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## The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (Volumes 4-6)

*Edward Gibbon, Hugh Trevor-Roper*  
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**Edward Gibbon, Hugh Trevor-Roper : The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (Volumes 4-6)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (Volumes 4-6):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wow I thought there were only 3 volumes By David Belfry This is a definitive set to have for anyone interested in the time of the Roman Empire. The content is well researched, although dated, but you'll find that many historians who have followed Edward use his writing as a reference. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Gibbon! By JimE Diego Slow read. But worth the effort....some apparent translation errors (e.g. Referring to "corn" when corn, a grain from the new world, was not yet known in ancient Rome. 31 of 32 people found the following review helpful. Should Have Stopped After the First Half By Arch Stanton Edward Gibbon was the greatest historian the English language ever knew. Period. His books defined the field for over 150 years and spawned countless imitators of his wit and style. But of course, almost two and a half centuries later his work seems

antiquated and quaint. Certainly he has been overtaken by other historians in terms of accuracy, and the field of archaeology has opened the door to a whole realm of knowledge which Gibbon knew nothing about. While a great many of his interpretations have been proven wrong, and some of his facts are shaky, the first set of his work is still a generally accurate account of the fall of Rome. Which brings us to the second set. The problem with Gibbon's last three books is the same thing that was the strength of his first three: his thesis. While many (including me) would argue that his view of a golden age in the second century followed by a continuous decline interspersed with brief periods of recovery is an oversimplification at best, it is still a workable thesis that can be made to fit the facts (more or less). Now for the second set of books he does not create a new thesis, he merely continues with the same one. That Rome fell in the west and continued its long, slow decline in the east. The problem with this is that while the west fell in 476 (294 years after he dates the beginning of the fall) the east didn't fall until 1453 (almost a thousand years after that). So in other words the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire was in a state of permanent decline for longer than the western empire was even around. This is despite being surrounded by angry enemies on all sides (including the newly established Muslim caliphates and various migrating tribes). Obviously it is impossible for an empire to start off in decline, whatever the precise meaning of that term is when it is applied to an entire civilization. His thesis must be wrong, yet he continues with it. A lot of his problem comes from his Classical prejudices. Classicists then (and now) have generally viewed the first centuries BC and AD as the high point in classical Roman civilization. It created the greatest art, books, and poems of Roman civilization. It is seen as essentially perfect. Which means that everything that deviates from it is considered a decline in standards. That's the problem with having an ideal baseline. This is even reflected in the name given to the Latin writing of the various periods. Ciceronian and Augustan literature is called Golden Age Latin. Post-Tiberian Latin is called Silver Age Latin. After the 2nd Century they don't even bother giving it a metal name, but if they call it anything it would be Vulgar Latin. They still use this classification system today. So a civilization that calls itself Roman is to be judged by the standards of the Roman Empire of the first two centuries (as seen through a 18th Century British lens) and not using more impartial or less biased parameters. The rest of his problems come from more contemporary sources. His era was seen as the Age of Enlightenment. Europe had finally managed to crawl up from the dust of excessive superstition and barbarism. The Middle Ages were a dirty little section of human history that separated modern Europe from its more noble Classical past. Despising (justly) religious fanaticism and ignorance they were particularly unprepared to see the benefit of a society that valued such features. Gibbon looked at the superstition-ridden and fanatical Byzantines and saw nothing of value. Since their society held values directly contrary to his own he considered them worthless. That they achieved anything at all must have been a great mystery to him, but instead of analyzing their culture to see what it was he slathers it with his contempt. So why given what I've said above do I still give this work four stars? Because even when he's fantastically wrong Edward Gibbon is a brilliant writer. His style is inimitable, filled with sarcasm and wit. Even when he's being snobbish he's charming. The scope of his research is incredible. I'd have a hard time getting this material now, and I can't even imagine how he got hold of all this in the 18th Century before computers, accessible printings, or even detailed bibliographies were available. Apart from archaeological evidence there is very little written material available now that he didn't have then and that he doesn't use in these books. As I said before, the basic narrative is correct. It's merely his interpretation that's wrong. So if you go in knowing that then you should find it an entertaining read. Gibbon is, as ever, immensely quotable. But please do not consider these books the be-all, end-all. Take what he says with a grain of salt and if you're interested then seek out a less biased source. There is a series of books which covers the same period in only slightly less detail. John Julius Norwich's books are very much like Gibbon's except that he uses more modern prose, is less snarky, and actually likes the Byzantines. These books are available as *Byzantium: The Early Centuries*, *Byzantium: The Apogee*, and *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall*. Or if you prefer they are all available in abbreviated form as *A Short History of Byzantium*, although that one is really too short to get a proper view of the Byzantines. These books aren't deep, but they do offer a highly readable and charming view of the Byzantine Empire across a thousand years of history. The Everyman's Library set is the nicest set of Gibbon available. They are green with an attractive black and gold title impressed in the cover and a bookmark sewn into the spine. They come in a nice box which stores them all (although mine doesn't have a picture for some reason). I did my research for these carefully when deciding which set to buy, because you really do want a good copy of Gibbon. The only problem is that the nice black and gold lettering on the spine comes off rather easily while reading, and the green fabric shows stains rather well. The text itself is as he had written it although the footnotes are a combination of his and J.B. Bury's. J.B. Bury was the foremost scholar of the Later Roman Empire in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. When Gibbon wrote his books he basically invented his own system of footnoting. Before his time nobody really attributed where they got their information from unless it was mentioned in passing within the text. Unfortunately Gibbon's system became hopelessly outdated as the process of attributing information became standardized over the next century. So J.B. Bury made it his task to get Gibbon's footnotes to conform to a slightly more traditional system. If you get a copy of Gibbon from another publisher make sure that it's the Bury edition since his redone footnotes really makes the books easier to read.

(Book Jacket Status: Jacketed)Volumes 4, 5, and 6 of the Bury Text, in a boxed set. Introduction by Hugh Trevor-Roper

From the Inside FlapVolumes 4, 5, and 6 of the Bury Text, in a boxed set. Introduction by Hugh Trevor-RoperFrom the Back Cover'Gibbon is a kind of bridge that connects the ancient with the ancient with the modern ages, ' noted Thomas Carlyle. 'And how gorgeously does it swing across the gloomy and tumultuous chasm of these barbarous centuries.' Indeed, Gibbon, the supreme historian of the Enlightenment--the illustrious scholar who envisioned history as a branch of literature--seemed almost predestined to write his monumental account of the Roman Empire's terrible self-destruction.About the AuthorEdward Gibbon was an English historian, writer, and member of Parliament.