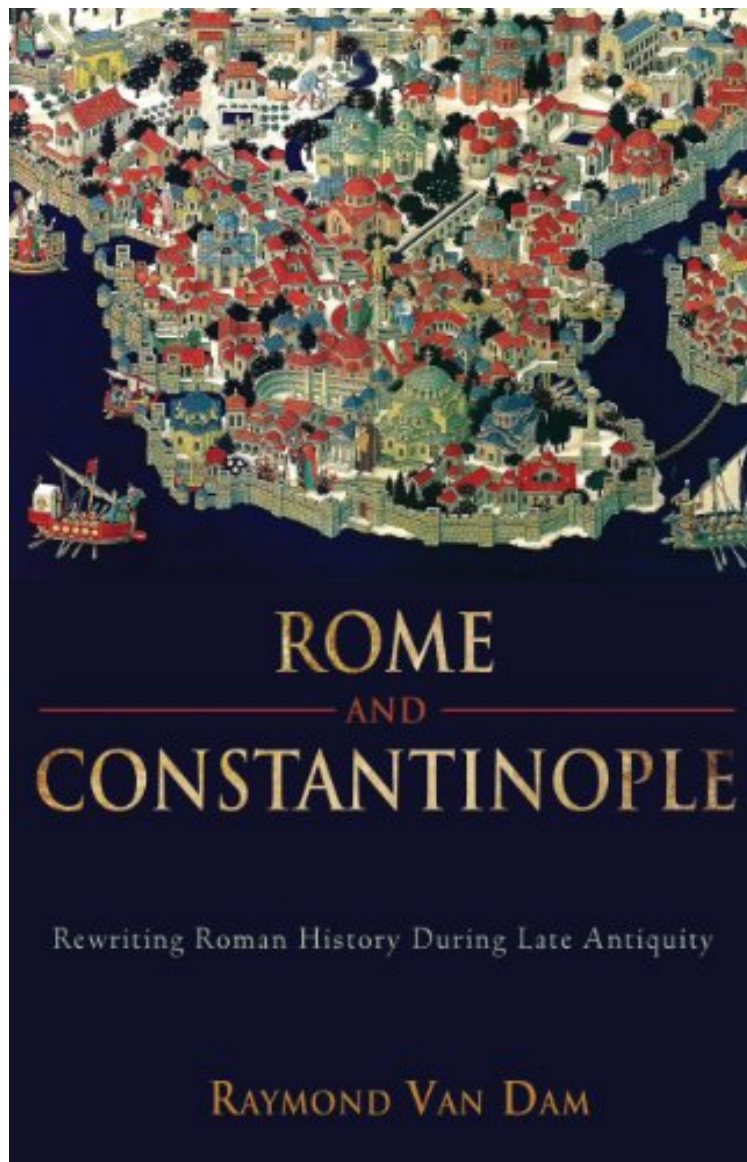


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## Rome and Constantinople: Rewriting Roman History during Late Antiquity (Edmondson Historical Lectures)

*Raymond Van Dam*

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**Raymond Van Dam : Rome and Constantinople: Rewriting Roman History during Late Antiquity (Edmondson Historical Lectures)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rome and Constantinople: Rewriting Roman History during Late Antiquity (Edmondson Historical Lectures):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Hard crack for those who simply can't get enough of the two

cities. By Hadrianus Management Group Inc. For such a small book, it is surprisingly chock full of pithy information that lays out the fascinating why and how of the formation of the new capital of the empire which supplanted old Rome, a city whose millennia developed sense of traditions and values were set literally in stone. Van Dam is masterful in invoking the world that was poised to turn from the myriad pagan Gods of Rome, to the novelty of the Hybrid deity that was newly marketed by Constantine in Nicea from the flotsam of a formerly illegal creed. Religion was only the first of the innovations that issued from this most radical of emperors in the entire history of the empire. The next was his creation of a new capital, intended from the get go to move the capital of state from vulnerable and ill defended Italy, to the vital and most productive eastern half of the Roman empire. Much like St. Petersburg, or Brasilia, the new city was created by fiat. Its streets and squares were crafted to impress all comers, and to reproduce the majesty and grandeur suitable for an imperial capital. I ate this tome up in one immensely satisfying swallow. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Comprehensive and succinct By Jollsters Comprehensive Byzantine history with a fresh perspective that will leave the reader fascinated. The prose is written so succinctly that it felt like reading a novel. I finished the book quickly and immediately wanted to reread it! Highly recommended for all interested readers. 9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Great book that might go a little too far at times By Kirialax Raymond Van Dam masterfully sketches out how two of the greatest cities of the later Roman Empire, Rome and Constantinople affected emperorship, imperial ideology, and history writing and how they in turn affected the cities. The central premise of this book is that imperial history had to be re-written at the end of antiquity. The city of Rome had a long and glorious heritage, but no longer looked the part as it was depopulated and falling into ruin. The city of Constantinople, on the other hand, was a grand city with an enormous population, but no real Greek, Roman, biblical, or Christian history behind it. The first chapter describes Rome and Van Dam argues that much of the grand construction was designed in a city associated with the Roman Republic and created to imitate that. However, in late antiquity the means of imperial power for emperors changed from that of "safeguarding" the Republic to appealing to the armies for power, and as such Rome itself lost some of its significance. It lost even more under the Christian empire, because the places of interest and locations of intercession with the divine were not closely tied up with the old city itself, and many of the important Christian sites were located on the periphery. Many of its civic festivals were associated with paganism as well, making association with such things in the city dangerous for emperors. The second half of the book moves on to Constantinople, a city which Van Dam argues was forced to steal heritage from sites around the Graeco-Roman world and adorn itself with Christian relics in order to create a history. However, things were noticeably different in Constantinople because it was not designed around pagan monuments and its precise lack of a Roman Republican past allowed for a creative break with that system of power for emperors. As such, churches were integrated into imperial ceremonial, and it was not even necessary that any pretenses of power be kept up: the senate was always weak and the emperor was God's vice-regent on earth. Finally, Van Dam discusses the textual rewriting of history in Hesychius of Miletus' world history that combines Greek mythology, Greek history, Roman history and divine intercession to firmly establish Constantinople as the New Rome. It's a very convincing argument, although it is one that he could take a bit further by applying it to early Byzantine chronicle writing and worldviews. While I think that this book is masterfully argued, there are a few little quibbles. For one, his cramming of all of a page's citations into a single footnote is a bit of a pain. I would much rather individual notes behind each citation, purely because it is simply cleaner and easier to find specific references. There are a few arguments that also do not seem to be terribly convincing, or simply need a little more evidence or explanation. For example, Van Dam briefly discusses imperial involvement in the late antique doctrinal conflicts and how emperors may have chosen to side with particular theological schools associated with major cities like Antioch and Alexandria for the sake of controlling them. It is an interesting argument, although how exactly control of the theological schools in Antioch has any sort of impact on Antioch's ability to act as a hub in defending northern Syria and Mesopotamia from the Sassanids is unclear. Another example of an argument that he may take too far is the idea of the actual concern in the east about representing a capital without Roman Republican institutions. I simply do not see how such ideas would have had much currency or relevance in the late antique Greek east, and how many people would have been aware of them. Regardless, none of these are central to his argument. This is a very good book. Its brevity means that you can read the entire thing in an evening, but anyone interested in the trappings of imperial power in late antiquity shouldn't be able to put it down. Van Dam's writing is very engaging, and his scholarship is good. Highly recommended.

Imperial Rome and Christian Constantinople were both astonishingly large cities with over-sized appetites that served as potent symbols of the Roman Empire and its rulers. Esteemed historian Raymond Van Dam draws upon a wide array of evidence to reveal a deep interdependence on imperial ideology and economy as he elucidates the parallel workaday realities and lofty images in their stories. Tracing the arc of empire from the Rome of Augustus to Justinian's Constantinople, he masterfully shows how the changing political structures, ideologies, and historical narratives of Old and New Rome always remained rooted in the bedrock of the ancient Mediterranean's economic and demographic realities. The transformations in the Late Roman Empire, brought about by the rise of the military and the church, required a rewriting of the master narrative of history and signaled changes in economic systems. Just as

Old Rome had provided a stage set for the performance of Republican emperorship, New Rome was configured for the celebration of Christian rule. As it came to pass, a city with too much history was outshone by a city with no history. Provided with the urban amenities and an imagined history appropriate to its elevated status, Constantinople could thus resonate as the new imperial capital, while Rome, on the other hand, was reinvented as the papal city.

"By cleverly juxtaposing an analysis of the symbolic roles of Rome and Constantinople with careful consideration of the practical necessities of supporting their enormous size, this book offers a fresh perspective on these ancient cities. Van Dam has a gift for inverting traditional interpretations and assumptions in a way that produces new insights and raises provocative questions about the nature and purpose of these great cities. This book will cause every reader to rethink his or her view of the twin capitals of the Roman world."?Gregory S. Aldrete, Professor of History and Humanistic Studies, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay"A nuanced and eminently readable study. Van Dam has written a great little book."?Robert Ousterhout, Professor of Byzantine Art and Architecture and Director of the Center for Ancient Studies, University of Pennsylvania"Rome and Constantinople is a wonderful little book full of big ideas and spiced with juicy details and clever observations."?Dennis Trout, Associate Professor, Department of Classical Studies, University of Missouri"Erudite, engaging, and well-written, this book offers both a synthetic overview of issues pertinent to the histories of Rome and Constantinople and an interpretation of the relationship between these two urban centers. Neophytes and scholars alike will find it a rewarding read."?Sarah Bassett, Associate Professor, Department of the History of Art, Henry Radford Hope School of Fine ArtsFrom the Inside FlapA fresh perspective on these two ancient cities through the lens of economicsAbout the AuthorRaymond Van Dam is Professor of History at the University of Michigan. His most recent books include *Becoming Christian: The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia* and *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*. He lives in Ann Arbor.