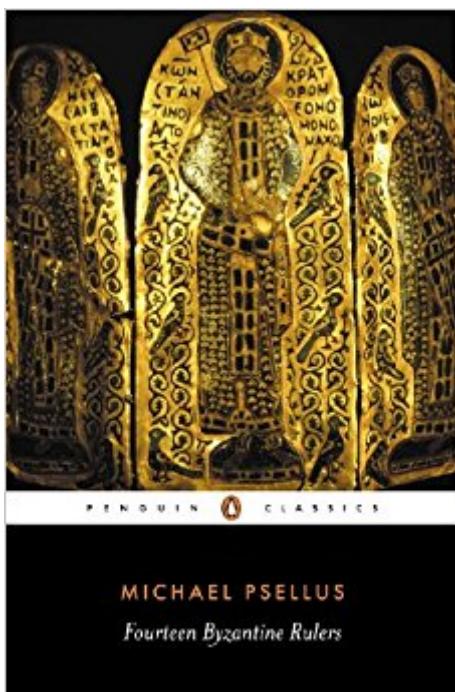


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Fourteen Byzantine Rulers: The Chronographia Of Michael Psellus (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

The death of Basil II in A.D. 1025, after fifty glorious years as sole emperor, ushered in decades of turbulence, corruption, and incompetence. For the following half-century of extraordinary decline, our main source is Michael Psellus, one of the greatest courtiers and men of letters of the age. His vivid and forceful chronicle, full of psychological insight and deep understanding of power politics, is a historical and literary document of the first importance. Recent scholars have shattered forever the view that the Byzantine Age was just a shabby and disreputable appendage to the Roman Empire; Psellus, a man of striking refinement and humanity, both portrays and exemplifies at its best the Byzantine way of life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

E. R. A. Sewter was a well-known Byzantine scholar and the editor of *Greece and Rome*. His translation of *The Alexiad* of Anna Comnena is still published in Penguin Classics. He died in 1976.

It is very difficult not to like the freshness of approach adopted by the author in his dealings with the good, the bad and the indifferent rulers he writes about, and mostly from close observations or first hand knowledge. In a few instances it has been suggested that he has fashioned his view of some of the rulers to suit his political purposes. He writes of his own contacts with the various emperors, challengers to the throne, good and bad generals, and the theological dramas of the day between the western inheritor of the former part of the Roman Empire, the Roman Pope and the military position in which Byzantium found itself after the two serious military losses it sustained in 1071:

the defeat of Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes at the battle of Manzikert in the far east, and the capture by the Normans of the city of Bari in the west, actually in southern Italy. Thus war on two fronts threatened the empire. Psellus was born in Constantinople in 1018 and was taught by a celebrated teacher. Psellus was distinguished from his fellow students by his mastery of both science and humanistic studies. He is said to have been a polymath and his work shows him to have been a brilliant, if slightly self important, writer. His observations of the intrigue's at court after 1071 captures the intrigue's of the Byzantine court struggles between rival groups for influence, political and military, over the empires responses to the setbacks of 1071. His description of the manner in which the great schism between the Pope in Rome and the Patriarch in Constantinople (both were equal, according to longstanding Byzantine authority) when both sides excommunicated the other! His capacity to be only slightly judgmental on some subjects allows him to be quite humorous on others. Overall this is an exciting work by an author who wrote of his own time in a fresh and fairly unrestrained style.

The author (Psellus) writes of a time and people he knew. He was an intimate of the Byzantine Court, so he is able to describe events and people who played a part in that era. There is some personal opinions and prejudices expressed, but generally he has written a factual and honest account of life in the Byzantine Court from 1025 to 1071. I found very interesting the ways emperors spent much of the state's funds on themselves and personal projects while allowing the civil service, the army, and the common people to suffer neglect.

Beautiful but sad. really brings home why the Roman Empire in the East fell. The capital was isolated and indolent in luxury while all the conquests of Basil II were being lost, yet Michael, a major player was in large part responsible. Gives you an insider view of a bureaucrat who thinks he's smarter than the people on the line.

Great read to fill your historical ignorance of the Byzantine period between Basil II and Alexios . Interesting to read contemporary writings of Psellus and witness the biases and his first hand accounts - with the most powerful people in the world. His narrative strongly focuses on the character of the rulers rather than their policies . A rare form in this period. -1 star as some parts get boring when the writer starts to self gloat or goes on tangents not necessary to the arc.

Excellent book. Psellus presents an intriguing and riveting history of the emperors of this time

period, as well as delving into the politics around their rule and struggles such as rebellions and political machinations. His chronicle is mostly concerned with the lives, politics, and traits of the emperors themselves, and less with the total scope of the empire itself under their reign, which gives it an interesting and unique perspective.

Arrived as described with minimal wear.

Interesting.

This is a great book! I am using it, along with others, for a college project in my Ancient/Medieval History Class! So far the information in the books I bought have helped me out tremendously! No regrets ;)

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