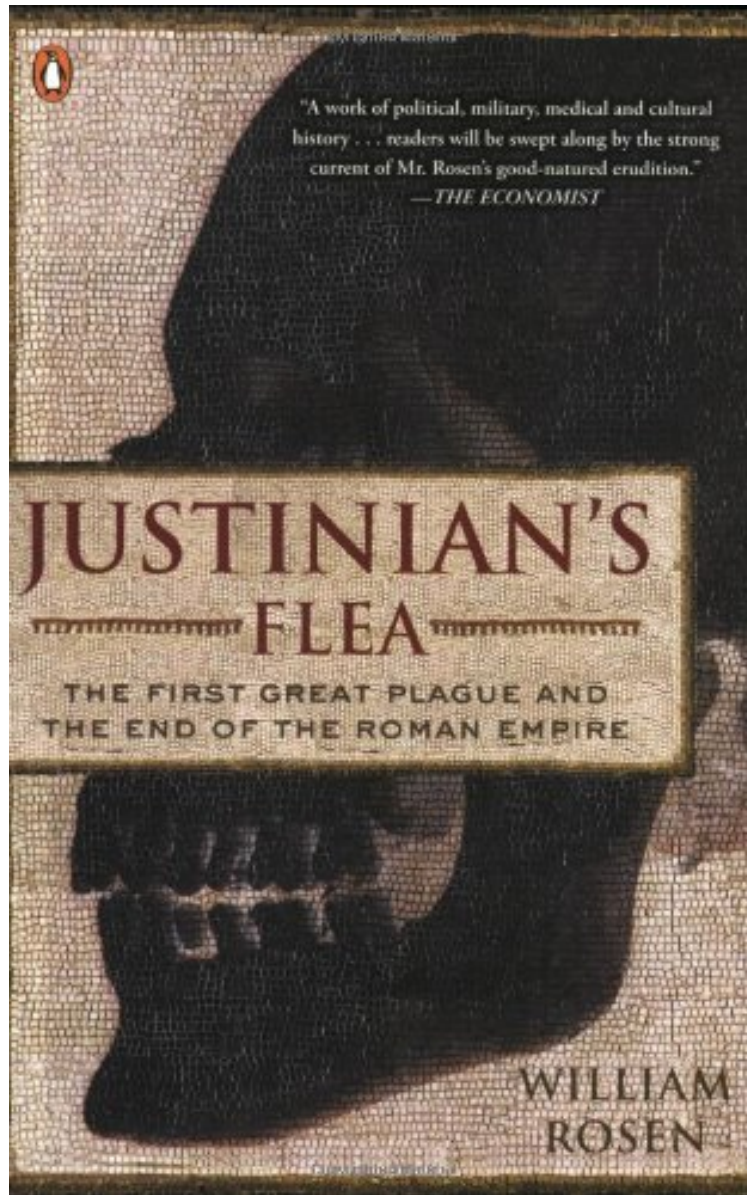


(Ebook free) Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire

Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire

William Rosen

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William Rosen : Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Man proposes, the Demon disposesBy ealovittOf all the books I've read about the Bubonic Plague, "Justinian's Flea" proved to be the most deft at weaving the history of Eastern Roman Empire with the ecological life cycle of the plague bacillus, as it mutated from a relatively harmless microbe to a demon that consumed at least twenty-five million human lives, beginning in the year 540 CE. I had assumed the sixth century pandemic originated somewhere in the Great Steppe that separated the Eastern Roman Empire from China, but this author makes the case that it actually originated in the "fertile African valleys between Lake Tana in the north and Lake Rudolf in the South...it would have had its choice of northward routes aboard its flea/rat hosts, either via the Red Sea, or up the Nile..." to the great port city of Alexandria. While waiting for the demon (the author's name for the plague bacillus) to appear, we are treated to a history of the Eastern Roman Empire as it began to split away from the West and from Rome. One of this author's main sources is Procopius of Caesaria, the principal historian of the 6th century. He accompanied Justinian's great general, Belisarius on many of his campaigns and wrote of them in "Wars of Justinian." Procopius also published a salacious 'Secret History' which was rediscovered in the Vatican Library many centuries after it was written. This is the source for the Empress Theodora's early life 'on stage' including the infamous anecdote about her act with the geese. I never realized ancient history could be morphed into an x-rated movie! William Rosen also quotes extensively from "The Buildings of Justinian" by Procopius to describe the construction of the Hagia Sophia, the massive domed church that reigned as Christendom's largest cathedral for a millennium. It was finished in a little under six years, which is an astonishing feat when you realize that Europe's great gothic cathedrals such as Chartres took generations of labor to complete. The erection of Hagia Sophia's immense dome forms one of the most noteworthy sidebars in "Justinian's Flea." Back to the plague itself, and the author's interesting assertion as to why Justinian's plague showed up when it did: a drop in the average temperature, almost certainly caused by a volcanic eruption. According to Procopius, in the summer of 536 a mysterious cloud appeared over the Mediterranean basin: "The sun gave forth its light without brightness and it seemed exceedingly like the sun in eclipse, for the beams it shed were not clear." Modern research points to the Ilopango volcano is San Salvador as the probable culprit. What do cooler than usual temperatures have to do with the plague? "The narrow range [of optimal temperature] bracketed by flea activity and bacterial blocking had kept the disease confined to its East African focus for hundreds if not thousands of years." The plague-carrying flea is only active within a very narrow range of temperature: from about 59 - 68 degrees Fahrenheit. When Egypt cooled down, the plague-bearing fleas were able to migrate north to the great port city of Alexandria, and from there to the rest of the Mediterranean basin. In this book's epilogue, the author speculates on what might have been if Justinian's plague hadn't fatally weakened the Eastern Roman Empire, just as the European proto-states were forming and the Muslims were about to sweep out of Arabia and conquer all before them. It forms a fitting finale to this remarkable mixture of history and epidemiology. Highly recommended. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. history comes aliveBy Helen D. SetterfieldHistory generally gets taught as a series of names and dates with VERY few reasons why or extra,, interesting details. Justinian's Flea makes that period come alive and adds a tons of interesting facts that are not often mentioned. As a retired teacher who still tutors, this was a great read for me. Don't try to do it all at once. This is not a 'mystery' with a 'whodunit' at the end. It is a very carefully researched book and I have enjoyed reading it in pieces and sort of absorbing it. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A fun and fascinating readBy Mark McCandlessThoroughly enjoyable exploration of the times of Justinian, with interesting in more depth discussions than usual with in political and military history books of important subjects such as the biology of the plague and the Justinian Codex.

From the acclaimed author of Miracle Cure and The Third Horseman, the epic story of the collision between one of nature's smallest organisms and history's mightiest empire During the golden age of the Roman Empire, Emperor Justinian reigned over a territory that stretched from Italy to North Africa. It was the zenith of his achievements and the last of them. In 542 AD, the bubonic plague struck. In weeks, the glorious classical world of Justinian had been plunged into the medieval and modern Europe was born. At its height, five thousand people died every day in Constantinople. Cities were completely depopulated. It was the first pandemic the world had ever known and it left its indelible mark: when the plague finally ended, more than 25 million people were dead. Weaving together history, microbiology, ecology, jurisprudence, theology, and epidemiology, Justinian's Flea is a unique and sweeping account of the little known event that changed the course of a continent.

From Publishers WeeklyWhat might be called "microbial history"the study of the impact of disease on human events is a subject that has received great attention in recent years. Rosen's new book follows John Barry's The Great Influenza and John Kelly's The Great Mortality. An editor and publisher for more than a quarter century, Rosen absorbingly narrates the story of how the Byzantine Empire encountered the dangerous Y. pestis in A.D. 542 and suffered a bubonic plague pandemic foreshadowing its more famous successor eight centuries later. Killing 25 million people and depressing the birth rate and economic growth for many generations, this unfortunate collision of bacterium and man would mark the end of antiquity and help usher in the Dark Ages. Rosen is particularly illuminating and

imaginative on the "macro" aftereffects of the plague. Thus, the "shock of the plague" would remake the political map north of the Alps by drawing power away from the Mediterranean and Byzantine worlds toward what would become France, Germany and England. Specialist historians may certainly dislike the inevitable reductionism such a broad-brush approach entails, but readers of Collapse and Guns, Germs, and Steel, Jared Diamond's grand narratives, will find this a welcome addendum. (May 14) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist Surveying the reign of Emperor Justinian of the Byzantine Empire during the years 527-65, Rosen enlists a range of topics from architecture to conquest to bubonic plague. The latter looms largest in his account, for it wreaked havoc in 542. Justinian's ambition to restore the Roman Empire, going great guns at the time under General Belisarius, came to a halt. The calamity's demographic consequences must have been substantial, too, if uncertain, and Rosen salts his text with speculations about the Byzantine seedlings of Europe's future nations. With more surety, Rosen relays eyewitness descriptions of the Justinian plague, with which he integrates the modern scientific understanding of *Yersinia pestis* and its carrier, the rat. Before the plague arrived in Constantinople, luckily for Justinian's historical reputation, he had already finished building the Hagia Sophia and codifying Roman law. Deeply steeped in the literature of late antiquity, Rosen wears his erudition lightly as he weaves interpretations into a fluid narrative of the era's geostrategic possibilities before the final onset of the Dark Ages. Gilbert Taylor Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved Ambitious and learned . . . readers will be swept along by the strong current of Mr. Rosen's good natured erudition. The Economist Impressive study of the Bubonic plague and its impact on history . . . eccentric and erudite . . . a massively ambitious work. The Guardian (UK) "History written with passion, panache, and an appealing bit of attitude." Kirkus s "Impressive study of the bubonic plague and its impact on history. . . . Eccentric and erudite . . . a massively ambitious work." The Guardian (London)