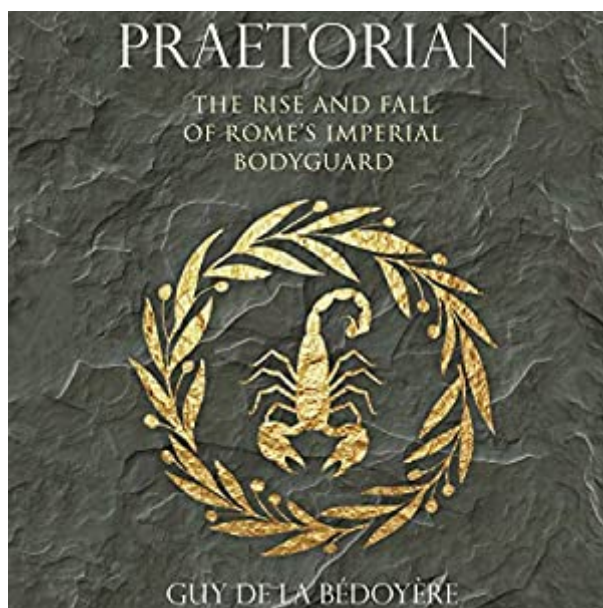


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Praetorian: The Rise And Fall Of Rome's Imperial Bodyguard



Synopsis

A riveting account of ancient Rome's imperial bodyguard, the select band of soldiers who wielded the power to make - or destroy - the emperors they served. Founded by Augustus around 27 BC, the elite Praetorian Guard was tasked with the protection of the emperor and his family. As the centuries unfolded, however, Praetorian soldiers served not only as protectors and enforcers but also as powerful political players. Fiercely loyal to some emperors, they vied with others and ruthlessly toppled those who displeased them, including Caligula, Nero, Pertinax, and many more. Guy de la B  f  re provides a compelling first full narrative history of the Praetorians, whose dangerous ambitions ceased only when Constantine permanently disbanded them. De la B  f  re introduces Praetorians of all echelons, from prefects and messengers to artillery experts and executioners. He explores the delicate position of emperors for whom prestige and guile were the only defenses against bodyguards hungry for power. Folding fascinating details into a broad assessment of the Praetorian era, the author sheds new light on the wielding of power in the greatest of the ancient world's empires.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an excellently sourced and researched history of the Praetorian Guard. I enjoy the study of history, and the early empire period of Rome is one of my favorite's to read about. Approaching the book from that perspective, I had a great time reading and learning more about the guard. This is a 'serious' history book, in that its well-researched, well-sourced, and cognizant of the potential

fallacies of the primary and secondary source materials used. Ample discussion is given to unknowns and discrepancies in the source material, and the discussion can get fairly detailed. Personally I enjoyed it, but others may find their eyes glazing over when reading, for example, a section devoted to a detailed discussion of whether praetorians received 720 or 750 denarii per year. If you're looking for a 'pop history' book, this is not it. That's not to say that the writing style is archaic or dense - it's not. Guy de la Bedoyere is eminently readable, and does a great job of summarizing the pertinent details of his research and presenting as clear and cogent a picture of ancient Rome as possible. Sadly, my one qualm with the book, and the reason for the star deduction, is centered around this clarity. The book is often repetitive with certain of its points and conclusions, to the point of distraction. I'm fairly certain this was done in order to keep the narrative structured and clear for the lay-person, but I feel it went too far. Overall, if you're interested in the Praetorian Guard, the early Roman Empire, or just history in general, then this is a great book to pick up. I haven't read anything that's exactly like it in terms of its area of focus, making it more than just a re-tread of other scholarly works. It's also very approachable (perhaps too approachable). I definitely recommend it.

Guy de la Bedoyere, this book's author, loves his subject and he drew me in to his descriptions of Roman goings on during the 340-odd years the Praetorian Guard existed, and I enjoyed his rumbling through sources to find out what really happened. It's a relatively short book - 271 pages. At times there are large gaps in the history; primarily when the empire was functioning well and there are times when important characters enter and leave the history after a sentence or two because that is all that's known about them. Created by Octavian, the fellow who precipitated the deaths of Anthony and Cleopatra and changed his own name to Augustus and dissolved by Constantine who rightly saw their power as a threat himself, the Guard frequently played a starring role in Rome's history. They protected most emperors and even murdered for them. Other emperors they murdered themselves. At other times they even held the empire up for sale and let others bid for the job of Emperor, but being a Roman Emperor was not often a long-lasting one. Some went in and out of office within a few months. It was Emperor today, murdered tomorrow. If you are interested in history this is a fine read and a great introduction to Roman times.

I am not a historian, but I am an academic (college instructor) and I've read my share of scholarly histories over the years. This is a pretty good one. It has its dry patches -- what academic book doesn't? -- but overall de la Bedoyere keeps this history readable and interesting. It is thoroughly

researched, of course, with a full bibliography and plenty of textual notes. Well I can't exactly recommend this for casual reading (it's not going to be the next Alexander Hamilton), for those truly interested in an in-depth history of the Praetorians, this book will get the job done.

I pretend to shrink from what one might call "this sort of history". I have learned to call it "guilty pleasure" of history in that it is of a sort that does not have so much a role in forming history as it is fun to read. I should be paying more attention to the revisionist deconstruction of opposing memoirs of the Gallic Wars, but I am weak. This is a book of serious history. It is also fun, which I slightly prefer to the term for a page-turner a.k.a. "riveting". The extra-textual sections testify amply. The writing itself is never sensationalist or affected. It is clear by intent and easy to consume. The appendices are: - Key Dates - Praetorian Pay and Organization - Praetorian Prefects - Glossary Then come seventeen pages of notes. This is a working historian, not some sensationalist cream-puff. Wait, there is more... near five pages of top notch commentary on references (you hardly ever see the author's ideas on this stuff). And finally the references themselves, as well as a nice bibliography. We are left with things to ponder. Forces behind the throne today. As Aretha Franklin would say "Who'se Zoomin' whom?"

I enjoyed reading this book. It was interesting and well written. There are a number of photos of key monuments and inscriptions that add to the text. I do wish that in the Kindle version of this book that a better way of organizing these images could have been found. It was clumsy moving between the images and the text.

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