

It seems that the British considered themselves as spectators in an old Greek tragedy leading to a catastrophe both foreseen and unavoidable since they were not strong enough and so, as their big Allies, each for different reasons, refused to act in the right directions.

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Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Medieval Western Civilization and the Byzantine and Islamic Worlds*, Lexington, Massachusetts and Toronto, D. C. Heath and Company, 1979, pp. xiii & 513, 21 Maps + 3 Charts, Hardcover, Illustrated.

Whenever the term "medieval history" or "medieval civilization" is used, it invariably but erroneously is used to describe medieval *Western* civilization. Professor Deno Geanakoplos, Professor of Byzantine and Renaissance History and Religious Studies at Yale University, has sought to correct this imbalance in a survey text that takes into account Byzantine and Islamic history in order "to provide a complete, enriched, and balanced view of medieval Western civilization from 300 to 1500 by presenting it in the broader context of the *entire* medieval world—the Byzantine and Islamic East, as well as the Latin West" (p.v.). Though it is intended principally as a college textbook in medieval history and civilization, it can easily be used by the interested general reader. The approach is comparative and will help the modern reader to understand the medieval background of the West, the Slavic East, and the Islamic East. The experienced teacher will find familiar material here in a new framework but also new material on social topics and institutions, such as demography, epidemics, economic depression, the treatment of women, Jews, heretics, and homosexuals. Life styles and theological questions in Constantinople, Cordova, Rome, and Paris are presented interestingly, and the intellectual and artistic achievements of the Latin, Byzantine, and Muslim worlds in literature, philosophy, science, painting, architecture, and music are compared and evaluated succinctly but authoritatively. The formative impact of late Byzantine humanism and painting on Early Renaissance culture is demonstrated and a much fuller treatment of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the West is provided, along with material on the Slavs, the Turks and others who came late on the European scene.

Dr. Geanakoplos, in a book that is richly illustrated, beautifully produced, and written with crystalline clarity, superbly describes the interaction that took place among the three medieval societies—an interaction that was careful to preserve the Koranic core of Islam, the Greek Orthodox Christianity and classical Greek learning of Byzantium, and the Latin Catholicism strongly tempered by German influences of the West. All three absorbed Greek learning, particularly Aristotelian logic and philosophy. In the process of cultural interaction, the principles of both "receptivity" and "repulsion" were to come into play. Each was to preserve its own distinct characteristics, despite a long series of encounters that resulted in certain mutual borrowings. Yet from all this the West was ultimately to benefit the most and create a new and unique civilization with enormous consequences for the development of the modern world.

Over one thousand years of history are reviewed in this book. The three main parts cover the Early Middle Ages, The High Middle Ages, and the Later Middle Ages (The Early Renaissance). The fourteen chapters (which all contain an up-to-date bibliography) range over the legacy of the ancient world; the barbarian Germans; the Latin West before and after Charlemagne; Western feudalism, manorialism, and the papacy; Eastern Christendom

and the Islamic world; the economic and social revival of Western Europe; the rise and decline of the Holy Roman Empire; Capetian France and Norman England; the Crusades; Church and culture in the Latin West; medieval lay society; Eastern Christendom (Byzantium and the Turks, the Slavs); politics, economics and religion in Western society; and early Renaissance culture (Latin and Byzantine humanism, philosophy, and art).

To use a contemporary idiom, this is a book that "puts it all together". This is history "come alive"—fascinating, exciting, illuminating. The author is a well established scholar who knows his historical sources, knows how to use the research of others constructively, and who is ever alert to bring new light to a period that he loves to investigate and to reconstruct for scholar and student alike with a *total* historical perspective.

Medieval Western Civilization and the Byzantine and Islamic Worlds is a long overdue corrective in a fundamental discipline and Deno Geanakoplos was the right person to provide it. It is a text that deserves the widest possible dissemination because it is truly historically properly balanced.

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Blöndal Sigfús, *The Varangians of Byzantium*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. XIII + 242.

For some six centuries, the Varangians have captured the fancy of the public, as they did of the author of this book. To the citizens of the Byzantine Empire, the Varangians were fierce barbarians. For a Norse saga writer, they had a certain colorful glamor, especially since the Byzantine Emperors regularly used Varangian guards for various purposes.

Blöndal relates how the Norsemen came to be taken into the Imperial service. Basil II, perhaps the greatest of all the Emperors of the East, shaped the Varangians into a regiment of guards rendering particularly important services to the Empire. The history of this regiment is portrayed right down to the fall of High Byzantium in 1204, and even further to the very last day of the Empire in May 1453. Englishmen eventually replaced the Norsemen, with resulting changes in the position and duties of the Varangians in the Byzantine state.

The author draws on numerous sources for his account, including Scandinavian, Greek, Latin, Russian, Arabic, and Armenian literature. He cites archaeological evidence from Venice, Byzantium, and Sweden in documenting what has survived of the famous band of Varangians. Its most famous member, Harald Hardrada, the King of Norway, died as a Viking, fighting against hopeless odds at Stamford Bridge in 1066.

The book traces the Varangians and their origins in a facile manner belying the difficulty encountered in gathering the widely - scattered sources of information and piecing them together into a coherent story. The author needed some 15 years to complete his work.

The first chapter provides an interesting account of the Varangians and their origins. The second chapter recounts how the Varangians gradually entered the army and navy of the Byzantine Empire, and eventually the Imperial Guard. Chapter Three describes how Harald Sigurrrason, later King Harald III of Norway, entered the Imperial service as a Varangian and served in Constantinople (1034-1043). His most notorious military expedition was the campaign in Sicily and southern Italy between 1038 and 1041, under the command of Georgios Maniaces.