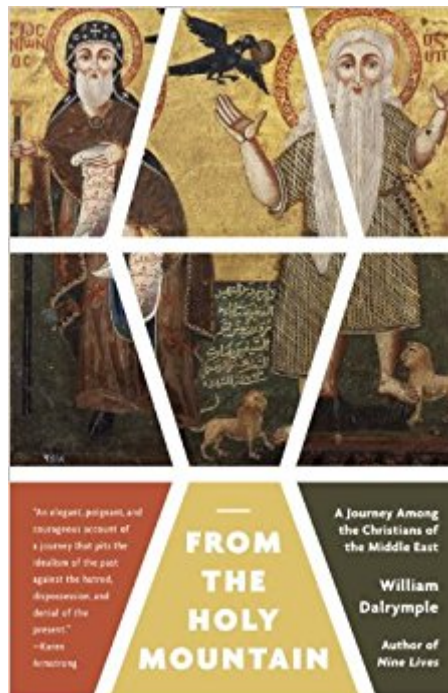


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# From The Holy Mountain: A Journey Among The Christians Of The Middle East



## Synopsis

In the spring of A.D. 587, John Moschos and his pupil Sophronius the Sophist embarked on a remarkable expedition across the entire Byzantine world, traveling from the shores of Bosphorus to the sand dunes of Egypt. Using Moschos's writings as his guide and inspiration, the acclaimed travel writer William Dalrymple retraces the footsteps of these two monks, providing along the way a moving elegy to the slowly dying civilization of Eastern Christianity and to the people who are struggling to keep its flame alive. The result is Dalrymple's unsurpassed masterpiece: a beautifully written travelogue, at once rich and scholarly, moving and courageous, overflowing with vivid characters and hugely topical insights into the history, spirituality and the fractured politics of the Middle East.

## Book Information

Paperback: 516 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (October 2, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307948897

ISBN-13: 978-0307948892

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1.3 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 16 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #361,201 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #118 in Books > Travel > Middle East > General #126 in Books > Travel > Specialty Travel > Literary & Religious #141 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Orthodoxy

## Customer Reviews

"This splendid book should take its rightful place on the same shelf as Chatwin's *In Patagonia*. . . [It is] rich with the poetry of antique places [and] transports the fascinated reader smoothly into a vanishing world." •The Washington Post Book World  
"An elegant, poignant, and courageous account of a journey that pits the idealism of the past against the hatred, dispossession, and denial of the present." •Karen Armstrong  
"Dalrymple's threnody for Eastern Christianity ranks with the great modern travel books, Robert Byron's *Road to Oxiana*, Patrick Leigh Fermor's *Time of Gifts* and Eric Newby's *Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*." •The Scotsman  
"Any travel writer who is so good at his job as to be brilliant, applauded, loved and

needed has to have an unusual list of qualities, and William Dalrymple has them all in aces.

Dalrymple's ear for conversation is as good as Alan Bennett's. The best and most unexpected book I have read since I forget when.

•Peter Levi, Literary Review

William Dalrymple is the author of seven acclaimed works of history and travel, including *City of Djinns*, which won the Young British Writer of the Year Prize and the Thomas Cook Travel Book award; the bestselling *From the Holy Mountain*; *White Mughals*, which won Britain's most prestigious history prize, the Wolfson; and *The Last Mughal*, which won the Duff Cooper Prize for History and Biography. He divides his time between New Delhi and London, and is a contributor to *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Guardian*.

Having previously read Dalrymple's *In Xanadu*, a book he had written in his early 20s, I had two motivations in reading this book: first of all, I was intrigued to see how his writing had developed over the intervening decade; secondly, I wanted to see if his idea of following in the footsteps of ancient travelers would work as well with less well known journey than Marco Polo's? On the first question I can report that his style had broadened and deepened since his earlier book. *In Xanadu* had a breathless, almost over-excited air to it, quite fitting for the work of a young author. The style of *From the Holy Mountain* is more reflective and mature, although it loses nothing of the sense of wonder and excitement of the earlier work. The second question has a more involved answer. The travelers whose journey Dalrymple is recreating are John Moschos and Sophronius the Sophist through the Byzantine Empire to the Holy Land and ultimately to Upper Egypt in the late 6th Century. They set off on their travels during a time of great upheaval and uncertainty in the Byzantine Empire, traveling through and around the Holy Land. Compared with Marco Polo's journey these travels are almost completely unknown. Dalrymple chose to start at Mount Athos which he visited to see the codex of *The Spiritual Meadow*, Moschos' collection of the tales he heard on the way. It is not far-fetched to say that *From the Holy Mountain* becomes Dalrymple's *Spiritual Meadow* as he shares with us the stories of the people he met and the places through which he traveled. He then heads east through Istanbul, Anatolia, Syria, through Lebanon, the occupied West Bank, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Cairo, and ultimately into Upper Egypt to conclude his journey in the Great Kharga Oasis. This journey took Dalrymple nearly six months and during that time he passed through some of the most troubled and contentious areas in the world. In all that time he never loses sight of the primary purpose of his journey which was to chronicle what had become of the Christian communities in the region in the 1500 years since Moschos and

Sophronius had passed that way. Dalrymple's two great strengths are his deep knowledge of ancient culture and history, and his genuine fondness and empathy towards the people whose lives he briefly encounters during his journey. These two aspects of his writing complement each other wonderfully in that he is able to give a sympathetic and knowledgeable account not only of the present situation in which communities find themselves but also to provide insight into how they came to be there. He is fully engaged in the problem of understanding how this region has become a place in which such deep animosities and hatred are daily acted out between three of the world's great religions, the three peoples of the Book. It will come as no surprise that he offers no simplistic or easy answers, but what he does provide is a detailed and insightful account of a region that has become more, rather than less, troubled in the 20 years that have passed since he wrote his account. The answer to my second question then is a resounding, "yes". In my view this is an even better book than *In Xanadu*. Dalrymple has taken a less promising theme and turned it into a grand narrative encapsulating three of the world's most important religions over a period of immense historical change. He manages to chronicle the political, historical and religious developments that have turned this part of the world into such a culturally rich, but politically and religiously difficult place to understand. Reading this book has significantly improved my understanding of the region and its people.

Great night time reading and studying..

The sites described are very much supported now by money from abroad. This was a fascinating read. So much has changed since Dalrymple's dramatic and emotional journey. Southeastern Turkey is safer for travelers and the churches and monasteries that remain can be visited safely. There are very few Christians left in Turkey, but what remains of their churches are being cared for, for now. I witnessed interesting presentations by priests and lay people to Turkish tourists and student groups. This book is worth reading for its history and context.

Dalrymple sets out on a journey through the Middle-East retracing the footsteps of John Moschos based on the latter's book 'the spiritual meadow'. The book is a great journey through history, geography and spirituality of the Christian Middle-East, and is told with a lot of humor.

Have just read *From The Holy Mountain* for the second time. What an excellent piece of work. The religious history of the middle east is refreshed and related with such scholarly detail. In spite of

being in constant danger WD goes fearlessly where another would fear to tread. Travel and history is combined perfectly. Loved it earlier and loved it again.

This is a great book for amateur historians who can enjoy a history-laden but simultaneously lighter-weight account of the author's journey. Kind of like the tales of people who have traveled the route of Marco Polo. Fascinating for those who enjoy middle east history and certainly the roots of Christianity.

Very interesting on the impact of Islam on ancient Christian holy sites in the Middle East. Book was written in 1997. Situation is far worse now.

It surpassed my expectations. In two weeks I will be in Constantinople with more understanding of the history.

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