

Lindsay Powell

Author and Historical Detective

NEWS RELEASE

We've been here before, and if we're smart we'll learn from the past.

– *New book demonstrates the truth of the adage 'all things under the sun, there's nothing new', finding striking parallels between events in the modern and ancient worlds –*

Austin, Texas, July 14, 2011 – Whether it is the financial crisis, Middle East, travel delays or death and taxes, the issues that make the headlines today are the same things people worried about 2,000 and more years ago. Learning how the people of the past dealt with them can prepare us to face the issues affecting us today.

“The past is a virtual laboratory in which we can study how cause and effect plays out in different circumstances,” says author Lindsay Powell. Combining a researcher's skill at finding unexpected connections in everyday events and a historian's knowledge of source material, in *ALL THINGS UNDER THE SUN: How Modern Ideas are Really Ancient* Lindsay takes a clear-eyed and often witty look at modern times through the longer perspective of ancient history and reveals that, as the old adage goes, ‘all things under the Sun, there's nothing new’. “Human societies have faced many of the same problems,” says Lindsay, “and if we're smart, we'll learn from the past and pick the solutions that worked – and avoid those that didn't.”

As an example he compares how the Romans dealt with natural disasters to modern responses. When an earthquake struck Asia Minor, the Emperor Tiberius dug into his own purse to provide immediate relief and gave the affected communities both a tax holiday for five years and money for reconstruction. A committee of independent senators was set up to oversee that the money was fairly distributed. Modern responses are often less well co-ordinated and promised assistance wanes over time as interest fades.

Lindsay Powell is a historian, media communications professional and writer who has a passion for the history of the Roman Empire. He has been described by Adrienne Mayor, renowned author of *The Poison King*, as a “fellow historical detective”. A veteran of the renowned Ermine Street Guard re-enactment society, he is the author of the ground-breaking biography *Eager for Glory: The Untold Story of Drusus the Elder, Conqueror of Germania*, published by Pen and Sword Books (2011). He is a regular contributor to *Ancient Warfare* and UNRV.com and he has written for *Military Heritage* magazine. Born in Wales, he now lives in Austin, Texas.

Reviewing *ALL THINGS UNDER THE SUN* Angus Wallace of The History Network wrote “If you are familiar with the BBC's *Alistair Cooke's Letter from America* this has a very similar feel. Each chapter draws a different parallel with the current events and the author's life (both in the US and

UK) with the classical word. It's a very easy read, almost light weight – and I mean that as a compliment as I have struggled through some weighty tomes and learned a lot less! It is concise, witty and informative!”

ALL THINGS UNDER THE SUN is available as an ebook for Kindle from Amazon and from Apple's iBookstore. For readers who prefer the look and feel of a traditional book a printed version is also available from Amazon.

For more details, please visit www.Lindsay-Powell.com.

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Extracts from *ALL THINGS UNDER THE SUN* by Lindsay Powell

On taxation and restoring public confidence in government officials (pages 6-7):

To establish the value of the taxable base, every five years, each male Roman citizen had to register for the census. In this he had to declare his family, wife, children, slaves and riches – acres of land, fruit bearing trees and the like. The process was overseen by officials called censors. Usually former consuls – heads of state who were elected from among the senators – these men organised the collection of census data in Rome and the provinces, upon which tax revenues were assessed. It is amazing to think that these calculations were carried out with nothing more than the rudimentary abacus. The censors also supervised public morality and audited the financial affairs of certain government departments and magistracies. If they uncovered evidence of impropriety or court judgments against a public official, the censor could bar him from standing at the next election. It is this censorship role that survives in our meaning of ‘censor’. (A case could be made for bringing back this position as part of the solution for restoring public confidence in modern government).

On dealing with natural disasters like earthquakes and flooding (page 123):

Flooding and fire routinely impacted the city of Rome. Elsewhere, natural disasters also took their toll. Asia Minor was particularly at risk from earthquakes and their effects could be every bit as devastating to the populations as the tsunami that just swept Japan:

That same year [AD 17] twelve famous cities of Asia fell by an earthquake in the night, so that the destruction was all the more unforeseen and fearful. Nor were there the means of escape usual in, such a disaster, by rushing out into the open country, for there, people were swallowed up by the yawning earth. Vast mountains, it is said, collapsed; what had been level ground seemed to be raised aloft, and fires blazed out amid the ruin. (Dio Cassius).

On hearing the terrible news the Romans responded with their prayers and moneybags, just as modern people do when answering humanitarian appeals for help. The then emperor, Tiberius, set an example by digging into his own savings:

The calamity fell most fatally on the inhabitants of Sardis, and it attracted to them the largest share of sympathy. The emperor promised ten million sesterces, and remitted for five years all they paid to the exchequer or to the emperor's purse. Magnesia, under Mount Sipylus, was considered to come next in loss and in need of help. The people of Temnus, Philadelpheia, Aegae, Apollonis, the Mostenians, and Hyrcanian Macedonians, as they were called, with the towns of Hierocaesarea, Myrina, Cyme, and Tmolus, were; it was decided to be exempted from tribute for the same time.

(Reconstruction funds and tax exemptions while the community rebuilds? Now there's an idea for modern governments to consider in times of emergency.) Senatorial oversight was required, then as now, of course observing the political niceties, and someone was to be sent from the Senate to examine their actual condition and to relieve them.

Marcus Aletus, one of the ex-praetors, was chosen, from a fear that, as an ex-consul was governor of

*Asia, there might be rivalry between men of equal rank, and consequent embarrassment.
(Dio Cassius).*

Political rivalries? Political embarrassment? In a time of crisis? It seems some things are as old as politics itself.

On reducing fire hazards in our cities (page 129):

Nero received a bad press for the fire [of Rome in AD 64], not least for fiddling or playing a harp to the lyrics of the destruction of Troy. In all likelihood he did nothing of the sort. Rather he opened up parks and public buildings, raised temporary accommodations for the homeless, and had subsidized food supplies shipped in. It did not, however, prevent the wicked rumour that Nero had begun the fire to clear space for his spectacular new palace, which he proceeded to construct.

The result of the Great Fire was not just the building of the Golden House of Nero (a Roman ancestor to the Palais de Versailles), with its publicly accessible gardens and lakes, and the public executions of many Christian ‘terrorists’; but what were, in effect, new building codes. The emperor, known for his love of the arts and architecture, set about rebuilding the city anew with wide thoroughfares and height-restricted tenement buildings of brick and [fire-resistant] tufa to reduce the likelihood of fire in future.

– Ends –

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