



A History of the Eastern Roman Empire from the Fall of Irene to the Accession of Basil I

J.B. Bury

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This is a history of the early Byzantine Empire. From the preface: "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, co-ordinate 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."

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