



*Justinian: Empire and Society in the
Sixth Century. Debates and
Documents in Ancient History Series*

By F.K. Haarer

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Reviewed by: David White



Justinian: Empire and Society in the Sixth Century. Debates and Documents in Ancient History Series. By F.K. Haarer. Edinburgh University Press, 2022. ISBN 978-0-7486-3979-2 (web-ready PDF). vi + 257 pp. £95.

Jlavius Petrus Sabbatius Iustinianus, better known as simply Justinian, was one of the longest-reigning Roman emperors, ruling the Eastern Roman Empire for a total of thirty-seven years (527-565). During this period Justinian witnessed the *Nika* riot of 532, oversaw the compilation of the *corpus juris civilis*, twice engaged in war with Persia (527-532 and 540-562), led a partial reconquest of the Western Roman Empire between 533-554, and participated in some of the most fiercely fought ecclesiastical and Christological debates of the sixth century.

Studying Justinian can be exhausting, and it is often difficult to make sense of his motives and rationales when we are confronted with the myriad of activities that he involved himself with. Thankfully, Fiona Haarer has provided an accessible and easily read overview of Justinian's emperorship, beginning, as is often traditional, with the ascendancy of his uncle Justin who preceded him on the imperial throne, ruling between 518-527. Each of the following chapters in section one of the publication is themed around Justinian's subsequent reign and provides solid foundations from which further research may be inspired. Importantly, Haarer consistently employs both ancient and modern references throughout the book, ensuring that readers are aware of the source material and current hypotheses related to each theme. Prior to the opening chapter, readers will find six maps beginning with a layout of sixth-century Constantinople highlighting important landmarks. The subsequent five maps, indicating various cities noted within the text, displays Justinian's empire including the reconquered imperial territories of North Africa, Italy, and Southern Spain.

The second part of the book provides samples taken from source materials that emphasise and inform each of the chapter themes. This will certainly be a welcomed addition for readers who are unfamiliar with this material and may find it difficult to source within physical books, online, or within museum collections. In total eighty-two literary and epigraphical extracts are presented including the earliest imperial

text marked by Justinian's presence (*Collecto Avellena* 147), a diptych announcing Justinian's consulship in 521, and texts authored from as far as the Austrasian royal court of Theudebert I in the west to Cyril of Scythopolis in the east. Outstanding examples of source materials include an inscription from Aïn Djelloula in North Africa detailing Byzantine efforts to restore the city's fortifications following its capture from the Vandals and the so-called pragmatic sanction which effectively marks the end of Justinian's efforts to restore Italy to eastern imperial rule.

Following part two, the reader will find an adequate reading list that is interspersed with written commentary highlighting modern hypotheses and theories concerning each chapter. This is especially important given that new methods and research paradigms have revealed a far more complex image of Justinian and the world he and the authors of the source material existed within than has been previously explored. This section is followed by a series of essay questions and exercise topics related to each of the chapter themes which will no doubt inspire newly minted students to ask questions and explore the immensely dense topic that is the emperor Justinian. Where possible Haarer has provided English translations of the relevant primary source materials and appears to have made every effort to provide the most current versions of these texts. Naturally, not all the source materials have received English translation and where one is absent, Haarer has provided what is often accepted as the scholarly edition of the text. The concluding biography of modern scholarship is rich and provides a springboard to deeper and more specific studies.

Undoubtedly, this book is aimed at an undergraduate audience and those who are looking for an academic introduction to the "Justinianic period." For those with a more developed knowledge of this period, Haarer provides a well-structured and summarised overview of this period without getting bogged down in nuances and matters better suited to academic journals and within the walls of society conferences. If I were to make a slight criticism of this publication it is that there are several typos and at least two incorrect dates which persons unfamiliar with this period may not discern if this book serves as their introduction. Of the dates it is important to note that a council of 220 bishops who met to condemn Justinian's conciliatory tones to repentant Arian (sic) clergy met from January-August of 535, not

335 as stated on page 55. The second incorrect date is the year of the so-called “Robber Council”—the Second Council of Ephesus which on page 76 is given as 499 but is correctly stated on page 78 as 449.

These errors aside, Haarer’s work is an excellent introduction to Justinian and the period of thirty-seven years that he ruled. Students and interested scholars will hardly find a better introduction to this fascinating period and one that is written in an accessible and well-referenced style.

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