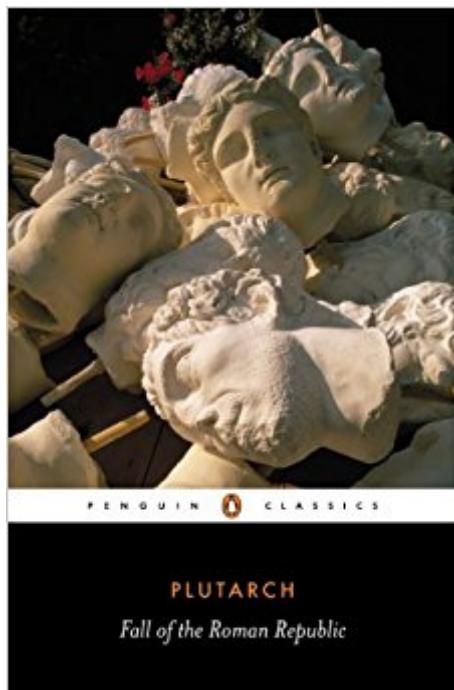


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Fall Of The Roman Republic (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Dramatic artist, natural scientist and philosopher, Plutarch is widely regarded as the most significant historian of his era, writing sharp and succinct accounts of the greatest politicians and statesmen of the classical period. Taken from *The Lives*, a series of biographies spanning the Graeco-Roman age, this collection illuminates the twilight of the old Roman Republic from 157-43 BC. Whether describing the would-be dictators Marius and Sulla, the battle between Crassus and Spartacus, the death of political idealist Crato, Julius Caesar's harrowing triumph in Gaul or the eloquent oratory of Cicero, all offer a fascinating insight into an empire wracked by political divisions. Deeply influential on Shakespeare and many other later writers, they continue to fascinate today with their exploration of corruption, decadence and the struggle for ultimate power. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

Paperback: 464 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics; Revised edition (April 25, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140449345

ISBN-13: 978-0140449341

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.9 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 28 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #32,888 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Ancient & Medieval Literature > Roman #6 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Greece #12 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Rome

Customer Reviews

Text: English, Latin (translation) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Plutarch (c.50-c.120 AD) was a writer and thinker born into a wealthy, established family of

Chaeronea in central Greece. He received the best possible education in rhetoric and philosophy, and traveled to Asia Minor and Egypt. Later, a series of visits to Rome and Italy contributed to his fame, which was given official recognition by the emperors Trajan and Hadrian. Plutarch rendered conscientious service to his province and city (where he continued to live), as well as holding a priesthood at nearby Delphi. His voluminous surviving writings are broadly divided into the "moral" works and the *Parallel Lives* of outstanding Greek and Roman leaders. The former (Moralia) are a mixture of rhetorical and antiquarian pieces, together with technical and moral philosophy (sometimes in dialogue form). The *Lives* have been influential from the Renaissance onwards.

Plutarch was a classical Greek historian during the Roman period who was well rounded and provides us with important insights into the classical world through his writings. Most important among these writings are the extensive biographies he wrote of important individuals from Greece and Rome. Some of his sources are now lost to us, but the tales live on. This particular collection is a set of six biographies of individuals set in the late Republic: Gaius Marius (who instituted various military reforms which probably doomed the Republic), Sulla (the first to enforce a dictatorship over the republic through civil war), Crassus, Pompey, Caesar, and Cicero. Through these writings we are introduced to religious customs, stories of prophecies, and tangential tales that have in some ways eclipsed the subject of the biography. For example, in the biography of Crassus, we are introduced to a fairly full account of the Spartacus War and the appeal of that story during McCarthy-era America among those who were dissenting from McCarthy's rhetoric is obvious. For all of this, the line that stands out in my memory is the popular description of Sulla being that his face was a "mulberry with oatmeal sprinkled on it." Definitely recommended.

Plutarch is the opposite of Isaac Asimov. Foundation portrays history only in terms of massive predictable, quantifiable and eminently understandable trends. There is little accounting for individual personalities; only stochastic movements of people, information, money, and resources. On the other hand, Plutarch writes history in the form of biographic essays, showing us one unique, sometimes inconsistent, often inscrutable man at a time. *Six Lives* was written 150 years after the fall of the Roman Republic, and gives the reader a feel for six top leaders of the Republic. I think they help show that while the Empire was sexier than the Republic, the Republic may have more to teach us... It's history is the cautionary tale of a prosperous, learned society with codified rights (for some), and elements of representative governance, which proceeded down a path to dictatorship.

Some understanding of how this happened may be gleaned from the six lives Plutarch examines: GAIUS MARIUS parlays success as a General into a legendary political career, becoming the first man to be elected Consul seven times. He is responsible for the slaughter on the Capitoline Hill, demonstrating an arrogance and ruthlessness which makes him plenty of enemies and few friends. He spends his last few unhealthy years fleeing political rivals and seeking sanctuary wherever he can find it, much as Mohammad Reza Pahlavi "the Shah of Iran" did in 1979. I'm not sure why Gaius was included on this list; he seems the less impressive than the others. SULLA is a little Roman Joseph Stalin. Turning on the public who elected him Consul, he maneuvers himself into a position of Dictator, and then proceeded to butcher over 12,000 citizens, political opponents, personal enemies and their families for the slightest real or perceived transgressions. Through sheer dumb luck, Sulla was asked to receive the surrender of notorious outlaw Jogurtha on behalf of Rome. Sulla hadn't contributed anything to Jogurtha's defeat and capture, but that didn't stop him from commissioning statues in Rome depicting him standing triumphally over the humbled outlaw. His peers were particularly miffed by a giant gold ring he had custom made, bearing the surrender scene. I guess he wore it under their noses, like bad bad LeRoy Brown. That must have been some outrageous piece of jewelry, to get mention Plutarch's book, written 150 years later! I wish somebody who saw it would have drawn a picture! Sulla died, incidentally, of a gruesome intestinal worm infestation. (Ascaris??) CRASSUS (Triumvir #1) is best known as the General who defeated Spartacus, and in his day: the richest man in Rome. His for-profit fire company used to show up at burning homes to negotiate a bargain sale of the house. If the owner refused, the firemen turned around and went home! He comes across as the weakest of the Triumvirs, with no realistic shot at coming out on top over Pompey or Caesar. Brutal ending for Crassus: a beheading when his military adventures in Parthia go bad. POMPEY (Triumvir #2) is the military strategy whiz-kid, who becomes General at twenty-two, and gets his own Triumph (victory parade) without the normally required rank of Praetor. His career as statesman is less impressive. When Crassus's death ends the Triumvirate, the Republic descends into civil war. Pompey snatches defeat from the jaws of victory, and loses to Caesar. Shortly after, he seeks asylum in Egypt, and is murdered by King Ptolmey's agents, in an example of cold-blooded Machiavellian politics which Plutarch explains well on page 239. Side note: while reading this section, I couldn't help feeling Pompey's nemesis, the renegade king Mithridates, was a much more intriguing personality. CAESAR (Triumvir #3) is the best known of these men, so I won't elaborate. No matter; there is so much overlap of events in the personal histories of Crassus, Pompey, and Caesar, that reading them in succession starts to feel a bit like Rashomon. If you have read Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, and the preceding chapters on

Crassus and Pompey, this section has little new to offer. CICERO is the lone intellectual of the group. It's nice to know that political power wasn't completely limited to generals, but Cicero wasn't nearly as powerful as the others on this list. I like him better in his own work: *On the Good Life* Penguin Classics. Plutarch thinks Cicero is a too-clever-by-half smartass, but does grudgingly admit his brilliant oratory skills, and his impressive legal career. Sadly, Cicero's life illustrates that being right or just or smart was not enough to ensure the public's goodwill during the Republic. Without question, military might ruled the day.

Parting Advice

- 1) Get a good *Atlas of the Roman World* for reference when you read this. There are plenty of places mentioned in this book, and no maps. This is a setup for much confusion: what the Romans called "Albania" is in present-day Georgia, while what we now call "Albania", the Romans called Dyrrhachium; what the Romans called "Iberia" is in present-day Armenia... etc.
- 2) If you go to Rome, be sure to seek out some of the ruins of the Republic: Temple of Hercules Victor, and the Temple of Portunus.

Cant go wrong with the classics.

Plutarch was a Greek historian who wrote in the 2nd Century AD. This work covers the lives of six key individuals in the twilight of the old Roman Republic from 105-43 BC. Marius and Sulla were soldier-dictators who first sought to gain one-man rule. They were followed by Crassus, Pompey and Caesar. These three lives are the best in the book. The final life is Cicero, the lawyer. There is good military detail on Marius' defeat of the Cimbri, Crassus' defeat at Carrhae and Caesar's triumph at Pharsalus. The Mithraditic Wars in Asia minor are important but difficult to follow due to the lack of any maps. There are no great lessons here, other than the eternal struggle for power. The editor was lazy in this book and should have provided a glossary of key individuals, since there are too many individuals with similar names. There are also no maps - a major flaw.

Seager's introductions are excellent, Warner's translation is uneventful. My really issue here is the way in which Penguin has chosen to present Plutarch: not as a collection of comparable moral lives, but as a historical source. His Penguin editions are grouped by period, not moral pairings. This features two problems: (i) it attempts to emphasize Plutarch's role as a historian and (ii) abolishes his credibility as a moralist. As someone who better appreciates Plutarch's sentimental, moral and anecdotal features, I'm disappointed to find that Penguin is attempting to sell more copies by packaging Plutarch as an historical source.

Easy to understand. Brought the history of Rome to me in a understandable way. I recommend to anyone interested in history.

I bought this for a class and it arrived how and when it said it would and was fairly interesting. We only read 2 chapters from it though

Great translation of Plutarch. If you are looking at learning more about ancient Rome then this is a must have.

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