

The fall of the Roman Empire has a unique place in the Western mind. The iconic symbol of the eventual fate of all empires, Rome rose to glory followed by inevitable decay. Its fifth century collapse was a tragedy played out on a grand scale, the archetypal fall and descent into barbarity. Classical civilization, interrupted by the fall of Rome, did not recover until the blaze of the Renaissance, when Europe rediscovered its roots.

My own lifelong passion for history did little to dent this impression, until having finished college I stumbled upon a little book by the sixth century Roman historian Procopius called *The Secret History*. Here was the story of a Roman Empire I had never known, the story of an Empire that had survived the Middle Ages until the guns of the modern world brought it down. How, as a history teacher myself, had I missed this fascinating tale, equal parts villainy and heroism? How, with its immense legacy in the Middle East and Europe, did everyone not know this story that is so *relevant*?

I needed to share this discovery with someone, but Byzantine history is unknown to all but a few in the West. Podcasting provided the perfect opportunity. I had to provide an outline—by choosing twelve emperors that illustrated the ebb and flow of imperial fortunes, I sketched Byzantine history.

Clearly, I had struck a chord. *Wired Magazine*, NPR and the *New York Times* ran stories about the project, and listeners responded, fascinated with a story that needed to be heard. This is a perfect illustration of how the paradigm has shifted. No longer are conventional media or conventional education the gatekeepers of information to the masses. Podcasting has provided a forum for connecting specialists with an audience, freeing them from the confines of a computer screen, and allowing them to enjoy the information in the spare moments of life. It has leveled the playing field, unlocking opportunities for the distribution of knowledge, and democratized the teaching process.

There are however significant differences between podcasting and the classroom. First, while nothing can take the place of knowledge and passion of a good classroom, distracting noise can derail even the best content. So I have paired with a technical expert who ensures that nothing gets in the way of the information. Second, while some institutions have opted to release straight recordings of classroom lectures, we think lectures do not necessarily make the best podcasts. Podcast information is most effective if broken up into readily absorbable chunks, and the listener's ability to pause or replay enables a more content-rich experience than may be appropriate for the give and take of a classroom.

The podcasting revolution is still in its infancy. As Virgil once wrote “fortune favors the bold”—there is no better time than now to podcast.

**URL:**

***12 Byzantine Rulers (Complete Podcast Series):*** <http://12byzantinerulers.com>