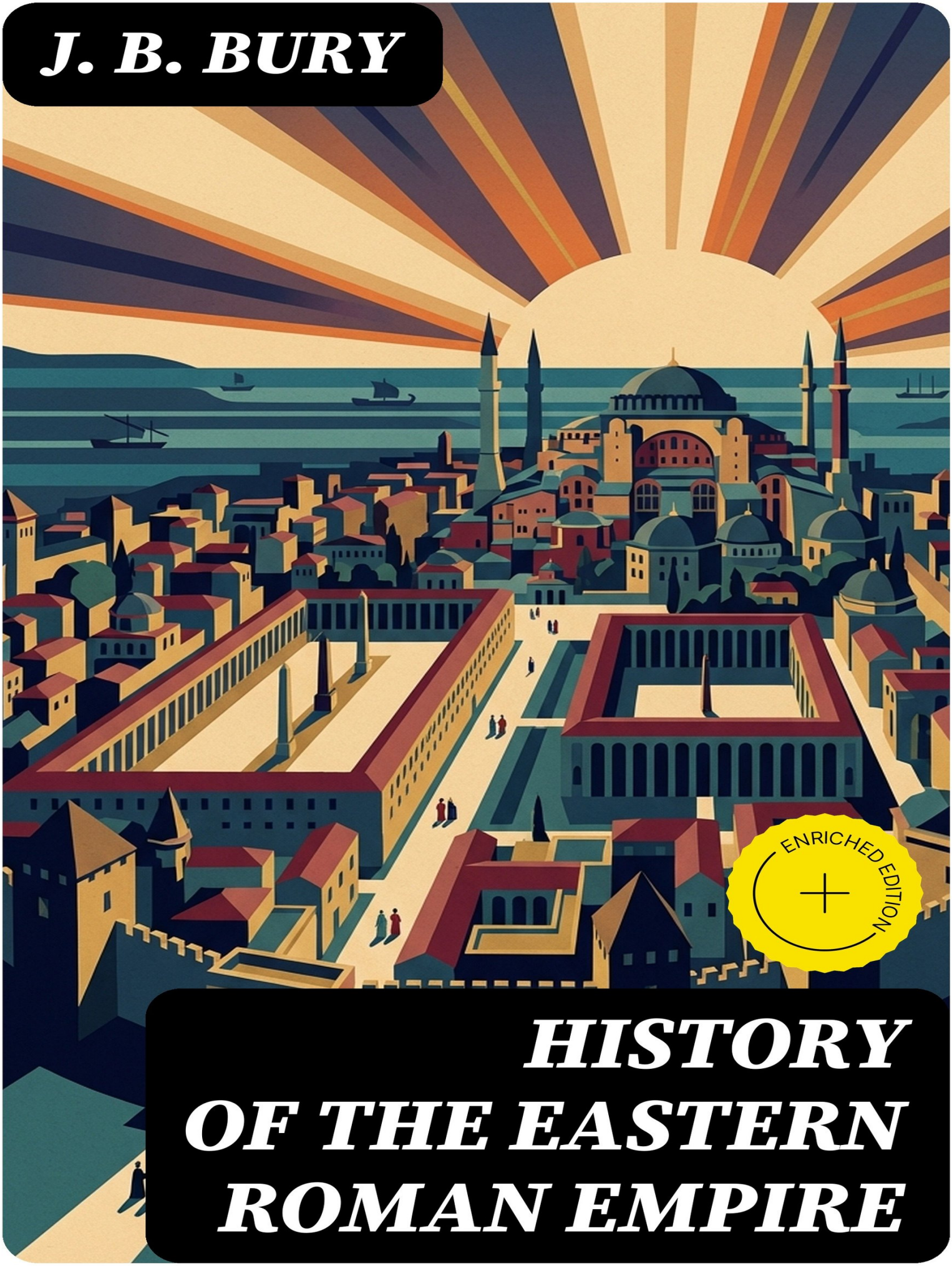
J. B. BURY



HISTORY OF THE EASTERN ROMAN EMPIRE

J. B. Bury

History of the Eastern Roman Empire

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Clara Easton

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Introduction

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Between the tenacity of Roman inheritance and the demands of a changing world, J. B. Bury’s History of the Eastern Roman Empire unfolds as a study of how an imperial state preserved its identity by transforming its institutions, narrating a polity that balanced theological conviction with pragmatic diplomacy, ceremonial splendor with fiscal discipline, and the pressures of frontier warfare with the quieter power of administration, all while translating Latin memory into Greek expression and reinterpreting universal claims in a mosaic of cities, provinces, and courts that continually renegotiated the meanings of authority, continuity, and survival across centuries of challenge and renewal.

This work is a landmark of scholarly narrative history, set in the Eastern Roman Empire—later known as Byzantium—with Constantinople as its political and cultural axis. Written by the historian J. B. Bury and published in the early twentieth century, it reflects the rigorous methods and philological exactitude of that era’s historical scholarship. The setting ranges across the eastern Mediterranean, Anatolia, and southeastern Europe, attending to both court and frontier. Rather than offering romantic color or antiquarian detail for its own sake, Bury situates episodes within the evolution of institutions, giving readers a disciplined, source-aware account of a complex medieval state.

Bury presents the empire not as a static relic but as a living government that faced recurring tests—succession disputes, religious tensions, external threats, and economic recalibrations—without reducing the story to a mere sequence of wars and rulers. The book guides the reader

through changes in administration, the logic of diplomacy, the protocols of court life, and the endurance of law and ritual. Its voice is measured, exacting, and lucid, aiming to clarify rather than embellish. The reading experience is analytical but accessible, paced by careful transitions, and attentive to how contemporary chroniclers framed events and how modern historians interrogate them.

Key themes include the relationship between legitimacy and performance, the uses of ceremony as political language, the interplay of church and state, and the shifting balance between central authority and local power. Bury examines the empire’s strategic toolkit—fortifications, mobile field forces, and diplomacy—alongside its fiscal structures and legal traditions. He is attentive to cultural synthesis, showing how Roman statecraft, Greek language, and Christian intellectual life fused into a distinctive imperial ethos. Continuity and adaptation emerge as the book’s throughline, revealing how institutions became instruments of survival even as they were reshaped by circumstance.

Bury’s method places primary sources in dialogue, weighing chronicles, official documents, and later testimonies with a critical eye. His tone is impartial yet engaged, preferring explanation to judgment and context to anecdote. The style avoids rhetorical excess, building arguments step by step and marking where evidence is firm or fragile. Readers encounter a historian who trusts the discipline of chronology and the power of comparative analysis. The result is a narrative that illuminates systems and causes without foreclosing interpretive nuance, allowing the complexity of the Eastern Roman experience to appear without the distortions of myth or nostalgia.

For contemporary readers, the book matters because it explores how states endure under pressure, how identity can be conserved through change, and how soft power—ritual, law, and diplomacy—can rival military force. It speaks to questions of multicultural governance, information

management, and the risks and rewards of centralization. The Eastern Roman example highlights the costs of strategic overreach, the value of administrative memory, and the ethical tensions that accompany claims to universal order. In a world where borders, beliefs, and bureaucracies intersect, Bury’s analysis offers frameworks for understanding resilience without romanticizing empire.

Approached as both narrative and inquiry, History of the Eastern Roman Empire invites readers to consider the texture of power—how it is staged, justified, and constrained—and to trace the subtle currents that outlast any single reign or campaign. It is a disciplined companion for study and a steady guide for general readers, illuminating a civilization that bridged ancient and medieval worlds. Without presuming prior expertise, the book establishes terms, clarifies debates, and suggests lines of connection that reward attentive reading, leaving the drama of specific outcomes to unfold in the chapters that follow.

Synopsis

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J. B. Bury’s History of the Eastern Roman Empire presents a tightly framed account of Byzantium between the fall of Empress Irene and the accession of Basil I, roughly A.D. 802–867. Written in the early twentieth century, the study combines narrative with institutional analysis, drawing on Greek and Latin chronicles to reconstruct policy, warfare, and governance. Bury opens by situating the empire’s predicament after Irene’s deposition: a state with strong administrative traditions facing renewed military pressures and diplomatic recalibration. He sets his method of weighing sources and competing interpretations, preparing the reader for a sequence of reigns whose interlocking problems—finance, faith, and frontiers—define the book’s central questions.

After charting the palace revolution that elevated Nikephoros I, Bury concentrates on the restoration of fiscal strength and administrative discipline. He details how the regime reasserted control over revenue, disciplined the civil service, and sought to secure the agrarian base that supplied soldiers and taxes. Strategic decisions are read through this financial lens: campaigns and diplomacy were constrained by the treasury and the needs of the themes. The Balkan frontier, especially the Bulgarian kingdom under an assertive leadership, emerges as an early test of these policies. Setbacks and negotiations alike are treated as evidence of an imperial system recalibrating rather than collapsing.

The narrative then turns to the succession crises and policy reversals that brought Leo V, Michael II, and Theophilos to power. Bury examines the renewed controversy over sacred images under Leo V, not only as

theology but as statecraft shaping alliances and legitimacy. He follows the eastern campaigns of Theophilos, setting raids, counter-raids, and fortress building within a larger contest with the Abbasid caliphate. Maritime losses, including the establishment of a Muslim stronghold on Crete and mounting pressure in Sicily, illustrate the strain on imperial resources. Yet institutional adaptability—professional troops, naval reorganization, and provincial resilience—remains a constant theme.

With the regency of Empress Theodora for the young Michael III, Bury narrates the restoration of icons and the consolidation of internal order. He treats the end of the image dispute as both a religious settlement and a pragmatic move that eased frictions within the army, clergy, and capital. Administrative continuity, careful management of revenues, and the reassertion of central oversight over provincial magnates figure prominently. The court emerges as a theater of ceremony and competition, where titles, dignities, and households structured politics. Bury uses this milieu to explain how stability could coexist with factional maneuvering in the empire’s upper ranks.

Ecclesiastical politics receive sustained attention, particularly the disputes surrounding the patriarchate of Constantinople and relations with Rome. Bury analyzes the sequence of depositions and appointments that crystallized into a broader contest over authority, learning, and jurisdiction. The book situates the so-called Photian controversy within a web of diplomacy that extended to the Balkans. Against this backdrop, missions associated with Constantine (later called Cyril) and Methodius appear as part of a wider cultural diplomacy that linked faith, language, and imperial prestige. The treatment remains cautious, emphasizing documentation and context over polemic while showing how church policy shaped foreign alignments.

In the later chapters, Michael III’s government is assessed through frontier defense, naval recovery, and the management of heterodox movements such as the Paulicians. Bury traces campaigns that aimed to stabilize Asia Minor and to respond to raids from multiple directions, pairing operational summaries with discussions of logistics and command. He also notes the first dramatic appearance of northern raiders on the Bosporus, treating it as a signal that new actors were entering Byzantine horizons. Court dynamics intensify, with ambitious generals and courtiers contending for influence. The emergence of Basil, and the impending transfer of power, close the narrative arc.

Throughout, the book’s central claim is less about a single turning point than about continuity under pressure. By depicting a state that adjusted its finances, legal customs, and military habits while negotiating religious and diplomatic storms, Bury positions this era as a prelude to later consolidation under the Macedonian dynasty. His measured prose and close reading of sources invite readers to separate accident from structure, personalities from institutions. Without oversimplifying, he shows how a medieval empire could absorb shocks and still prepare for renewal. The result remains a foundational synthesis for understanding Byzantium’s durability and its wider medieval entanglements.

Historical Context

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J. B. Bury’s History of the Eastern Roman Empire concentrates on the Byzantine state between the fall of Empress Irene in 802 and the accession of Basil I in 867. Its setting is Constantinople, the court of the basileus, and the administrative framework of themes, tagmata, and fiscal logothesia that sustained a Roman polity speaking Greek and professing Orthodox Christianity. The work begins amid a contested imperial ideology, sharpened by Charlemagne’s coronation in 800 and disputes over the title “Emperor of the Romans.” Bury situates institutions, ceremonial, and diplomacy as the levers by which power was asserted across Anatolia, the Balkans, and the Aegean.

Political turbulence frames the early narrative. Irene’s deposition in 802 elevated Nikephoros I, whose fiscal rigor and recruitment strengthened central revenues but provoked opposition. War with the Bulgarians culminated in the disaster at Pliska in 811, where Nikephoros fell, exposing the throne to rapid succession: Michael I Rangabe, then Leo V. Palace coups, the authority of the tagmata, and military aristocracies continually recalibrated sovereignty. Michael II founded the Amorian dynasty in 820, suppressing the massive revolt of Thomas the Slav (821–823). Bury tracks how emperors balanced tax policy, provincial commands, and court factions to stabilize rule without relinquishing Roman universal claims.

Religious controversy, especially the renewed Iconoclasm, structures Bury’s treatment of ideology and law. Leo V reimposed iconoclast policy in 815, continued under Michael II and Theophilos, challenging monastic influence and the authority of the patriarchate. The Studite movement, led earlier by Theodore the Studite, provided

articulate opposition. After Theophilos’s death, the regency of Empress Theodora restored the veneration of images in 843, celebrated as the “Triumph of Orthodoxy.” Bury analyzes how doctrine, council decisions, and imperial edicts intersected with property rights, clerical careers, and provincial loyalty, portraying creed as inseparable from governance and the machinery of justice.

Relations with the Islamic world dominate the eastern frontier. Under al-Ma’mun and al-Mu‘tasim, the Abbasids pressed deep raids into Anatolia; the storming of Amorion in 838 marked a psychological blow to the Amorian dynasty. Maritime power mattered as Aghlabid forces advanced in Sicily from 827, taking Palermo in 831, while Andalusian exiles established an emirate on Crete in the 820s. Bury emphasizes logistics, fortifications, and the navy’s role, including the Cibyrrhaeot theme and defensive use of incendiary weapons. Periodic truces and prisoner exchanges on the Cilician frontier reveal diplomacy’s persistence even amid sustained campaigning and ideological rivalry.

The northern and western flanks demanded equal attention. Bulgarian power expanded under Krum and Omurtag, before a negotiated stabilization yielded space for cultural competition. In 860 northern raiders identified in Byzantine sources as the Rus’ struck near Constantinople, prompting defensive and diplomatic responses. The 860s also witnessed the mission of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius to Moravia and the Christianization of Bulgaria under Boris I, events tied to jurisdictional rivalry between Constantinople and Rome. Bury treats the Photian Schism (858–867) as a struggle over ecclesiastical authority with concrete political stakes, shaping relations with Bulgaria and the wider Slavic world.

Institutions and society form a constant backdrop. Bury details the theme system’s provincial commands, the central ministries (logothetes), and elite households staffed by eunuchs and literati. Constantinople’s population,

defended by Theodosian Walls, supported markets, guilds, and courts; the stable gold nomisma anchored taxation and salaries. Court ceremonial communicated hierarchy, while monastic estates and episcopal networks tied countryside to capital. Education in rhetoric and law sustained a governing class conversant with Roman jurisprudence and scripture. Although later codified in texts like the Book of the Eparch, many practices he describes were already embedded, shaping policy, revenue, and recruitment.

Bury’s reconstruction relies on a diverse corpus. For political narrative he mines Theophanes the Confessor at the transition to 813, the later continuations associated with Constantine VII, and Genesios. Ecclesiastical conflicts are illuminated by the Life of Ignatius and the correspondence of Photius. Arabic historians, such as al-Tabari, and Latin annals supply external vantage points, while seals, coins, and legal documents anchor chronology and offices. His method aligns with Rankean source-criticism and late nineteenth-century German Byzantinistics, privileging verifiable documentary threads over anecdote. He challenges Gibbon’s dismissive judgments, emphasizing administrative complexity, fiscal capacity, and the empire’s international negotiations.

Published in 1912, the book reflects Edwardian historical scholarship and Britain’s preoccupation with constitutional order, finance, and imperial strategy. Bury accentuates continuity between Roman and Byzantine governance and judges policies—such as Iconoclasm or frontier expeditions—by their administrative and diplomatic consequences rather than theological sentiment. His emphasis on bureaucracy, taxation, and disciplined armies mirrors contemporary interests in the fiscal-military state, while his fairer tone toward Byzantium counters earlier Anglophone prejudice. By closing at Basil I’s accession, he frames a transition toward institutional consolidation, presenting the

empire as a resilient mediator between Latin West and Islamic East, and a durable European power.

History of the Eastern Roman Empire

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Preface

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The history of Byzantine civilization, in which social elements of the West and the East are so curiously blended and fused into a unique culture, will not be written for many years to come. It cannot be written until each successive epoch has been exhaustively studied and its distinguishing characteristics clearly ascertained. The fallacious assumption, once accepted as a truism, that the Byzantine spirit knew no change or shadow of turning, that the social atmosphere of the Eastern Rome was always immutably the same, has indeed been discredited; but even in recent sketches of this civilization by competent hands we can see unconscious survivals of that belief. The curve of the whole development has still to be accurately traced, and this can only be done by defining each section by means of the evidence which applies to that section alone. No other method will enable us to discriminate the series of gradual changes which transformed the Byzantium of Justinian into that—so different in a thousand ways—of the last Constantine.

This consideration has guided me in writing the present volume, which continues, but on a larger scale, my History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene, published more than twenty years ago, and covers a period of two generations, which may be called for the sake of convenience the Amorian epoch. I think there has been a tendency to regard this period, occurring, as it does, between the revival under the Isaurian and the territorial expansion under the Basilian sovrans, as no more than a passage from the one to the other; and I think there has been a certain failure to comprehend the significance of the Amorian dynasty. The period is not a mere epilogue, and it is

much more than a prologue. It has its own distinct, coordinate place in the series of development; and I hope that this volume may help to bring into relief the fact that the Amorian age meant a new phase in Byzantine culture.

In recent years various and valuable additions have been made to the material available to the historian. Arabic and Syriac sources important for the Eastern wars have been printed and translated. Some new Greek documents, buried in MSS., have been published. Perhaps the most unexpected accessions to our knowledge concern Bulgaria, and are due to archaeological research. Pliska, the palace of the early princes, has been excavated, and a number of interesting and difficult inscriptions have come to light there and in other parts of the country. This material, published and illustrated by MM. Uspenski and Shkorpil, who conducted the Pliska diggings, has furnished new facts of great importance.

A further advance has been made, since the days when Finlay wrote, by the application of modern methods of criticism to the chronicles on which the history of this period principally depends. The pioneer work of Hirsch (Byzantinische Studien), published in 1876, is still an indispensable guide; but since then the obscure questions connected with the chronographies of George and Simeon have been more or less illuminated by the researches of various scholars, especially by de Boor's edition of George and Sreznevski’s publication of the Slavonic version of Simeon. But though it is desirable to determine the mutual relations among the Simeon documents, the historian of Theophilus and Michael III is more concerned to discover the character of the sources which Simeon used. My own studies have led me to the conclusion that his narrative of those reigns is chiefly based on a lost chronicle which was written before the end of the century and was not unfavourable to the Amorian dynasty.

Much, too, has been done to elucidate perplexing historical questions by the researches of A. A. Vasiliev (to whose book on the Saracen wars of the Amorians I am greatly indebted), E. W. Brooks, the late J. Pargoire, C. de Boor, and many others. The example of a period not specially favoured may serve to illustrate the general progress of Byzantine studies during the last generation.

When he has submitted his material to the requisite critical analysis, and reconstructed a narrative accordingly, the historian has done all that he can, and his responsibility ends. When he has had before him a number of independent reports of the same events, he may hope to have elicited an approximation to the truth by a process of comparison. But how when he has only one? There are several narratives in this volume which are mainly derived from a single independent source. The usual practice in such cases is, having eliminated any errors and inconsistencies that we may have means of detecting, and having made allowances for bias, to accept the story as substantially true and accurate. The single account is assumed to be veracious when there is no counter-evidence. But is this assumption valid? Take the account of the murder of Michael III. which has come down to us. If each of the several persons who were in various ways concerned in that transaction had written down soon or even immediately afterwards a detailed report of what happened, each endeavouring honestly to describe the events accurately, it is virtually certain that there would have been endless divergencies and contradictions between these reports. Is there, then, a serious probability that the one account which happens to have been handed down, whether written by the pen or derived from the lips of a narrator of whose mentality we have no knowledge,—is there a serious probability that this story presents to our minds images at all resembling those which would appear to us if the scenes had been preserved by a cinematographic process? I have followed

the usual practice—it is difficult to do otherwise; but I do not pretend to justify it. There are many portions of medieval and of ancient “recorded” history which will always remain more or less fables convenues, or for the accuracy of which, at least, no discreet person will be prepared to stand security even when scientific method has done for them all it can do.

It would not be just to the leading men who guided public affairs during this period, such as Theophilus and Bardas, to attempt to draw their portraits. The data are entirely insufficient. Even in the case of Photius, who has left a considerable literary legacy, while we can appreciate, perhaps duly, his historical significance, his personality is only half revealed; his character may be variously conceived; and the only safe course is to record his acts without presuming to know how far they were determined by personal motives.

J. B. BURY.

Rome, January 1912.


CONSTANTINVS MAIOR IMPERATOR
HERACLIVS ET TARASIVS PATRICIATVS
PRIVILEGIA

Chapter I
Nicephorus I., Stauracius, and Michael I..
(A.D. 802-813)

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§1. The Fall of Irene

The Isaurian or Syrian dynasty, which had not only discharged efficiently the task of defending the Roman Empire against the Saracens and Bulgarians, but had also infused new life into the administration and institutions, terminated ingloriously two years after the Imperial coronation of Charles the Great[1] at Rome. Ambassadors of Charles were in Constantinople at the time of the revolution which hurled the Empress Irene from the throne. Their business at her court was to treat concerning a proposal of marriage from their master. It appears that the Empress entertained serious thoughts of an alliance which her advisers would hardly have suffered her to contract, and the danger may have precipitated a revolution which could not long be postponed. Few palace revolutions have been more completely justified by the exigencies of the common weal, and if personal ambitions had not sufficed to bring about the fall of Irene, public interest would have dictated the removal of a sovran whose incapacity must soon have led to public disaster.

The career of Irene of Athens had been unusually brilliant[1q]. An obscure provincial, she was elevated by a stroke of fortune to be the consort of the heir to the greatest throne in Europe. Her husband died after a short reign, and as their son was a mere child she was left in possession of the supreme power. She was thus enabled to lead the

reaction against iconoclasm, and connect her name indissolubly with an Ecumenical Council**[2][2q]**. By this policy she covered herself with glory in the eyes of orthodox posterity; she received the eulogies of popes; and the monks, who basked in the light of her countenance, extolled her as a saint. We have no records that would enable us to draw a portrait of Irene's mind, but we know that she was the most worldly of women, and that love of power was a fundamental trait of her character. When her son Constantine was old enough to assume the reins of government, she was reluctant to retire into the background, and a struggle for power ensued, which ended ultimately in the victory of the mother. The son, deprived of his eyesight, was rendered incapable of reigning (a.d. 797), and Irene enjoyed for five years undivided sovran power, not as a regent, but in her own right.

Extreme measures of ambition which, if adopted by heretics, they would execrate as crimes, are easily pardoned or overlooked by monks In the case of a monarch who believes rightly; But even in the narrative of the prejudiced monk, who is our informant, we can see that he himself disapproved of the behavior of the "most pious" Irene, and, what is more important, that the public sympathy was with her son. Her conduct of the government did not secure her the respect which her previous actions had forfeited. She was under the alternating influence of two favorite eunuchs, whose intrigues against each other divided the court. After the death of Stauracius, his rival Aetius enjoyed the supreme control of the Empress and the Empire. He may have been a capable man; but his position was precarious, his power was resented by the other ministers of state, and, in such circumstances, the policy of the Empire could not be efficiently carried on. He united in his own hands the commands of two of the Asiatic Themes, the Opsikian and the Anatolic, and he made his brother Leo strategos of both Macedonia and Thrace. By the control of the troops of these

provinces he hoped to compass his scheme of raising Leo to the Imperial throne.

We can hardly doubt that the political object of mitigating her unpopularity in the capital was the motive of certain measures of relief or favour which the Empress adopted in March 801. She remitted the “urban tribute”, the principal tax paid by the inhabitants of Constantinople, but we are unable to say whether this indulgence was intended to be temporary or permanent. She lightened the custom dues which were collected in the Hellespont and the Bosphorus. We may question the need and suspect the wisdom of either of these measures; but a better case could probably be made out for the abolition of the duty on receipts. This tax, similar to the notorious Chrysargyron**[3]** which Anastasius I did away with, was from the conditions of its collection especially liable to abuse, and it was difficult for the fisc to check the honesty of the excise officers who gathered it. We have a lurid picture of the hardships which it entailed. Tradesmen of every order were groaning under extravagant exactions. Sheep-dealers and pig-dealers, butchers, wine-merchants, weavers and shoemakers, fullers, bronzesmiths, goldsmiths, workers in wood, perfumers, architects are enumerated as sufferers. The high-roads and the sea-coasts were infested by fiscal officers demanding dues on the most insignificant articles. When a traveller came to some narrow defile, he would be startled by the sudden appearance of a tax-gatherer, sitting aloft like a thing uncanny. The fisherman who caught three fishes, barely enough to support him, was obliged to surrender one to the necessities of the treasury, or rather of its representative. Those who made their livelihood by catching or shooting birds were in the same predicament. It is needless to say that all the proceeds of these exactions did not flow into the fisc; there was unlimited opportunity for peculation and oppression on the part of the collectors.

We learn that Irene abolished this harsh and impolitic system from a congratulatory letter addressed to her on the occasion by Theodore, the abbot of Studion. We must remember that the writer was an ardent partisan of the Empress, whom he lauds in hyperbolic phrases, according to the manner of the age, and we may reasonably suspect that he has overdrawn the abuses which she remedied in order to exalt the merit of her reform.

The monks of Studion, driven from their cloister by her son, had been restored with high honor by Irene, and we may believe that they were the most devoted of her supporters. The letter which Theodore addressed to her on this occasion shows that in his eyes her offences against humanity counted as nothing, if set against her services to orthodoxy and canonical law. It is characteristic of medieval Christianity that one who made such high professions of respect for Christian ethics should extol the “virtue” of the woman who had blinded her son, and assert that her virtue has made her government popular and will preserve it unshaken.

Even if Irene’s capacity for ruling had equalled her appetite for power, and if the reverence which the monks entertained for her had been universal, her sex was a weak point in her position. Other women had governed—Pulcheria, for instance—in the name of an Emperor; but Irene was the first who had reigned alone, not as a regent, but as sole and supreme autocrat. This was an innovation against which no constitutional objection seems to have been urged or recognized as valid at Constantinople; though in Western Europe it was said that the Roman Empire could not devolve upon a woman, and this principle was alleged as an argument justifying the coronation of Charles the Great. But in the army there was undoubtedly a feeling of dissatisfaction that the sovran was disqualified by her sex from leading her hosts in war; and as the spirit of iconoclasm was still prevalent in the army, especially in the

powerful Asiatic Themes, there was no inclination to waive this objection in the case of the restorer of image-worship.

The power exercised by the eunuch Aetius was intolerable to many of the magnates who held high offices of state, and they had good reason to argue that in the interests of the Empire, placed as it was between two formidable foes, a stronger government than that of a favourite who wielded authority at the caprice of a woman was imperatively required. The negotiations of the Empress with Charles the Great, and the arrival of ambassadors from him and the Pope, to discuss a marriage between the two monarchs which should restore in Eastern and Western Europe the political unity of the Roman Empire once more, were equally distasteful and alarming to Aetius and to his opponents. The overtures of Charles may well have impressed the patricians of New Rome with the danger of the existing situation and with the urgent need that the Empire should have a strong sovran to maintain its rights and prestige against the pretensions of the Western barbarian who claimed to be a true Augustus. It might also be foreseen that Aetius would now move heaven and earth to secure the elevation of his brother to the throne as speedily as possible.

These circumstances may sufficiently explain the fact that the discontent of the leading officials with Irene's government culminated in October 802, while the Western ambassadors were still in Constantinople. The leader of the conspiracy was Nicephorus, who held the post of Logothete of the General Treasury**[5]**, and he was recognized by his accomplices as the man who should succeed to the Imperial crown. His two chief supporters were Nicetas Triphyllios, the Domestic of the scholarian guards, and his brother Leo, who had formerly been strategos of Thrace. The cooperation of these men was highly important; for Aetius counted upon their loyalty, as Nicetas had espoused his part against his rival Stauracius. Leo, who held the high financial office of

Sakellarios, and the quaestor Theoktistos joined in the plot, and several other patricians.

On the night of October 31 the conspirators appeared before the Brazen Gate (Chalkê[4]) of the Palace, and induced the guard to admit them, by a story which certainly bore little appearance of likelihood. They said that Aetius had been attempting to force the Empress to elevate his brother to the rank of Augustus, and that she, in order to obviate his importunities, had dispatched the patricians at this late hour to proclaim Nicephorus as Emperor. The authority of such important men could hardly be resisted by the guardians of the gate, and in obedience to the supposed command of their sovran they joined in proclaiming the usurper. It was not yet midnight. Slaves and others were sent to all quarters of the city to spread the news, and the Palace of Eleutherios, in which the Augusta was then staying, was surrounded by soldiers. This Palace, which she had built herself, was probably situated to the north of the harbour of Eleutherios, somewhere in the vicinity of the Forum which was known as Bous. In the morning she was removed to the Great Palace and detained in custody, while the ceremony of coronation was performed for Nicephorus by the Patriarch Tarasius, in the presence of a large multitude, who beheld the spectacle with various emotions.

The writer from whom we learn these events was a monk, violently hostile to the new Emperor, and devoted to the orthodox Irene, who had testified so brilliantly to the “true faith”. We must not forget his bias when we read that all the spectators were imprecating curses on the Patriarch, and on the Emperor and his well-wishers. Some, he says, marvelled how Providence could permit such an event and see the pious Empress deserted by those courtiers who had professed to be most attached to her, like the brothers Triphyllios. Others, unable to believe the evidence of their eyes, thought they were dreaming. Those who took in the situation were contrasting in prophetic fancy the days that

time and place, but they appear throughout Abbasid fiscal records as the standard monetary measure.

43 A kaid (Arabic qaʾid) was a military commander or leader; in the medieval Arabic context the term is used here for the officer commanding a regiment of about 1,000 men.

44 Praesenti (Latin for ‘in the presence’) is used here as a technical term meaning troops kept immediately in the ruler’s presence as an elite or palace guard, i.e. forces stationed with the caliph.

45 Samarra is a city north of Baghdad that served as the Abbasid court and effective capital after al-Muʿtasim’s move in 836, with the court remaining there for much of the 9th century.

46 The Cilician Gates are the long, strategic mountain pass through the Taurus range linking central Anatolia with the Cilician plain; they were a frequent invasion route in antiquity and the medieval period.

47 The Paulicians were a Christian movement in eastern Asia Minor, branded heretical by the Byzantine Church; from the 8th–9th centuries some Paulician communities were militarised and allied with neighbouring Muslim emirates against Byzantium.

48 A legendary king of Crete associated by ancient writers with the Bronze-Age Minoan civilization centered on Knossos; modern archaeology dates Minoan culture roughly to the third–second millennia BCE (commonly c. 2700–1450 BCE).

49 A Byzantine 'theme' was an administrative and military province (from about the 7th–8th centuries) governed by a

strategos who combined civil authority with command of local troops.

50 An alternate spelling of the Umayyads, the dynasty that ruled much of the early Islamic world; in Iberia (Al-Andalus) the Umayyad emirate/caliphate was established from the mid-8th century onward and centered on Cordova.

51 A transliterated term (from Arabic handak/handaq) meaning a deep ditch or moat used as a defensive fortification; here it explains the origin of the name Chandax (Candia) for the town's fortifications.

52 A rendering of the Byzantine tourmarches, an officer commanding a tourma (a military division); the rank was used in the medieval Byzantine army (from around the 7th century and later) as a mid-to-senior field command.

53 Byzantine emperor who reigned c. 802–811; he succeeded Empress Irene and played a central role in the wars and diplomacy with the Carolingian rulers described in the chapter.

54 Late-8th/early-9th-century designation for the group of islands at the Rialto in the Venetian lagoon that became the civic and commercial centre of what became the city of Venice.

55 A Byzantine court and military rank (from Greek spatharios), originally meaning a 'sword-bearer' and often used as an honorific title conferred on officers and local rulers in this period.

56 Pliska was the early medieval capital of the Bulgarian khans (7th–9th centuries), located in the plain northeast of Shumla; archaeological excavations have identified large

fortifications and a royal palace at the site near the modern village of Pliska.

57 A contemporary Bulgarian royal title rendered in the text as Kanas uvegé and translated ‘sublime khan’; it was used by early Bulgarian rulers to denote sovereign authority.

58 Zupan is a Slavic title historically used in the Balkans for the head or chief of a clan or district, often translated loosely as ‘count’ or local governor, though its exact rank varied by region and period.

59 Boilads (also spelled bolyads in some sources) were members of the high nobility in early Bulgaria, with a distinction made in the text between ‘the six great boilads’ and other grades of this aristocratic order.

60 Indictions are a Roman–Byzantine system of cyclical dating based on 15-year fiscal cycles that was widely used in official documents for numbering years, not a continuous era like Anno Domini.

61 Shegor alem refers in the text to the Bulgarian system of dating by sixty-year lunar cycles beginning in A.D. 659; an isolated shegor-year number therefore requires specification of the cycle to fix it in the modern calendar.

62 Sardica is the ancient Roman name for the city now known as Sofia (capital of Bulgaria); in Byzantine and early medieval sources it was an important fortress and administrative centre on the Empire’s northern frontier.

63 A Slavic title (often spelled župan) for a local chieftain or district leader who exercised political and military authority over a community or territory in early medieval South Slav regions.

64 A Byzantine official who combined military and civil command as governor of a Theme (province); strategoi (plural) directed troops, collected taxes, and administered regional affairs.

65 Plural of nomisma, the Byzantine gold coin (originally the solidus) used as a unit of currency and tribute; its exact purchasing power varied over time and is not directly equivalent to modern values.

66 A group of mountaineer warriors from the eastern Mediterranean (often associated with the Lebanese/Cilician frontier) who in the ninth century sometimes served as irregular troops or naval colonists in Byzantine service.

67 A Byzantine-dependent city in the Crimean peninsula (often called Chersonesus) that lay outside the normal provincial organization and was governed by local magistrates; it served as an important commercial and defensive outpost for Constantinople.

68 The title used in the text for the supreme ruler of the Khazars (more commonly transliterated Khagan); medieval sources portray the Chagan as a sacred, often remote monarch who typically delegated actual administration to a Beg or viceroy.

69 The chief city and capital of the Khazar Khaganate, described in medieval Arabic and Byzantine sources as a multi-part wooden town at the mouths of the Volga on the Caspian Sea; its exact archaeological location is uncertain but is generally placed in the Volga delta region.

70 A fortress on the lower Don (built c. 833) constructed with Byzantine assistance for the Khazars and known in the sources as Sarkel or the 'White House'; it was designed as a strategic stronghold guarding the Khazar frontier.