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Roman Lives: A Selection Of Eight Roman Lives (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

'I treat the narrative of the Lives as a kind of mirror...The experience is like nothing so much as spending time in their company and living with them: I receive and welcome each of them in turn as my guest.' In the eight lives of this collection Plutarch introduces the reader to the major figures and periods of classical Rome. He portrays virtues to be emulated and vices to be avoided, but his purpose is also implicitly to educate and warn those in his own day who wielded power. In prose that is rich, elegant and sprinkled with learned references, he explores with an extraordinary degree of insight the interplay of character and political action. While drawing chiefly on historical sources, he brings to biography a natural story-teller's ear for a good anecdote. Throughout the ages Plutarch's Lives have been valued for their historical value and their charm. This new translation will introduce new generations to his urbane erudition. The most comprehensive selection available, it is accompanied by a lucid introduction, explanatory notes, bibliographies, maps and indexes. About the Series: For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the broadest spectrum of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, voluminous notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

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Customer Reviews

This fine, well-edited translation would be THE translation to get for Plutarch's best Roman lives ... IF they had included the Life of Cicero. (Soldiers outweigh orators in the Oxford hierarchy.) As it is,

the Penguin "Fall of the Roman Republic" anthology remains useful. That said, Oxford has been kicking Penguin tail with its scholarly, up-to-date translations of classical texts. Penguin has been sprucing up its backlist some, but I always look for an Oxford first, if there is one.

This is an excellent translation of a timeless classic. The notes are well done and thorough and the introduction is very helpful whether you are a scholarly type or an interested lay reader. The only qualm I have is that it was often hard to know when the action of each life took place. This is a minor glitch, however, and does not hinder from the overall enjoyment of the work. The lives are biography, history, psychology, comedy, tragedy and farce all in one. Plutarch's narrative is brisk and never dull; he mixes anecdotes and interpretation deftly, but never forces the reader one way or the other. He is a masterful essayist and biographer and these works can be read repeatedly with enjoyment each time. Highly recommended.

For someone like myself who had not read Plutarch's lives and who was not as familiar with Roman history as perhaps I should be, this edition was a wonderful introduction. The translation is clear and dramatic of Plutarch's biographies and personality studies (along with the times and political controversies) that resulting in the fall of the Republic and the establishment of the Empire. But, and there is a but, these biographies are only the most familiar selection of Plutarch's Roman biographies and the choice has been made by the translator-editor. I like to read in completeness, and for that reason this edition is a four star, and is sending me back to Plutarch in another edition to read those biographies that the editors choose not to include.

This is a very easy to read translation of Plutarch's classic work. Nice cover. Clear printing. Well bound. If you haven't read these short works on the Greeks and Romans, you should. There is much to learn from their triumphs and their failures. For future leaders, scholars and politicians, much can be learned from those who came before. Recommended. (As well as, Greek Lives)

I hate Plutarch, if only because he is indispensable. His numerous Lives are all that is left of large sections of Greek and Roman history, or are essential corroboration for other, scarce sources. To modern readers, Plutarch can easily sound annoying. His portraits are invariably red-cheeked and gleaming-eyed. Vice and virtue are his main measures of men (and the few women). 'These two young men were remarkably similar in terms of their courage and self-restraint - and also their generosity, eloquence, and high principles,' he begins on the Gracchi. 'The younger Marius

revealed the extent of his savagery and brutality in the continued slaughter of the best and most distinguished men of Rome,' is how he concludes on Marius. Politics are first and foremost personal, and portents and dreams are invariably full of meaning. Yet this is excellent, colourful, and entertaining biography. The characters jump out of the page. The times are evoked magnificently. Some people like to see in Plutarch timeless lessons on human psychology and behaviour; without going so far, his Lives certainly provide unmatched insights into the thoughts and beliefs of the ancients. As to history, one needs to be aware how this came to us. In antiquity, works were copied in schools, especially of rhetoric. Thus what ensured they were reproduced in large numbers, and had a chance of survival in the ensuing Dark Age, was style, not content. Likewise, medieval copyists, all monks, were interested in the moral lessons of the works they preserved. (There are exceptions to this: invaluable papyri were found intact in the Egyptian desert; but these are rare.) Plutarch passed both the stylistic and moral tests. But he lacks the structure of a Thucydides or a Polybius. His works are not graspable without context - a context which the introductions contained in this edition don't quite supply, even if they help. So the history enthusiast needs to be warned: this is great biography, but to the historian it is only supplementary, if essential, material. This edition contains only eight of Plutarch's Roman Lives: Cato the Elder, Aemilius Paullus, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, Marius, Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar. A number of the less prominent characters treated by Plutarch need to be looked for in other editions (Numa, Cato the Younger, Marcellus, Crassus, Galba...).

This is the best single translation of Plutarch I've seen to date. Waterfield's selection of lives traces the final years of the Roman Republic very well. My only complaint is that Waterfield's edition excludes some major Roman lives -- Brutus, Cicero, Cato the Younger, to name a few. Plutarch writes history as a tale, which is why "Roman Lives" will appeal to fiction lovers and historians alike. The battles are well told, especially Caesar & Pompey's. To this reviewer's mind, Aemilius Paullus is the most noble of all, while Antony is the worst. But the greatest life of all, no doubt, is Caesar. The life of Caesar (read along with those of Pompey and Marc Antony) are the richest depiction of the "lust to dominate" imaginable. Caesar is genuinely admirable, remarkable in every way, and Plutarch kind of likes him. But he is Rome incarnate, for good or ill.

Simply the single best translation of Plutarch that I've ever read. Highly readable and recommended.

Needed this book for class

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