



2-1-2013

Justinian's Flea: Plague, Empire, and the Birth of Europe,
by William Rosen, Viking, 2007

George W. Geib

Butler University, ggeib@butler.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/las_bookreviews

Recommended Citation

Geib, George W., "*Justinian's Flea: Plague, Empire, and the Birth of Europe*, by William Rosen, Viking, 2007" (2013). *LAS Faculty Book Reviews*. 131.

http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/las_bookreviews/131

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in LAS Faculty Book Reviews by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact omacisaa@butler.edu.

Because Ideas Matter...

The faculty and staff of Butler University's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences presents

Recommended Readings



Justinian's Flea: Plague, Empire, and the Birth of Europe

by William Rosen, Viking, 2007

Reviewed by George Geib

Few experiences have evoked greater fear in history than plague. For nearly two millennia, the Black Death kept returning to Europe to ravage cities and civilizations. One of the earlier, and more terrible, outbreaks came during the reign of the last important ancient Roman emperor, Justinian. Rosen merges the stories of pandemic and imperial decline into an engaging narrative targeted to the general reader. Most accounts of that age mirror Procopius and his sixth century contemporaries, interested in Justinian as law giver, builder of Hagia Sophia, reconqueror of the western Roman empire, and source of great personal anecdotes. Rosen deftly retells these tales, but adds the larger context of the terrible pressures upon the ancient eastern empire that saw its rapid fragmentation into a recognizably medieval world. Chief among these pressures is the bubonic plague outbreak that struck Constantinople in 542 and eventually killed an estimated 25 million people. Big picture history is at least as old as Edward Gibbon, and as current as Jared Diamond. If you like such introductions to people and ideas, Rosen should entertain and inform you.

- George Geib is Professor of History at Butler University.