



The Late Byzantine Army: Arms and Society, 1204-1453 (Middle Ages Series)

By Mark C. Bartusis

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The late Byzantine period was a time characterized by both civil strife and foreign invasion, framed by two cataclysmic events: the fall of Constantinople to the western Europeans in 1204 and again to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. Mark C. Bartusis here opens an extraordinary window on the Byzantine Empire during its last centuries by providing the first comprehensive treatment of the dying empire's military.

Although the Byzantine army was highly visible, it was increasingly ineffective in preventing the incursion of western European crusaders into the Aegean, the advance of the Ottoman Turks into Europe, and the slow decline and eventual fall of the thousand-year Byzantine Empire. Using all the available Greek, western European, Slavic, and Turkish sources, Bartusis describes the evolution of the army both as an institution and as an instrument of imperial policy. He considers the army's size, organization, administration, and the varieties of soldiers, and he examines Byzantine feudalism and the army's impact on society and the economy.

In its extensive use of soldier companies composed of foreign mercenaries, the Byzantine army had many parallels with those of western Europe; in the final analysis, Bartusis contends, the death of Byzantium was attributable more to a shrinking fiscal base than to any lack of creative military thinking on the part of its leaders.

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Editorial Review

Review

A History Book Club selection

"An essential tool for comparative historians, Byzantinists, Balkanologists, historians of the later Crusades, medieval Islamic, especially Ottoman, and western European medieval and Renaissance history. Its publication reinforces the reputation of Bartusis as a foremost authority on many dimensions of late Byzantine institutions and the related social and economic context."—Walter Kaegi, *Journal of Military History*

From the Back Cover

Mark C. Bartusis opens an extraordinary window on the Byzantine Empire during its last centuries by providing the first comprehensive treatment of the dying empire's military. The late Byzantine period was a time characterized by both civil strife and foreign invasion and framed by two cataclysmic events: the fall of Constantinople to the western Europeans in 1204 and again to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. While the army enjoyed a highly visible presence during this time, it was increasingly ineffective in defending the state. This failure is central to understanding the persistence of the western European crusader states in the Aegean, the advance of the Ottoman Turks into Europe, and the slow decline and eventual fall of the thousand-year Byzantine Empire. Using all of the available Greek, western European, Slavic, and Turkish sources, Bartusis describes the evolution of the army both as an institution and as an instrument of imperial policy. He considers the army's size, organization, administration, and varieties of soldiers, including discussions of campaigns, garrisons, finances, recruitment, and the military role of peasants, weapons, and equipment. He also examines Byzantine feudalism and the army's impact on the economy and society. Bartusis emphasizes that the corps of heavily armed mercenaries and soldiers probably never numbered more than several hundred. He further argues that the composition of the late Byzantine army had many parallels with the contemporary armies in western Europe, including the extensive use of soldier companies composed of foreign mercenaries. In a final analysis, he suggests that the death of Byzantium is attributable more to a shrinking fiscal base than to any lack of creative military thinking on the part of its leaders. The *Late Byzantine Army* is a major work of scholarship that fills a gap in the understanding of the late Byzantine empire. It will be of interest to students and scholars of medieval and Byzantine institutional history.

About the Author

Mark C. Bartusis is Professor of History at Northern State University, Aberdeen, South Dakota.

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