

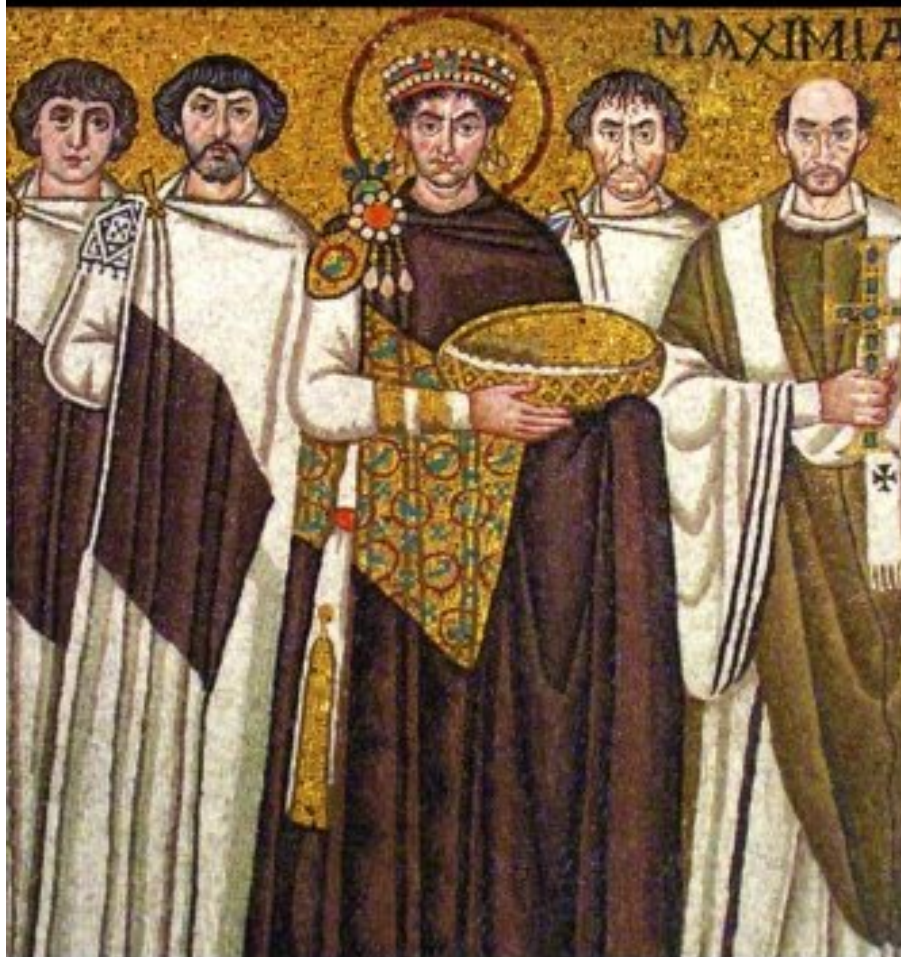
CONSTANTINOPLE: BIRTH OF AN EMPIRE BY HAROLD LAMB



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About the Author

Harold Lamb (1892-1962), who wrote biographies and screenplays as well as historical fiction, is best remembered for his tales of Cossacks and Crusaders. Howard Andrew Jones is the managing editor of Black Gate magazine and the editor in chief of the online journal Sword and Sorcery. Barrie Tait Collins, a cousin of Harold Lamb, has worked as an editor, writer, and, since 1975, a journalist for various Connecticut newspapers.

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CONSTANTINOPLE: BIRTH OF AN EMPIRE BY HAROLD LAMB PDF

Harold Lamb gives a comprehensive account of the life and reign of the Roman Emperor Justinian I (482-565), from his origin as the peasant Petrus Sabbatius, to the purple clad Emperor. Upon Justinian's ascension to the throne the western provinces had been occupied by hostile barbarians for over a generation. In the east, what remained of the Roman Empire faced invasion by the Huns from the north, and by an undiminished Persian Empire across the eastern border. Despite all of this Justinian managed to withstand the waves of invasion, embark on vast architectural projects across the empire, and restore Roman mastery over the Mediterranean. Lamb also examines the colorful personalities surrounding Justinian. His wife Theodora, the actress turned empress, who was more spymaster than anything else; the ever victorious count Belisarius, who, despite his popularity with the military, the people, and the lost provinces he reclaimed for the empire, refused to take up arms and overthrow his emperor as so many other Roman generals had done before him. Constantinople: Birth of an Empire is a great resource for anyone interested in eastern Roman/Byzantine history during the age of Justinian.

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Vivid, Readable, and Accurate

By David E. Blair

The British cherish their popular historians. We in the United States forget them. And of all our forgotten popular historians from the early to mid-twentieth century, Harold Lamb may well be the best of the bunch. He was immensely successful and popular as both a fiction and non-fiction writer. Lamb was absolutely prolific with major screenplays to his credit, magazine articles in the best journals running into the hundreds along with thirty to forty odd books. To find this title in Amazon run a search in books for "Harold Lamb - Constantinople," and you will find all the available used offerings. Ultimately, however, the question is how does this book stand up to critical scrutiny as accurate, informative history? And the short answer is far better than G. P. Baker's biography of Justinian, and I rated that at four stars. By all means, if Justinian the Great is

of interest to you, you will enjoy this book and probably learn a great deal.

As with all of his histories, Lamb's grasp of his subject verges on the encyclopedic. This man had the money and time to research his projects. It is obvious that the author spent substantial time in the near east and at Ravenna and Venice researching this book. This rewards the reader with vivid descriptions and insights into both Byzantine art and architecture. All aspects of Justinian's career are well covered. The important interactions of the principal players are presented with a marvelous wealth of detail and insightful analysis. Justinian and Theodora, Narses, Belisarius, John of Cappadocia, Peter the Patrician and the rest of the cast of characters integral to the Age of Justinian are all fully developed. The major issues of the era are at least handled competently or better. The overwhelming importance of religion in all aspects of sixth century Byzantine existence is amply demonstrated. Authors such as Glanville Downey may show more depth and deeper analytical powers in regard to these matters, but Lamb provides a fascinating read that is factually almost spot on.

An interesting first chapter indicates both the strengths and weaknesses of this book. It represents a prelude to the material to be covered in the bulk of the text. It is loaded with conclusory assumptions about the fall of the western Roman empire. It is also replete with translated quotes of contemporary sources and loads of factual material to support these suppositions. Also, expect some invented conversations, this is popular history after all. There may be one or two anachronistic references I can identify. Expect as well a vivid narrative history that conforms to known historical facts 99% of the time along with ample illumination of the larger issues. A summation of Lamb's thoughts on Justinian and his era is supplied in an afterword, and most interestingly a final section on "the illusion of history" closes the book. In this short closing chapter, many of the classical interpretations of the Age of Justinian are glossed. And, I find that I am far closer to agreeing with Lamb's assessment of Justinian the Great than I am with Gibbon, Toynbee, Bury, Voltaire or the other scholars cited. This book is highly recommended both as a fun and informative read and an enlightening encounter with an almost forgotten author.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

good for anyone with a love of history

By Susie

I liked this book as I do many of the other Lamb offerings. The scope of history and the realism of the characters are captured in a captivating manner.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Wonderful history. Lamb writes in the 20's but history ...

By dogpatch

Wonderful history. Lamb writes in the 20's but history doesn't care. Take a look and find he writes many a great account of the period. Accurate stuff, well delivered.

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