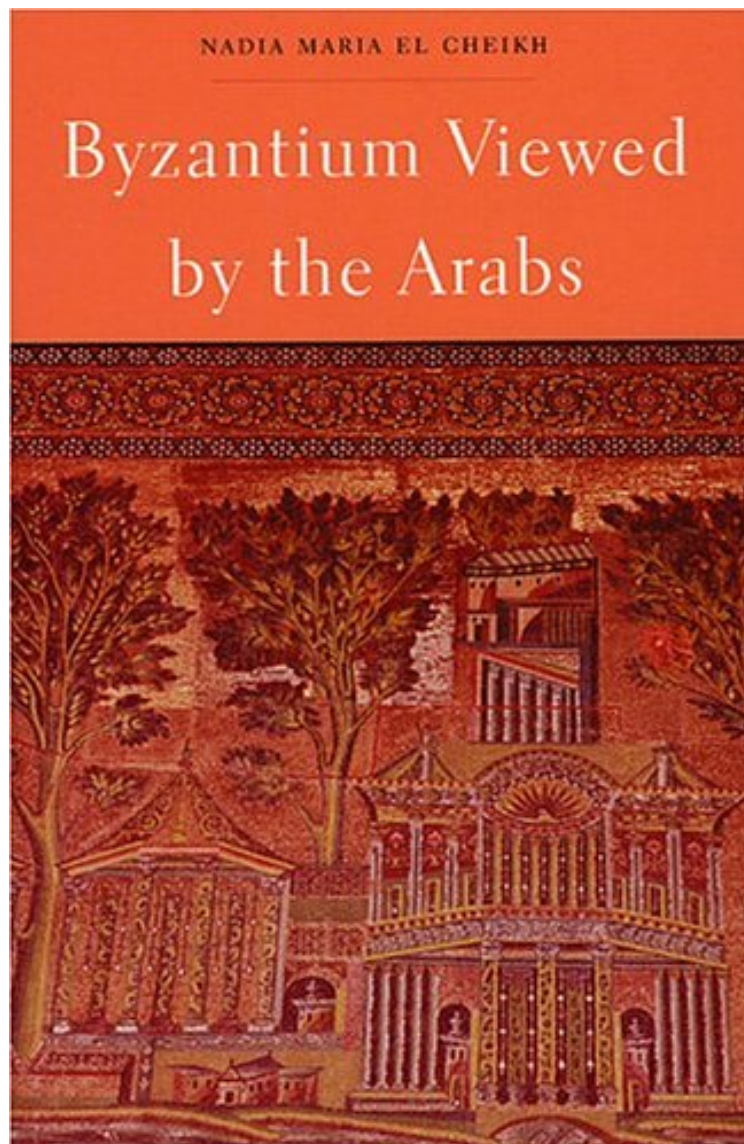


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Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs (Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs)

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Nadia Maria El Cheikh : Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs (Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs (Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Well-researched Arab/ Muslim look at Christianity amidst the long,

drawn-out Byzantine empire. By Charles O'Reilly Two sides help make a full story. Much knowledge here. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. This included Nadia Maria El Cheikh's excellent "Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs" By M.R. I'm not really what you'd call a history expert, I'm not even what you'd call a history enthusiast since my interests pertain to Mediterranean cultures and the histories around them as well as certain civilizations in Asia. Yet, when I first got my hands on Lord John Julius Norwich's History of Byzantium I quickly became enamored with the Byzantine Empire and quickly rushed to learn all I could about it. This included Nadia Maria El Cheikh's excellent "Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs". This is a fairly comprehensive text that dives into every nook and cranny to pull out all of the tasty historical anecdotes and hints as to how Arabic culture viewed Byzantium's culture, people, religion, architecture, learning and so on. It covers all the bases from the rise of Islam to the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and everything in between. I was initially worried that this book would be too dense for my less academically attuned brain to follow, but this text was surprisingly easily accessible. I love this book and if the topic interests you then I guarantee that there is no better text out there to better educate, enlighten and entertain. 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Stellar work of scholarship By Kirialax Nadia Maria El Cheikh has produced a tremendous work of scholarship on Arab intellectual history in the Middle Ages. The premise of the book is exactly what the title says. Fortunately, El Cheikh is well-versed in the trends of modern historical scholarship and recognizes early on that the Arab sources rarely provide much "real" information on Byzantium. Instead, as she concludes (p. 223), "Byzantium was also an imaginary category of difference against which Islam defined itself." In sum and as Postmodern history has taught us, the work is not beyond the author: what the Muslims are saying about Byzantium says a lot more about the Muslims themselves than the Byzantines. The book runs from the beginning of Islam in the seventh century A.D. (although the information is quite patchy there) to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and it covers a lot of topics. Although Muslim views of Constantinople is a favourite theme of the book, El Cheikh covers views on politics, women, and ceremony while providing abundant references. Those abundant references are arguably the book's greatest strength. She has accessed an enormous corpus of Arabic texts, the majority of which are not available in English translation. While some are available in other modern languages, it seems that the bulk of them are inaccessible to those who are unable to read medieval Arabic (like myself); thus having this comprehensive survey is invaluable. In terms of complaints, I only have two musings which may not qualify as complaints. El Cheikh demonstrates in the last chapter the remarkable continuity of Arab views of Constantinople, but then really fails to address just what this did to the long-standing apocalyptic tradition about the city's fall. Surely something more complex happened than what she related. Second, given the title of the book I was disappointed that the voices of non-Muslims Arabs did not make an appearance. I recognize that the ultimate thesis of the work is that the Byzantines served as a foil of Muslim character, but looking at the views of Christian Arabs like Yahya of Antioch would have only enriched the text, although I recognize that it might expand it beyond all reasonable limits. This is a well-researched, indispensable book on the intellectual history of the first seven centuries through their views of Byzantium.

This book studies the Arabic-Islamic view of Byzantium, tracing the Byzantine image as it evolved through centuries of warfare, contact, and exchanges. Including previously inaccessible material on the Arabic textual tradition on Byzantium, this investigation shows the significance of Byzantium to the Arab Muslim establishment and their appreciation of various facets of Byzantine culture and civilization. The Arabic-Islamic representation of the Byzantine Empire stretching from the reference to Byzantium in the Qur'an until the fall of Constantinople in 1453 is considered in terms of a few salient themes. The image of Byzantium reveals itself to be complex, non-monolithic, and self-referential. Formulating an alternative appreciation to the politics of confrontation and hostility that so often underlies scholarly discourse on Muslim-Byzantine relations, this book presents the schemes developed by medieval authors to reinterpret aspects of their own history, their own self-definition, and their own view of the world.

The achievement of this book is to have made a wide-ranging, theoretically informed, and useful introduction to an important subject. It has succeeded in signaling the most important periods and themes of its subject, cutting a new trail for future Arabist scholarship and giving specialists from other fields a view of the treasures that can be found in this one. (Kevin van Bladel Bryn Mawr Classical 2004-12-19) In this very readable book, El Cheikh has given us an interesting and well-researched study into the perceptions entertained by the Muslims about their neighbours, the Byzantines I have no hesitation at all in warmly recommending it to students and scholars seeking to learn more about this fascinating topic. (Robert G. Hoyland Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 2006-01-01) [El Cheikh] offers a clear and thorough survey of the various sources in a chronological framework. Her work is a valuable contribution to an area that has too often focused on polemics and has failed to see how identity is formed by defining oneself against the other. In addition, her work will be useful to those who want to examine the historical relationship between Islam and Christian cultures, especially outside of the usual areas of inquiry, the Crusades or colonialism. In addition to a survey of Arab-Muslim images of Byzantium, El Cheikh offers an historical evaluation of two faith traditions that have yet to live in peaceful coexistence in many parts of the world. Peaceful coexistence cannot be built when one faith has a consistent desire to conquer and dominate the other. El Cheikh's work can also be seen as an invitation to

dialogue, not just among historians and Byzantinists, but among Christians and Muslims who want to evaluate their own common histories honestly and openly. (Ben de Lee St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 2006-01-01)About the AuthorNadia Maria El Cheikh is an Associate Professor in the Department of History and Archaeology, American University of Beirut.