

CHAPTER

8

Analyzing a Primary Source:
The Emperor Justinian

CRITICAL THINKING
WORKSHEET 19

The following description of Justinian was written by the Byzantine historian Procopius. Procopius knew Justinian from personal observation, and most of his writings about him were full of praise. Later in life, however, Procopius wrote a *Secret History*, in which he claimed to portray the real nature of the emperor. Read the excerpt below and then answer the questions that follow.

"This Emperor was insincere, crafty, hypocritical, dissembling [hiding] his anger, doubledealing, clever, a perfect artist in acting out an opinion which he pretended to hold, and even being able to produce tears, not from joy or sorrow, but . . . according to the need of the moment, always playing false yet not carelessly, but adding both his signature and the most terrible oaths to bind his agreements But he departed straightway from his agreements and his oaths, just like the vilest slaves, who, through fear of the tortures hanging over them, are induced to make confessions of acts which they had denied on oath. He was a fickle friend, a truceless enemy, an ardent devotee of assassination and of robbery . . . And in addition to his other shortcomings, while he

was very easygoing as to lending an ear to slanders, yet he was severe as to inflicting punishment . . . He never paused for a thorough investigation before reaching a decision, but straightway upon hearing what the slanderer said, he would make his decision and order it published. And he did not hesitate to write orders that called for the capture of towns and the burning of cities and the enslavement of whole peoples, for no reason whatever."

(Reprinted by permission of the publishers and The Loeb Classical Library from Procopius, *Secret History*, trans. by H. B. Dewing, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1940.)

1. What seems to be the author's opinion of Justinian? _____

2. How does the information in this passage compare to what you learned about Justinian in *class*? _____

3. To what might you attribute the author's changed attitude? _____

4. Do you think Procopius is exaggerating? Explain. _____

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