunderstood and its character so often misrepresented. For the first step towards grasping the history of those centuries through which the ancient evolved into the modern world is the comprehension of the fact that the old Roman Empire did not cease to exist until the year 1453. The line of Roman Emperors continued in unbroken succession from Octavius Augustus to Constantine Palaeologus.

Now this essential fact is obscured as far as language is able to obscure it by applying the name "Byzantine" or the name "Greek" to the Empire in its later stages. Historians who use the phrase "Byzantine Empire" are not very consistent or very precise as to the date at which the "Roman Empire" ends and the "Byzantine Empire" begins. Sometimes the line is drawn at the foundation of Constantinople by Constantine the Great, sometimes at the death of Theodosius the Great, sometimes at the reign of Justinian, sometimes (as by Finlay) at the accession of Leo the Isaurian; and the historian who adopts one line of division cannot assert that the historian who adopts a different line is wrong. For all such lines are purely arbitrary. No "Byzantine Empire" ever began to exist; the Roman Empire did not come to an end until 1453.

But, it may be objected, is it not true that the Roman

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Empire in the days of Constantine VII, who reigned in the tenth century, was completely different from what it was in the days of Constantine I., who reigned in the fourth century? and having in view this great difference in character, is it not permissible for historians, as a mere matter of convenience, to distinguish the later period by some confessedly appropriate word like "Byzantine" or "Graeco-Roman"? Such a use may be of course convenient and harmless in conversation among those who are fully aware that it is only a phrase of convenience; and there is no objection to "Byzantine art" or "Graeco-Roman law." But in writing or lecturing, such expressions as Byzantine, Greek, or Romaic Empire are highly objectionable, because they tend to obscure an important fact and perpetuate a serious error.

It seems especially unfortunate to adopt one of these names as the title of a book, and thus help to stereotype as a separate unity what is really a part of a continuous series. Every century of the Roman Empire differed from the preceding and from the succeeding, but the development was continuous; the Empire was still the Roman Empire, and I am not aware that it is usual to give a man a new name when he enters upon a new decade of life. We designate a man as young and old; and so we may speak of the earlier and later ages of a kingdom or an empire. But *Byzantine* is a proper adjective, and is too apparently precise not to be misleading. Gibbon perhaps is almost the only modern historian who, in treating this subject, has not done injustice to the continuity of history by the title of his work; but unfortunately in reading the later chapters one is apt to forget what that title is.

Moved by these considerations, I have avoided speaking of a Byzantine, a Greek, or a Graeco-Roman Empire, and have carefully restricted myself to the only correct appellation. For the sake of distinction the word "later" has been added on the title-page; and no further distinction is required, at least till the year 800, which marks the termination of my work.

This brings us to another unfortunate use of words, which similarly tends to perpetuate an erroneous impression. A rival Roman Empire was founded in the West by the coronation of Charles the Great in 800; and it is evidently very convenient

to distinguish the rival Empires by prefixing the adjectives Western and Eastern. And this nomenclature is not only convenient, but quite justifiable; for it suggests no historical error, while it expresses succinctly the European situation.

But unhappily the phrase *Eastern Roman Empire* is not confined to this legitimate use. We hear of an Eastern and a Western Roman Empire in the fifth century; we hear of the Fall of a Western Empire in 476. Such language, though it has the sanction of high names, is both incorrect in itself and leads to a further confusion. In the first place, it is incorrect. The Roman Empire was one and undivided in the fifth century; though there were generally more Emperors than one, there were never two Empires. To speak of two Empires in the fifth century—and if such speech applies to the fifth it applies also to the fourth—is to misrepresent in the grossest manner the theory of the imperial constitution. No one talks about two Roman Empires in the days of Constantius and Constans; yet the relation of Arcadius and Honorius, the relation of Theodosius II and Valentinian III, the relation of Leo I. and Anthemius, were exactly the same as the political relation which existed between the sons of Constantine. However independent one of another, or even hostile, the rulers from time to time may have been, theoretically the unity of the Empire which they ruled was unaffected. No Empire fell in 476; that year only marks a stage, and not even the most important stage, in the process of disintegration which was going on during the whole century. The resignation of Romulus Augustulus did not even shake the Roman Empire, far less did it cause an Empire to fall. It is unfortunate, therefore, that Gibbon spoke of the "Fall of the Western Empire," and that many modern writers have given their sanction to the phrase. Notwithstanding all that Mr. Freeman has said on the matter in sundry places, it will be probably a long time yet before the inveterate error of assigning a wrong importance to the year 476 A.D. has been finally eradicated.

In the second place, this nomenclature leads to a further confusion. For if the erroneous expression *Eastern Roman Empire* be admitted into use for the fifth century, the inevitable tendency is to identify this false abstraction with the Eastern Roman Empire, rightly so called, of later days. And

this identification unavoidably leads to the idea that a state called the Eastern Roman Empire came into being after the death of Theodosius the Great, in 395 A.D., and continued until 1453 A.D.

The simplicity of history is thus obscured. Nothing can be easier than to apprehend that the Roman Empire endured, one and undivided, however changed and dismembered, from the first century B.C. to the fifteenth century A.D.; and that from the year 800 forward we distinguish it as *Eastern*, on account of the foundation of a rival Empire, which also called itself Roman, in the West.

I have now explained my title, and I may add that by discarding the word Byzantine an additional advantage has been gained. So many prejudicial associations have grown up round this inauspicious word that it almost involves a *petitio principii*, like the phrase *Bas-Empire* in French. This is due to the unhistorical manner in which many eminent authors have treated the later Roman Empire. These writers knew very little about it, and they regarded it as a safe subject for derision. Voltaire, for instance, speaks of Byzantine history "as a worthless repertory of declamation and miracles, disgraceful to the human mind." "With this remark," says Finlay, "the records of an empire, which witnessed the rise and fall of the Caliphs and Carolingians, are dismissed by one who exclaimed, 'J'ôterai aux nations le bandeau de l'erreur.'" Gibbon hurried over the history of the Emperors later than the seventh century with contemptuous celerity, and his great authority has much to answer for. The remarks of Hegel in his *Philosophie der Geschichte* amount to much the same as the remark of Voltaire.

The sins of M. Guizot are of omission rather than of commission. His well-known *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe* is open to two criticisms. In the first place, it is not what it professes to be,—a history of European civilisation,—for it only deals with western Europe. But, waiving this, the author entirely ignores one of the most important and essential factors in the development of civilisation in western Europe—the influence of the later Roman Empire and New Rome. On this subject I may refer the reader to the concluding chapter of my second volume; I mention it here because M.

Guizot's extraordinary omission was clearly due to the inveterate prejudice that the "Byzantine Empire," and all things appertaining thereto, may be safely neglected.

In his *History of European Morals* (ii. p. 13) Mr. Lecky writes: "Of that Byzantine Empire the universal verdict of history is that it constitutes, with scarcely an exception, the most thoroughly base and despicable form that civilisation has yet assumed." I am not sure what Mr. Lecky means by "the universal verdict of history"; in recent years, certainly, the Younger Rome has found some staunch and eminent champions. But I am sure that the statement fairly represents the notions generally prevalent on the subject.

All this shows that *Byzantine* is a dangerous word, when it is used in a political sense. It is convenient and harmless to talk about Byzantine art or even "la vie byzantine," but it is dangerous to talk about a Byzantine Empire; for if we do so we run the risk of provoking universal verdicts of history. It might therefore be advisable, even if this were the only ground for doing so, to abandon the name and elude hard sentences by leading the accused forth under a different appellation. But it is not the only or the most important ground; as we have already seen, the name is improper, and it is therefore not only advisable but necessary to discard it.

I have been obliged to dwell at some length on a matter of nomenclature. I must add a few words on the scope of these two volumes, which, I venture to hope, may have some value as a very modest contribution to the study of a period which is too little known. They cover the four centuries during which the transition from the ancient world to the medieval world may be said to have taken place. *Ancient* and *medieval* are vague terms, but, whatever latitude we give them, we can hardly apply the term medieval to the fourth century or the term ancient to the eighth. In the year 395 A.D. the Empire was intact, but with the fifth century its dismemberment began; and 395 A.D. is consequently a convenient date to adopt as a starting-point. I propose to trace briefly the history of its dismemberment by the Germans, then more fully its recovery under Justinian, its decline after Justinian, and its reintegration in the eighth century; making the fall of Irene in 802 A.D. my point of termination, because it happens

to be conveniently close in time to the foundation of the rival Roman Empire in 800 A.D. The coronation of Charles the Great marks a new departure in European history, and it therefore forms, as Arnold recognised, a suitable end as well as a suitable beginning. After 800 there are two Roman Empires; and the history of the successors of Irene would naturally occupy a separate book, entitled *A History of the Eastern Roman Empire*.

The history of the fifth century is better known, and has been more thoroughly worked up than that of its successors. I have therefore treated it with comparative brevity, and omitted many of the details, which the reader may find in the works of Gibbon and Mr. Hodgkin. In fact, I originally intended to treat the dismemberment of the Empire by the Germans and the fortunes of the houses of Theodosius and Leo I. as a mere introduction to a history of the subsequent period. But I was carried further than I intended, and the result considerably exceeds the limits of an introduction, while it is something less than a co-ordinate part of the work. The dismemberment of the Empire by the Germans brings us into contact with the nations who dismembered it, and tempts a writer to stray into the domains which have been so fully surveyed by Dahn in his *Könige der Germanen*. I have been careful not to yield to this temptation; I have avoided episodes and digressions; and have not concerned myself with tracing the doubtful antecedents of the various nations who settled in the Roman provinces. In fact, I have tried to trespass as little as possible on the field occupied by Dahn in Germany and by Mr. Hodgkin in England.

Coming to the sixth century, my account of the reconquest of Italy by Belisarius and Narses is compressed; while I have narrated fully the Persian wars on the Euphrates and in Colchis. As far as I am aware, no complete account of the latter has ever been published in an English form, Gibbon's treatment being nothing more than a sketch; while as to the former, after the brilliant fourth volume of Mr. Hodgkin's *Italy and her Invaders*, one could not think of rewriting all the details. But, notwithstanding, a critic may charge me with want of proportion, and ask why I occupy considerable space with the details of wars, which, even for special historians,

have been almost buried in oblivion, and at the same time content myself with only a general account of the famous Italian campaigns of Belisarius. My reply is that I am concerned with the history of the Roman Empire, and not with the history of Italy or of the West; and the events on the Persian frontier were of vital consequence for the very existence of the Roman Empire, while the events in Italy were, for it, of only secondary importance. Of course Italy was a part of the Empire; but it was outlying—its loss or recovery affected the *Roman Republic* (strange to say!) in a far less degree than other losses or gains. And just as the historian of modern England may leave the details of Indian affairs to the special historian of India, so a general historian of the Roman Empire may, after the fifth century, leave the details of Italian affairs to the special historian of Italy. It seemed to me that the real want of proportion would have been to reproduce at length the *Gothica* of Procopius and neglect his *Persica*.

On the same principle I have given a detailed narrative (I believe for the first time) of the somewhat tedious wars in the Balkan peninsula at the end of the sixth century, described by Theophylactus. Ranke deplored the want of an essay concerning the invasions of Avars and Slaves in the reign of Maurice; the learned and patient Hopf went hopelessly astray over the curious sentences of an "Attic" euphuist; and these facts induce me to hope that some future historian, repelled equally by an ancient language and an affected style, may applaud a predecessor for having reproduced most of the details in bald English.

The Church was so closely connected with the State that the ecclesiastical element cannot be ignored in histories that are not ecclesiastical; but I have endeavoured to encroach on this ground as little as possible. As time went on, the influence of the Greek Church became stronger, and consequently, with each succeeding century, church affairs claim a larger measure of a historian's attention. Hence in the latter part of this work the reader may expect to find more information on ecclesiastical matters than in the earlier.

The short chapters on life and manners consist of jottings, which could not be conveniently introduced into the narrative,

and were too characteristic to be omitted; they do not aim at any standard of completeness.

Both historians and classical scholars are divided on the question of the transliteration of Greek names. To be thoroughly consistent in the "new" spelling, one would have to speak not only of Athênai, but of Kônstantînupolis and Rhodos. Such apparitions on the pages of a book are intolerable to plain readers; and special difficulties arise in the case of Roman names of Greek-speaking individuals. I determined finally to be consistently Roman rather than either consistently or inconsistently Greek, and use, except in a few cases, the Latin forms, which, justified by the custom of many centuries, are more familiar to the eye. In some obvious cases, of course, it would be pedantic not to use forms which are neither Greek nor Latin, such as Constantine, Rhodes, or Rome. I confess that I was at first tempted to adopt the plausible compromise of Mr. Freeman; but an admirable article in the *Fortnightly Review* for January 1888, by Mr. R. Y. Tyrrell, confirmed me in the course which I have pursued. On the other hand, I have adopted Mr. Freeman's way of spelling Slave (for Slav). Speaking of Mr. Freeman, I am impelled to add that his brilliant and stimulating essays first taught me in all its bearings the truth that the Roman Empire is the key to European history.

In conclusion, I have to record my thanks to my wife, who contributes a chapter on "Byzantine Art" (vol. ii. p. 40 *sqq.*), and to Professor Mahaffy for his assistance in revising the proof-sheets and for valuable suggestions and corrections.

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ERRATA TO VOL. I.

Page 52, line 27 from top,	<i>read</i>	south-western course,	and by the Propontis	<i>for</i>	south-eastern course.
„ 55, „ 34	„	<i>read</i>	Augusteum again,	will <i>for</i>	Augusteum, again will.
„ 57, „ 28	„	„	Chrysopolis	„	Chalcedon.
„ 160, „ 15	„	„	Dorystolon	„	Dorostylum.
„ 299, „ 26	„	„	Odessus	„	Odyssus.
„ 323, note 1,	„	„	du Méril	„	de Méril.
„ 360, line 5	„	„	Silverius	„	Sylverius.
„ „ „ 9	„	„	„	„	„
„ „ „ 12	„	„	„	„	„
„ 386, note, line 2,	„	„	once—	„	once,
„ 395, line 10 from top,	„	„	Theudebert	„	Theudibert.
„ „ „ 24	„	„	„	„	„
„ 397, „ 6	„	„	„	„	„
„ „ „ 15	„	„	„	„	„
„ „ „ 19	„	„	„	„	„
„ „ „ 20	„	„	Theudebald	„	Theudibald.
„ „ note 6,	„	„	Theudebert	„	Theudibert.
„ 412, line 21	„	„	nephew	„	son.
„ 414, lines 3-4	„	„	Theudebald	„	Theudibald
„ „ line 6	„	„	„	„	„
„ 444, „ 13	„	„	the Hippis	„	Hippis.
„ 445, „ 9	„	„	at the Hippis	„	at Hippis.
„ 460, „ 8	„	„	at the Neocnus	„	at Neocnus.

at the time of Constantine this system was revolutionised and all tended to the new capital.¹ But before he saw the Milion the traveller would be struck by the imposing mass and great dome of St. Sophia, the eternal monument of Justinian and his architect Anthemius. As he stood in front of the west entrance of the great church, the northern side of the hippodrome would be on his right hand.

Then passing on a few steps farther and standing with his back to the south side of St. Sophia, he would see stretching before him southward a long rectangular place, bounded on one side by the eastern wall of the hippodrome and on the other by the western wall of the imperial palace. This place was called the Augusteum or Augustaiôn, that is, "the Place of Augustus" or "the Imperial Place."² It is not clear, however, whether the name was chosen as a sort of renovation of *Gusteôn*,³ "vegetable market," the place having been used for that purpose in old Byzantium; or whether *Gusteôn* was a corruption of *Augusteôn*, and this gave rise to the derivation. The magnificence of Justinian had paved this piazza with marble, and the southern part was distinguished as the "Marble Place,"⁴ while the northern part, near St. Sophia, was called Milion, from the building of that name, which the traveller, looking southward, would see on his right hand, close to the wall of the hippodrome.

The Milion was not a mere pillar; it was a roofed building, open at the sides, supported by seven pillars, and within were to be seen the statues of Constantine the Great and his mother St. Helena, those of Justin the Younger and his wife Sophia, those of Arabia, Justin's daughter, and of another Helena of less renown, a niece of Justin.⁵ The Milion was an important station in the public processions of the Emperors. Walking from

¹ See Professor Ramsay, "The Tale of Saint Abercius," *Hellenic Journal*, iii. 345. Cf. *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. xv. p. 100 sqq.

² It was also called the forum of Constantine—probably its official name. Topographers (e.g. Labarte, *op. cit.* p. 32) generally distinguish the forum of Constantine from the Augusteum, placing the former farther west, but a passage in Cedrenus is decisive (i. 660, ed. Bonn), when he speaks of the senate house, τὸ σενάτον, as in the forum

of Constantine. See above, p. 52 note 3. Cf. Paspatis, p. 65.

³ Dances which were celebrated on certain occasions in the Augusteum οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὀψοπωλείῳ seem to have kept up an old pre-Constantinopolitan usage. Cf. Suidas, *sub* Ἀθγουστος, and Codinus, p. 232. Paspatis, p. 72.

⁴ Τὸ Μαρμαρωτῶν or Πλακωτῶν, Const. Porphy. i. 84, ed. Bonn.

⁵ Codinus, p. 28. Paspatis, pp. 102-104.

the south, and still keeping to the west side of the Augusteum, our traveller would have seen the great pillar surmounted by the statue of Justinian, and the other great pillar surmounted by the statue of the Empress Eudoxia, of which the stylobate still exists. Having passed some mansions of private individuals, he reaches the southern limit of the Augusteum and returns along the eastern side, which is occupied with more important edifices. Of these buildings, which are separated from the walls of the palace by a long portico called the "Passage of Achilles,"¹ the most southerly was the baths of Zeuxippus. Originally built by Severus, these baths were enriched with splendid statues,² chiefly of great men, Homer and Hesiod, Plato and Aristotle, Demosthenes and Aeschines, Julius Caesar, Virgil. But these valuable works perished in the flames which consumed the whole building in the great Nika revolt of 532. Justinian rebuilt it, but he could not restore the labours of antiquity.

North of the Zeuxippus was the senate house (*Buleuterion*), originally built by Julian and adorned with even more precious monuments of Hellenic sculpture than the baths of Severus. But it too did not escape fire; like St. Sophia it had to be twice rebuilt, first in the reign of Arcadius, on the occasion of Chrysostom's arrest, and afterwards in the Nika sedition,³ which was fatal to so many public buildings.

After the senate house he comes to the residence of the Patriarch (*Patriarcheion*), which probably faced the Milion on the opposite side. The Patriarch's house contained a splendid hall,⁴ called the Thomaites, and also halls of justice for the hearing of ecclesiastical cases. A visitor to Byzantium,⁵ at the beginning of the thirteenth century, mentions that an excellent garden was attached to the patriarchal palace, and perhaps it lay between the house itself and the senate house.

Our imaginary traveller, having now reached the north side of the Augusteum, again will notice a small church between the palace wall and the south-east corner of St.

¹ τὰ διαβατικά τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως, so called from the Bath of Achilles, which was somewhere close to St. Scphia.

² Mentioned by the poet Christodorus, who lived in the reign of Anastasius.

³ Procopius, *Accl.* iii. 202: λόγον μὲν

τῇ τε πολυτελείᾳ καὶ τῇ κατασκευῇ τῇ πάσῃ κρείττον Ἰουστινιανοῦ ἔργον. It probably faced the pillar of Justinian. Paspatis, p. 76.

⁴ τρικλινος.

⁵ This visitor was the Russian monk Antonius. See Paspatis, p. 83.

The cause of this misfortune was made a matter of judicial investigation. Some actually attributed it to Chrysostom himself; others to his followers.¹ The superstitious said it was miraculous; while the bigoted, who had infidelity on the brain, said it was the work of a pagan. A modern writer suggests that some fanatical admirer of Chrysostom wished to light a farewell bonfire in his honour.² It was at all events made an excuse for persecuting the friends of John, and we hear of all sorts of cruelties perpetrated; for example, of tortures inflicted on a young lad named Eutropius, "pure as a virgin," who had been a lector of the Patriarch. Olympias was condemned to exile, as well as many others. Among those who anticipated the sentence by flight was an old maid named Nicarete, who deserves mention as a curious figure of the time. She was a philanthropist who devoted her means to works of charity, and always went about with a chest of drugs, which she used to dispense gratis, and which pious rumour said were always effectual. She reminds us of charitable ladies of modern times who distribute tracts, have a craze for homoeopathy, and hang on the lips of some favourite clergyman. Many were exiled for refusing to communicate with Arsacius, the new Patriarch. Partaking of the communion with him was made a sort of test for discovering who was a Johannite.³

Meanwhile John was being transported to Cucusus, a place where the mountain chains of Cappadocia and Armenia meet, hardly consoling himself with the reflection that Barabbas was preferred to Christ. We cannot follow out the details of his experiences in that cold climate,⁴ of all the hardships he underwent, of the various projects he still entered into with Jerome, of his correspondence with Olympias. Such details are for the biographer or the ecclesiastical historian. But we may note here a refined trait of the spiritual woman in Olympias; she did not mention in her letter to Chrysostom the persecution which she had undergone for his sake. But she was seized by a deep melancholy, that had a flavour of distrust in God, in spite of her own convictions; and all the arguments of Chrysostom to prevent her from feeling scandalised at the

¹ Zosimus, v. 24.

² Guldenpenning, p. 163.

³ For the Johannites, see Socrates, vi.

⁴ For Nicarete, see Sozomen, viii. 23.

⁵ For the Isaurian depredations, see above, p. 70.

triumph of the unjust cause seem to have hardly consoled her. A legend was current in later times that her encoffined body had, by her own directions, been cast into the sea at Nicomedia, that it had been carried to Constantinople and thence to Brochthi, where it was placed in the church of St. Thomas. The sea voyages of sainted bodies were a favourite subject of christian legend, and reappear in the legends of the Round Table.

About a year after John's exile earthquakes took place, which terrified the superstitious nature of the Emperor. He sent to consult a certain St. Nilus,¹ who lived on Mount Sinai. Nilus had been once a brilliant figure in the world; a handsome and elegant man at the court of Theodosius, he had attained to the highest political office, the praetorian prefecture of the East; he had contracted a happy marriage with a woman whom he loved, and he had two sons. Quite suddenly he said goodbye to them all, except one of his sons, with whom he departed and took up his abode on Mount Sinai. A sudden desire had come upon him to save his soul, a sudden craving for the spiritual life. He enjoyed a great and widespread reputation for sanctity, and was consulted as a sort of oracle.² In answer to Arcadius' queries he replied by blaming him for the exile of John, whom he called "the lamp of truth and the trumpet of God," saying that when he heard of what had happened he was "lightning struck with the fire of grief." But the oracle had no effect; the earthquake ceased, and when Arcadius, like Pharaoh, hardened his heart.

In 407 it was determined to change the place of Chrysostom's exile. At Cucusus he had kept up a large correspondence, and his life, if dreary, was tolerable. His enemies wished that he should be quite out of the world, and Pityus, a desolate place on the south-eastern coast of the Euxine, was fixed on as his future abode. But on the way thither he died from exhaustion (14th September).³

Besides the fact that they decided the relation of the patriarchate to the imperial power in Constantinople, the events narrated in this chapter present other points worthy of remark.

¹ See Nilus, *Epist.* iii. 279 (Migne, *Patr. Gr.* lxxix.)

² It should be noticed that anchorites

were in the christian world what oracles had been in the Greek world.

³ Socrates, vi. 21.

