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The Secret History [Illustrated] (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Illustrated with 10 unique illustrations.# By the Historian# How the Great General Belisarius Was Hoodwinked by His Wife# How Belated Jealousy Affected Belisarius's Military Judgment# Showing the Danger of Interfering with a Woman's Intrigues# How Theodora Humiliated the Conqueror of Africa and Italy# How Theodora Tricked the General's Daughter# Ignorance of the Emperor Justin, and How His Nephew Justinian Was the Virtual Ruler# Outrages of the Blues# Character and Appearance of Justinian# How Theodora, Most Depraved of All Courtesans, Won His Love# How Justinian Created a New Law Permitting Him to Marry a Courtesan# How the Defender of the Faith Ruined His Subjects# Proving That Justinian and Theodora Were Actually Fiends in Human Form# Deceptive Affability and Piety of a Tyrant# Justice for Sale# How All Roman Citizens Became Slaves# What Happened to Those Who Fell Out of Favor with Theodora# How She Saved Five Hundred Harlots from a Life of Sin# How Justinian Killed a Trillion People# How He Seized All the Wealth of the Romans and Threw It Away# Debasing of the Quaestorship# The Sky Tax, and How Border Armies Were Forbidden to Punish Invading Barbarians# Further Corruption in High Places# How Landowners Were Ruined# Unjust Treatment of the Soldiers# How He Robbed His Own Officials# How He Spoiled the Beauty of the Cities and Plundered the Poor# How the Defender of the Faith Protected the Interests of the Christians# His Violation of the Laws of the Romans and How Jews Were Fined for Eating Lamb# Other Incidents Revealing Him as a Liar and a Hypocrite# Further Innovations of Justinian and Theodora, and a Conclusion

In what I have written on the Roman wars up to the present point, the story was arranged in chronological order and as completely as the times then permitted. What I shall write now follows a different plan, supplementing the previous formal chronicle with a disclosure of what really happened throughout the Roman Empire. You see, it was not possible, during the life of certain persons, to write the truth of what they did, as a historian should. If I had, their hordes of spies would have found out about it, and they would have put me to a most horrible death. I could not even trust my nearest relatives. That is why I was compelled to hide the real explanation of many matters glossed over in my previous books. These secrets it is now my duty to tell and reveal the remaining hidden matters and motives. Yet when I approach this different task, I find it hard indeed to have to stammer and retract what I have written before about the lives of Justinian and Theodora. Worse yet, it occurs to me that what I am now about to tell will seem neither probable nor plausible to future generations, especially as time flows on and my story becomes ancient history. I fear they may think me a writer of fiction, and even put me among the poets. However, I have this much to cheer me, that my account will not be unendorsed by other testimony: so I shall not shrink from the duty of completing this work. For

the men of today, who know best the truth of these matters, will be trustworthy witnesses to posterity of the accuracy of my evidence. Still another thing for a long time deferred my passion to relieve myself of this untold tale. For I wondered if it might be prejudicial to future generations, and the wickedness of these deeds had not best remain unknown to later times: lest future tyrants, hearing, might emulate them. It is deplorably natural that most monarchs mimic the sins of their predecessors and are most readily disposed to turn to the evils of the past. But, finally, I was again constrained to proceed with this history, for the reason that future tyrants may see also that those who thus err cannot avoid retribution in the end, since the persons of whom I write suffered that judgment.

Book Information

File Size: 717 KB

Print Length: 176 pages

Publisher: * (December 3, 2008)

Publication Date: December 18, 2007

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B001MV6ZFK

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #337,485 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #55

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Customer Reviews

... As for other people's money, he seized it by stealth without the slightest hesitation, for he did not even think it necessary to put forward any excuse or justification before taking possession of a thing to which he had no claim. Yet when he had secured the money he was quite prepared to show his contempt for it by reckless prodigality, or to throw it to barbarians without the slightest

need. In short, he kept no money, and allowed no one else in the world to keep any, as if he were not overcome by avarice but held fast by envy of those who had acquired money. Thus he cheerfully banished wealth from Roman soil and became the architect of poverty for all. As is well known, Procopius wrote both the official and the unofficial histories of Justinian's reign. In fact, the editor has an interesting passage on P.'s esoteric art of writing: "...There are good reasons ... to take Procopius at his word, not least of which is the fact that the differences between these two works are more often apparent than they are real. The main one is that whereas criticism of Justinian and his policies in the Secret History is invariably explicit and direct and expressed in the authorial voice, in the History of the Wars the self-same accusations tend to be put into the mouths of others, such as foreign ambassadors or visitors to court, or are expressed implicitly, by way of literary allusion. Another ruse employed in the History of the Wars is to take charges levelled at Justinian in the Secret History and project them onto the Persian Shah Chosroes (Khusro). Justinian and Chosroes become, in effect, interchangeable as models of oriental despotism." Nonetheless, Procopius does not lay everything out in the "unofficial" history, either. He may be describing a horrible state of affairs, and yet his rhetoric is often too classical: If in the attitude of mind and way of life the difference between them (Justinian and Theodora) was apparent, they were at one in their rapacity, their bloodlust and their utter contempt for the truth. Both of them were the most practised liars, and if anyone who aroused Theodora's ire was alleged to be committing any offence however trivial and insignificant, she promptly fabricated charges which had nothing to do with the accused and blew the matter up to criminal proportions. Endless indictments received a hearing, and a special court was set up to dispose of them. The judges appointed were of Theodora's choosing, and it was their function to contend with each other to see which of them by the inhumanity of his verdict could succeed better than the others in satisfying the Empress's desire. Of Theodora's sexual depravity (the dishiest part of the book), I will say only that some things are too good to be true, and some things too awful. Reassuring reading if you think we live in the worst of times.

This is so worth reading. Imagine writing a secret history about your boss who's a creep and even though the story won't come out till after he's dead, you still want the story told.

I have the opportunity to tour Istanbul this fall, so I read Procopius' "Secret History" as a start toward getting grounded in the history of the area. The book really singed my eyebrows! The main characters described by Procopius are the Emperor Justinian, the Emperess Theodora, the general

Belisarius, and his wife Antonia. (The time period is the first half of the 6th Century.) The men are described as weak and vacillating, whereas the women are either amoral sexual athletes or sexual monsters, depending on your point of view. I cannot bring myself to even describe many of the sexual exploits of these two women. Perhaps one mild example will give the flavor of their willingness to experiment beyond what I could have ever imagined. Have you ever heard of laying naked on the floor, being sprinkled with barley, and then allowing geese to come in and nibble the barley off one's body? That story transgresses the horizon of my sexual imagination. Both women had a lust for cruelty, as well as for sexual pleasure. They meddled in affairs of state, and contributed to the decline and fall of Roman civilization in the West. (Belisarius destroyed Gothic power in the West, but did not stay to re-build Roman institutions, due to meddling back in Byzantium. So the truly barbaric Lombards took over, and western civilization collapsed irretrievably. I was never told this aspect of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" when I was a boy in school (or even when I was a young man in college for that matter!). Fred Hallberg

In 40 pages you will know first hand what ruined Rome

Ancient "House of Cards". I think that Theodora is the inspiration for Claire Underwood.

Well written but rather depressing.

Better than GAME OF THRONES.

An interesting and hopefully, a true account of the time of the Emperor Justinian.

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