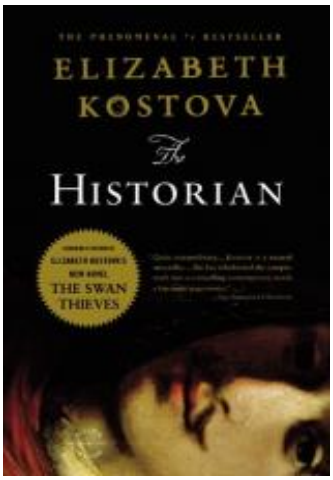
The Historian

by Elizabeth Kostova



About the Book

Also available as a Time Warner AudioBook, eBook and Large Print Edition

"To you, perceptive reader, I bequeath my history...."

Late one night, exploring her father's library, a young woman finds an ancient book and a cache of yellowing letters. The letters are all addressed to "*My dear and unfortunate successor*," and they plunge her into a world she never dreamed of --- a labyrinth where the secrets of her father's past and her mother's mysterious fate connect to an inconceivable evil hidden in the depths of history.

The letters provide links to one of the darkest powers that humanity has ever known --- and to a centuries-long quest to find the source of that darkness and wipe it out. It is a quest for the truth about Vlad the Impaler, the medieval ruler whose barbarous reign formed the basis of the legend of Dracula. Generations of historians have risked their reputations, their sanity, and even their lives to learn the truth about Vlad the Impaler and Dracula. Now one young woman must decide whether to take up this quest herself --- to follow her father in a hunt that nearly brought him to ruin years ago, when he was a vibrant young scholar and her mother was still alive.

What does the legend of Vlad the Impaler have to do with the modern world? Is it possible that the Dracula of myth truly existed --- and that he has lived on, century after century, pursuing his own unknowable ends? The answers to these questions cross time and borders, as first the father and then the daughter search for clues, from dusty Ivy League libraries to Istanbul, Budapest, and the depths of Eastern Europe. In city after city, in monasteries and archives, in letters and in secret conversations, the horrible truth emerges about Vlad the Impaler's dark reign --- and about a time-defying pact that may have kept his awful work alive down through the ages.

Parsing obscure signs and hidden texts, reading codes worked into the fabric of medieval monastic traditions --- ;and

evading the unknown adversaries who will go to any lengths to conceal and protect Vlad's ancient powers --- one woman comes ever closer to the secret of her own past and a confrontation with the very definition of evil. Elizabeth Kostova's debut novel is an adventure of monumental proportions, a relentless tale that blends fact and fantasy, history and the present, with an assurance that is almost unbearably suspenseful --- and utterly unforgettable.

Discussion Guide

1. In the "Note to the Reader," the narrator tells us, "There is a final resource to which I have resorted when necessary--the imagination." How does she use this resource in telling her story? Is it a resource to which the other historians in the book resort, as well?

2. The theme of mentors and disciples is an important one in the book. Who are the story's mentors, and in what sense is each a mentor? Who are the book's disciples?

3. Near the end of Chapter 4, Rossi says, "Human history's full of evil deeds, and maybe we ought to think of them with tears, not fascination." Does he follow his own advice? How does his attitude toward history evolve in the course of his own story?

4. In Chapter 5, Paul's friend Massimo asserts that in history, there are no small questions. What does he mean by this and how does this idea inform the book? Do you agree with his statement?

5. Helen and Paul come from very different worlds, although they share a passion for history. How have their upbringings differed? What factors have shaped each?

6. Throughout the book, anyone who finds an antique book with a dragon in the middle is exposed to some kind of danger. What does this danger consist of? Is it an external power, or do the characters bring it upon themselves?

7. Each of the characters is aware of some of the history being made in his or her own times. What are some of these real historical events, and why are they important to the story?

8. At the beginning of Chapter 1, Paul's daughter notes, "I had been raised in a world so sheltered that it makes my adult life in academia look positively adventurous." How does she change as a person in the course of her quest?

9. Helen's history is deeply intertwined with that of Dracula. In what ways are the two characters connected? Does she triumph over his legacy, or not?

10. In Chapter 73, Dracula states his credo: "History has taught us that the nature of man is evil, sublimely so." Do the characters and events of the novel prove or disprove this belief?

Author Bio

Elizabeth Kostova is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of MYSTERY PLAY, THE SHADOW LAND, THE SWAN THIEVES and THE HISTORIAN. She graduated from Yale and holds an MFA from the University of Michigan, where she won a Hopwood Award for Novel-in-Progress. She is also co-founder of the Elizabeth Kostova Foundation for Creative Writing in Bulgaria.

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