

Justinian & Theodora

Procopius was a historian who lived during the time of Justinian. In his histories, published during his lifetime, he praised Justinian. The first reading, titled *Buildings*, is taken from these. However, he had privately written down other impressions of Justinian and his wife Theodora. This *Secret History* of Procopius was published later and is the source of the second reading.

Reading #1: Adapted from H.B. Dewing, Procopius, *Buildings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940).



In our own age there has been born the Emperor Justinian, who, taking over the State when it was harassed by disorder, has not only made it greater in extent, but also much more illustrious, by expelling from it those barbarians who had from old pressed hard upon it. . . . Justinian created countless cities which did not exist before. And finding that the belief in God was, before his time, straying into errors and being forced to go in many directions, he completely destroyed all the paths leading to such errors, and brought it about that it stood on the firm foundation of a single faith. Moreover, finding the laws obscure because they had become far more numerous than they should be, and in obvious confusion because they disagreed with each other, he preserved them by cleansing them of the mass of their verbal trickery, and by controlling their discrepancies with the greatest firmness.

Reading #2: Adapted from Procopius, *Secret History*, translated by G.A. Williamson (London: Penguin, 1966).

Justinian was dissembling, crafty, hypocritical, secretive by temperament, two-faced; a clever fellow with a marvelous ability to conceal his real opinion, and able to shed tears, not from any joy or sorrow, but employing them artfully when required in accordance with the immediate need, lying all the time; not carelessly, however, but confirming his undertakings both with his signature and with the most fearsome oaths, even when dealing with his own subjects. . . . Justinian showed himself approachable and affable to those with whom he came in contact; not a single person found himself denied access to the emperor, and even those who broke the rules by the way they stood or spoke in his presence never incurred his wrath. That, however, did not make him blush when confronting those whom he intended to destroy. In fact, he never even gave a hint of anger or irritation to show how he felt towards those who had offended him; but with a friendly expression on his face and without raising an eyebrow, in a gentle voice he would order tens of thousands of quite innocent persons to be put to death, cities to be razed to the ground, and all their possessions to be confiscated for the Treasury....

To her bodily needs, Theodora devoted quite unnecessary attention, though never enough to satisfy herself. She was in a great hurry to get into her bath, and very unwilling to get out again. When she had finished her ablutions she would go now to breakfast, and after a light breakfast she would take a rest. But at lunch and supper, she indulged her taste for every kind of food and drink. Again and again she would sleep for hours on end, by day till nightfall and by night until sunrise. And though she had strayed thus into every path of self-indulgence for so great a part of the day, she thought fit to run the whole of the Roman Empire! If the emperor entrusted any business to a man without first seeking her approval, such a change of fortune would come upon that man's affairs that very soon after he would be removed from his position with the utmost ignominy, and die a most shameful death.

