



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

By William Rosen

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Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire
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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 the Trade Paperback edition.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

What 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)

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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*

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Review

Justinian's Flea is narrative history writing at its best. Breathtaking in its scope, the book presents a confident mix of history, science, architecture, theology, military strategy, law, engineering and medicine to tell the story of how plague transformed the classical world and gave birth to mediaeval Europe. William Rosen's canvas stretches from China to Spain, and Britain to Arabia, and his intriguing cast of characters includes emperors, priests, soldiers, and engineers as well as rats, fleas and silkworms. *Justinian's Flea* transforms our understanding of many key events in the history of the last two thousand years, from the decline of Rome to the rise of Islam and beyond. -- *Karl Sabbagh, author of The Riemann Hypothesis: The Greatest Unsolved Problem in Mathematics* and *Skyscraper: The Making of a Building*

An engrossing and insightful account of one of the most important but little known medical disasters in human history. -- *John Kelly, author of The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time*

We live at a time when the Pope's quotation of a Byzantine emperor can cause an international incident. William Rosen's fascinating new book offers a timely portrait of the greatest Byzantine emperor of them all - and explains, in compelling detail, how the golden age of Constantinople was blotted out by a catastrophe as momentous as any in history. -- *Tom Holland, author of Rubicon*

William Rosen doesn't just give us the most believable, the most human and the most fully rounded Justinian ever. He also conjures up a vivid picture of the age, in a compelling style that makes his weighty learning light. -- *Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, author of Millennium and Civilizations*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jerry Brock:

The e-book untitled Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire is the guide that recommended to you to learn. You can see the quality of the book content that will be shown to an individual. The language that article author use to explained their ideas are easily to understand. The article author was did a lot of analysis when write the book, so the information that they share for your requirements is absolutely accurate. You also might get the e-book of Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire from the publisher to make you a lot more enjoy free time.

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Danielle Hawkins:

This Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire is great book for you because the content which can be full of information for you who have always deal with world and also have to make decision every minute. That book reveal it info accurately using great organize word or we can declare no rambling sentences inside. So if you are read this hurriedly you can have whole information in it. Doesn't mean it only provides you with straight forward sentences but hard core information with attractive delivering sentences. Having Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire in your hand like keeping the world in your arm, details in it is not ridiculous one particular. We can say that no book that offer you world throughout ten or fifteen tiny right but this book already do that. So , it is good reading book. Hi Mr. and Mrs. active do you still doubt in which?

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