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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# Debasement 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.

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Customer Reviews

The reign of Emperor Justinian (r. 527 - 565 A.D.) can be rightfully viewed as a sort of last-gasp greatness for the decrepit Roman Empire, by this point a scattershot ghost of its former self.

Justinian is a renown figure in this era, a titan: he begged off the barbarians with many a-bribe, and thus thrived; he began silk production (stealing the secrets from China); he erected magnificent buildings and edifices, one of which is now declared to be a lost 'Wonder of the World.' Most

predominately, he put scholars to work on a new law-code; this well-organized legal code, set in twelve volumes, became the basis from which European law sprung. It is interesting to see how history depicts Justinian. In Asimov's Chronology of the World, the science-fiction author states: "...Justinian I (482-565), sometimes called 'Justinian the Great.' He was forceful and intelligent, and his wife, Theodora (500-548), of lowly origin, was even more forceful and intelligent..." and goes on to list the varied accomplishments of the era, hinting between the lines that all was not utopian - a brief passage that some 30,000 people were slain in a riot involving horse racing, and a concluding statement that, as of 600 A.D., while "...the East Roman Empire still looked formidable on the map...it had been exhausted past the possibility of any new expansive adventures." For a slightly more askew glance at the reign of Justinian and his consort Theodora, Procopius' *The Secret History* will readily fill in the spaces that Asimov (and most respectable historians) glaze over in light of the Emperor's many accomplishments.

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