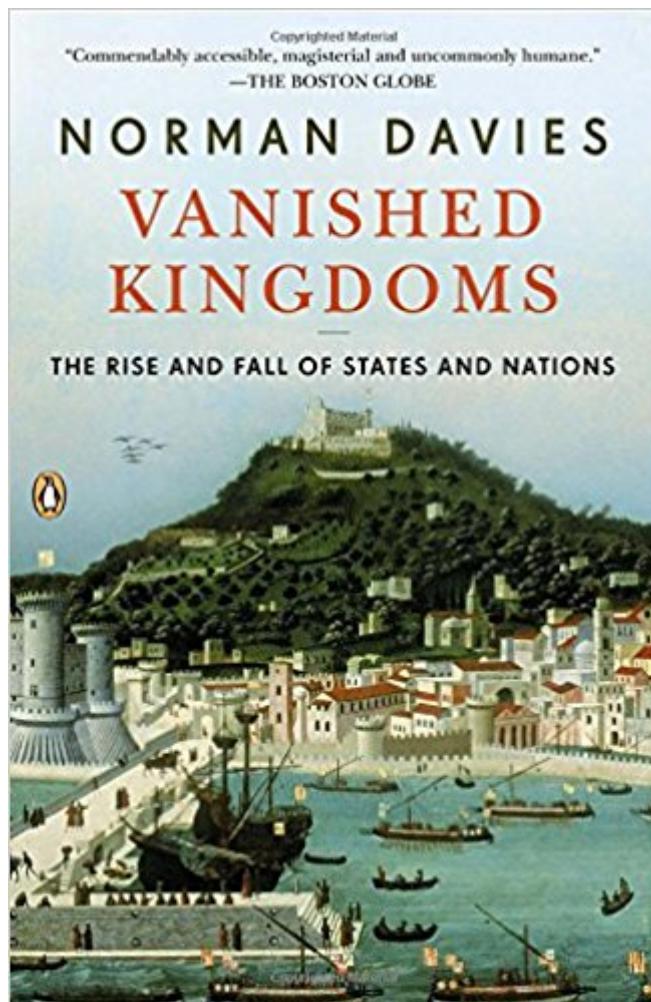


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# Vanished Kingdoms: The Rise And Fall Of States And Nations



## Synopsis

From the bestselling author of *Europe: A History* comes a uniquely ambitious masterpiece that will thrill fans of lost civilizations. While Germany, Italy, France, and England dominate our conceptions of Europe, these modern states are relatively recent constructs. In this brilliant work of historical reconstruction, Norman Davies brings back to life the long-forgotten empire of Aragon, which once controlled the Western Mediterranean; the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, once the largest country in Europe, and the Kingdom of the Rock, founded by ancient Britons when neither England nor Scotland existed. In the tradition of Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Davies subverts our established view of the past and urges us to reconsider the impetus for the rise and fall of nations.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A dozen-plus examples from European history constitute this ruminative disquisition on the impermanence of polities. Struck by popular amnesia about the existence of his selections, some of which endured for centuries (although one, the Republic of Carpatho-Ukraine, lived but one day), Davies, from a traveler's viewpoint, describes the contemporary appearance of each former state's territory or principal city, then applies engrossing clarity to the history of its origin, ascent, and decline. Two states en route to expiration, Prussia and Savoy, left traces in contemporary Germany and Italy, but the rest are gone, submerged by dynastic politics, as were the duchy of Burgundy and the kingdom of Aragon, or hacked away and conquered by aggressive neighbors, as was the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. Despite the subject of extinction, pessimism does not pervade Davies' accounts, which detect a persistence of popular

memory about each vanished state, encouraging advocates for its revival, as occurred in the cases of Poland and Lithuania. Having current relevance especially to the UK and Montenegro, Davies' fascinating work harbors insights and discoveries for avid history readers. --Gilbert Taylor --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

An alternative history of Europe that is . . . densely packed yet commendably accessible, magisterial, and uncommonly humane. • The Boston Globe "Hugely ambitious . . . From the mists, Mr. Davies summons the kingdoms; he records their emergence, their flowering and their demise" -- whether by "internal diseases" or "foreign war" in Thomas Hobbes' words. And he examines the traces that the kingdoms have left behind, in works of art or a piece of rock or perhaps just a place name. • The Wall Street Journal "Davies resurrects the lands and peoples that were lost in the brutal tide of history. . . . It takes a tremendous feat of empathy to write about countries and peoples that no longer exist. And the amount of information in *Vanished Kingdoms* that will be new to all but the most expert students of European history is staggering. . . . Fascinating facts and insights flutter on its many pages." • San Francisco Chronicle "Davies is well known as an iconoclast who punctures the comforting myths of countries that history has blessed. . . . *Vanished Kingdoms* gives full rein to his historical imagination and enthusiasms, imparting a powerful sense of places lost in time. All across Europe ghosts will bless him for telling their long-forgotten stories." • The Economist "Davies is certainly one of the best British historical writers of the past half century, and every gauntlet he throws down is bejeweled. His literary gifts and his capacity for what he nicely calls "imaginative sympathy" are stretched to their limits by this challenging project. . . . Yet Davies succeeds, and it is quite a success." • Timothy Snyder, *The Guardian* (London)

Why authors indulge in telling us their little stories about their feelings and personal experiences on the subjects they discuss in books like this (a History book, not a travelogue or a personal memoir, that is), is a mystery to me. This book is very long, exceedingly long, and a good part of the guilt for that is precisely this: the personal experience of the author, supposed to embellish the reading (I guess?) adding dozens of vaguely interesting pages (to be diplomatic) to a work which per se demands a lot of space. As so many times, a good editor is obviously missing here. But (bad as that is) that is not what moved me to write this review. I cannot forgive a scholar for obvious and basic

mistakes like those I quickly spotted when reading the book. For instance, Mr. Davies uses Italian monikers for Spanish historical characters. We are supposed to be led by an expert here, not a dilettante who is not liable to revise his sources and check his data. We are talking about mainstream and living European languages here, not obscure and dead bygone tongues, please!.I know, this may just be a small error. Alright, but all the chapter about Aragon is infused with such a lack of accuracy that it made me shiver when thinking of more gross mistakes that I would sure overlook in other chapters. Too bad for such an ambitious work. I am sorry, but I could no longer trust the rigour of the author, and thus I put the book down after some more reading.

I am a European history buff and once again Norman Davies has delivered. I love the sections about Burgundy, Rosenau and Etruria. My problem is with the Litva section when he writes about the Union of Brest in 1595. Eastern Orthodox Christians respect their bishops just as much as any other hierarch so his writings shows his pro Polish bias. The reality is that the Polish rulers pressured the Ruthenian bishops to accept Papal supremacy and persecuted the dioceses which refused. In fact the persecution and interference was so severe by the Polish Catholic rulers that many Eastern Orthodox Christians preferred to be ruled by Muslims rather than their fellow Christians. Professor Davies' pro Polish and Russophobic writings in the Litva section is the reason why I gave the book four stars.

This is the history of Europe that I was not taught at school. I am an Australian and was brought up on British History and a British interpretation of Europe which was incorrect, and leaves us today with a complete lack of understanding of the forces that are shaping modern Europe. I found this book a revelation on understanding Europe and I sincerely regret that I had not read it before travelling to Europe many times over the past 15 years. It is a must for anyone of Anglo Saxon heritage travelling to Europe to really appreciate the nuances of different cultures within modern European countries.Roger Grace

What a fascinating travelogue through space and time! Extremely entertaining couldn't put it down. Great non fiction read

I wasn't as blown away by this as I hoped to be. I think I expected a more cohesive story of how European kingdoms, important in their day, were lost to history, because they have no successor nations today. Instead this is episodic, each chapter a disjunct story. Some of these "kingdoms" are

little more than chieftains. Much is unknown and only surmised, or imagined. Far too much "what if" or "maybe it could be that" for me.

The concept of Vanished Kingdoms is interesting and Normal Davies is steeped in knowledge and research. The problem is execution to a degree as the book is not a particularly engaging read and dry at several points that really kill the flow. If I could give 3.5 stars I would and it is worth reading for die hard history oriented people. For the casual reader the different take is not enough to likely engage you.

In classic Norman Davies style, this book inundates the reader with detail to the point of boredom, then touches on some interesting point often enough to keep the reader going.

Vanished Kingdoms is a compelling account of European countries that no longer exist. In several highly readable and well-researched narratives, Davies exposes fault lines in today's map of the continent and provides needed understanding of such contemporary events as the Scottish referendum and the Russian invasion of parts of Ukraine. As the sage said, those who forget history are condemned to repeat it.

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