



A History of Rome

Theodor Mommsen

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The classical historian Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903) published his monumental *History of Rome* between 1854 and 1856. His work was received with widespread acclaim by the scholarly community and the reading public. In 1902 Mommsen was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and acclaimed as 'the greatest living master of the art of historical writing'. Mommsen rejected traditional Enlightenment accounts, which glorified ancient Rome; instead, guided by a new and rigorous criticism of sources, Mommsen began the demythologisation of Roman history. In a vivacious and engaging style, Mommsen drew bold parallels between the nineteenth century and classical Rome.

Information about this Folio Society edition (taken from the Editorial Note):

Theodor Mommsen's *Römische Geschichte* was first published in three volumes between 1854 and 1856, and was subsequently revised several times. The text of the present volume is derived from William Purdie Dickson's translation, first published in four volumes by Richard Bentley in London in 1868, of the fourth German edition.

The text printed in the ensuing pages preserves slightly less than half of the 1868 edition's three-quarters of a million words. In abridging a work of such magnitude, strict guiding principles tend to be honoured as much in their breach as in their observance. With that caveat in mind, therefore, the intention in this edition has been to provide, within a single volume, a continuous narrative of the history of Rome, from the origins of the city down to the Civil War that resulted in the sole rule of Julius Caesar (c.753—46BC). At the same time, it is hoped that the selection represents the essential character of Mommsen's historical vision, and can be read with both pleasure and profit by a non-specialist audience.

In pursuit of these goals, the relative amount of space devoted to each of the main periods of Roman history has been preserved, and Mommsen's own book divisions and titles retained. Similarly, the original chapter titles and breaks—and indeed even the paragraphing—has been followed as closely as possible. With some obvious exceptions, marginal precedence has been given to social and constitutional developments, and to political events and conflicts in Rome and Italy, over foreign policy and the detailed narration of overseas wars. Consequently, the significant amount of background information that Mommsen provided concerning the foreign nations with which Rome came into violent contact—Etruscans, Celts, Carthaginians and the peoples of the Hellenistic eastern Mediterranean among them—has been almost entirely excised. And the summaries on literature and the arts that were tacked on to the end of each book have also had to be omitted. Within these broad parameters, however, every effort has been made to ensure that the full spectrum of Mommsen's themes, methodology, and style is portrayed.

So that the text retains its readability, all cuts have been made silently, without the distraction of frequent ellipses. Where it has proved impossible to provide a continuous narrative in Mommsen's own words, then editorial linking passages, printed in smaller type than the rest of the text, have been supplied. These confine themselves to the bare essentials and take a deliberately conservative line in order to sit more comfortably with the main narrative. The new maps and extensive chronology are also intended to compensate for information otherwise excised. A handful of editorial footnotes and other brief interpolations have been added where essential for sense. All such additions to the original text, as well as any other localised rewordings necessitated by the cuts, are contained within square brackets. Most of Mommsen's analogies to

subsequent historical events, which are one of the many delights of his work, require no explanation for an educated readership.

Any attempt to update Mommsen's scholarship would be presumptuous, if not completely foolhardy, and so all points of fact and interpretation have been allowed to stand without comment. Thus, for example, Mommsen's belief that Caesar was probably born in 102BC—rather than 100 BC, as is now generally accepted—has not been amended. Nor has it been deemed necessary to bring into line with current accepted norms either the spelling of proper nouns or Diskon's faithful equivalents of Mommsen's deliberately idiosyncratic and anachronistic rendition of Latin terms. Of these, the most noticeable is undoubtedly the word 'burgess' instead of 'citizen'. While proving that few things date faster than modernity, they also provide an important reminder that Mommsen wrote his history with the pressing political and national issues facing both pre-unification Germany and the rest of the mid-nineteenth century Europe directly in mind.

A History of Rome Details

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From Reader Review A History of Rome for online ebook

Ivan says

It is a great book on ancient Rome !

Carlo Cattivelli says

Essendo trascorso più di un secolo e mezzo dalla prima uscita, la monumentale storia della Roma repubblicana scritta dal premio Nobel tedesco patisce un po' il tempo passato, sia per l'evoluzione delle scoperte scientifiche, sia (seppur molto meno) per le trasformazioni del pensiero in materia, ma resta un'opera che merita di essere letto senza farsi spaventare dalla dimensione perché – in aggiunta ai suoi comunque notevolissimi pregi storiografici – si dimostra in innumerevoli parti un testo di elevato valore letterario. Malgrado la traduzione in mio possesso risale al ventennio fascista (con tanto di polemichette nazionaliste sparse qua e là), la scrittura di Mommsen mostra di unire alla cura maniacale dello studioso il coinvolgimento e l'entusiasmo dell'appassionato, narrando i sette secoli che precedono la morte di Cesare come se si trattasse di cronaca viva piuttosto che un pezzo di classicità: per tale scopo, risulta fondamentale il continuo inquadramento sociale e psicologico realizzato analizzando oltre agli eventi anche le modifiche via via intercorse nella sfera dell'arte, della religione, dell'economia e – più in generale – delle relazioni interpersonali. Dal punto di vista temporale, il lavoro prende le mosse non 'ab Urbe condita', ma dai decenni precedenti, attraverso l'accurato tratteggio delle tribù presenti nell'Italia centro-meridionale e dei rapporti fra di loro e con i Greci, per giungere sul limitare delle idi di Marzo: quasi che l'autore non se la fosse sentita di raccontare la caduta del suo idolo assoluto, Giulio Cesare, e del dominio 'illuminato' che egli esercitava sugli ormai vastissimi possedimenti di Roma. Lo storico difatti non si fa pregare a mettere in chiaro le proprie simpatie e antipatie, a volte sottolineate dal semplice mutare dello stile nel racconto, in un'esposizione che è tutto meno che asettica sebbene sempre precisa e documentatissima (il corpo delle note è imponente, una sorta di libro nel libro): su alcune posizioni si può discutere, ma quel che conta è chi scrive cerca con costanza di farle discendere dai fatti. Allo stesso modo, vengono enfatizzate le innumerevoli vergogne disseminate lungo l'esistenza della repubblica romana, laddove il sangue correva a fiumi a causa di errori, ignavia, avidità: dalla dissennata condotta della guerra annibalica alle doppiezze in politica estera, dalla gratuita distruzione di Corinto alla ferocia delle guerre civili che, si sa, in materia sono in ogni tempo le peggiori. Seppur cresciuto in una società meno sensibile della nostra su certi temi, Mommsen narra con una punta di sgomento i massacri indiscriminati e le persecuzioni feroci che contrassegnarono con frequenza impressionante tutto il periodo – non che i due millenni successivi siano stati meglio, ma questo è un altro discorso – completando così un grande affresco di un mondo da noi più lontano di quanto si possa comunemente pensare malgrado vi siano saldamente piantate le nostre radici.

Jos says

Only read selected excerpts from a abridged Nobel prize edition. Too much detail regarding factions and ideas that can't fully be understood without previous knowledge about Ancient Rome.

Katie says

It was like climbing Mount Everest but I did it! I read the whole thing. I learned a lot but there is so much more information in the book that didn't sink in, and some ideas that definitely should not be taken seriously.

Richard says

An abridged version of Mommsen's 1857 multi-volume history of Rome during the collapse of the Republic and the very beginning of the Empire. Extremely clear & readable! Maps would have been a helpful addition- but otherwise, excellent.

On a scarier note. Much of what led to the Roman Republic's demise is very similar to what's occurring now with the US Republic. Arguments over the franchise and who is a "Roman citizen", including limits on immigration; Intransigence of the oligarchs, greed of the capitalist and political classes; A useless Senate more interested in itself than in the Republic. Scary, because there's no reason it can't happen here! Could the US Republic be lurching in this direction? Will a Caesar come to our rescue, bring stability at the cost of liberty...?

Dimitar says

Thoroughly engrossing! Written with a kind of passion. Mommsen has strong opinions about who is worthy of praise and who just happened to be on the right place at the right time. I prefer this style which openly advocates certain views to supposed neutrality.

The analysis of ancient society is at a very high level. The book is not just a good read (which it is!) but also promotes understanding.

Liedzeit says

Insgesamt öde und dröge. Eine sehr behäbige, nervende Sprache, fast ohne Absätze, mit lauter wards. Dafür den Nobelpreis? Nun, immerhin gibt es diesen grandiosen Satz: "Daß von Hellas und Italiens vergangener Herrlichkeit zu dem stolzeren Bau der neueren Weltgeschichte eine Brücke herüberführt, daß Westeuropa romanisch, das germanische Europa klassisch ist, daß die Namen Themistokles und Scipio für uns einen anderen Klang haben als Asoka und Salmanassar, daß Homer und Sophokles nicht wie die Veden und Kalidasa nur den literarischen Botaniker anziehen, sondern in dem eigenen Garten uns blühe, das ist Cäsars Werk; und wenn die Schöpfung seines großen Vorgängers im Osten von den Sturmfluten des Mittelalters fast ganz zertrümmert worden ist, so hat Cäsars Bau die Jahrtausende überdauert, die dem Menschengeschlecht Religion und Staat verwandelt, den Schwerpunkt der Zivilisation selbst ihm verschoben haben, und für das, was wir Ewigkeit nennen, steht er aufrecht."

Tiberiu Pana says

Exhaustive description of the romans, including religion, art, warfare, from the times Rome was just a village to the times of Pompey and Caesar.

Mommsen had extreme nationalistic beliefs and that influenced his writing, him believing the German people were the worthy descendants of the Roman Empire, so believe the historic facts (years, names) but take the descriptions with a pinch of salt.

Dave Carroll says

So, here I am at the end of Book Five. There were less cumbersome options when choosing to dive into a Mommsen writing. Having committed to reading a work by every Nobel Laureate for Literature and Mommsen being only the second chronologically, it would have been wiser to choose a shorter, singular work. But too many of the man's contemporaries like Mark Twain raved about his comprehensive History of Rome and so, alas, this long and exhaustive project. Mommsen is accused of tediousness in his style but, in truth, he is just immensely comprehensive and invested in his quest to show us our ancient past. And, of course, this isn't just about Rome but western civilization from Rome's founding and it's earliest monarchic origin, through its various republican and democratic incarnations bringing us full circle with the return of monarchy under Julius Caesar. This project required a commitment of an hour almost daily over eight months but it was worth the investment in that so many holes of my historical knowledge have now been filled. Mommsen wrote more about Rome's later eras which I will likely dive into later. For now, I move on both exhausted and grateful for this literary journey well written and well spoken.

Aaron says

A great read. The book is an adaptation of the fourth and fifth books of Mommsen's massive work, covering the history of Rome from the end of the Third Punic War to the death of Caesar.

It reads easily, mostly because Mommsen presents this time as a unified drama: the decay of the Roman republic to an oligarchy and the different assaults on the entrenched oligarchs of the Senate by the Gracchi brothers, Marius, and finally and successfully, by Caesar.

It is also entertaining because his judgments on individual characters wind through the entire work and have all the delicacy of a chainsaw; he repeatedly castigates Cicero, Cato, and Pompey. His heavy-handedness is annoying at times, especially to one who loves Cicero the author and has sympathies with Cato. His judgment of Pompey as a mediocre man was the most startling, though, as it is difficult to reconcile with his own descriptions of Pompey's achievements as a general. Mommsen finishes his work with an extensive and fascinating analysis of Caesar, whom he reveres.

Rodrigo says

Massive undertaking on the history of Rome until the advent of the Principate. Mommsen won the Nobel Prize thanks to this book. His interpretation of events still has a bit of a modern tone 150 years after he wrote the book.

Overall, a very significant read for any person who wants to understand the Roman Republic, but it may be

too scholarly for those too used to Dan Brown or JK Rowling.

Michael David says

Of all the Nobel winners, there was only one of them who was awarded for history. He was Theodor Mommsen, and he won in 1902 for his History of Rome.

The feat has never been replicated since then, so it prompted me to look up the work that won the Nobel Prize for him and attempt to read it. I didn't expect much, but it was indeed brilliant. Mommsen describes the milieu and the politics of Rome. Democracy was initiated by Gaius Gracchus until eventually perfected by Caesar despite staunch opposition. The work still remains to be a lucid and beautiful illustration of that time, and proof that truth is indeed sometimes stranger than fiction. Heroic profligates like Sulla appeared in history at times: these are the people who single-mindedly pursue an ideal and then step back once it has been achieved; insipid and arrant clowns as Pompey also act as counterpoints to once-in-a-millennium people such as Julius Caesar, and the whole gamut of treachery, perfidy, larceny and robbery pepper the pathway of Rome to civilization and to finally becoming a proper empire.

It may not be one of my favorites, but it is one of the best works, not only of history, but of literature. For that it gets a perfect score from me.

Shyam says

This is a magisterial account of the history of Rome from its conception in 753 BC down to the rise of Caesar written in an authoritative prose. Prior knowledge of Rome is recommended.

Unfortunately, this beautiful Folio Society edition is abridged, but as this is among the more easily found (and lower priced) editions of the work, and even though I agree with Montaigne's view that "*every abridgement of a good book is a foolish abridgement.*", I would still recommend it.

(See the description for this edition above for a full explanation of how it is abridged.)

I was not planning on reading this due to the abridgement, but before I began Gibbon, I came across a copy for an extremely good price, and so I grabbed it. I'm glad I did. I enjoyed it more than Gibbon, partly due to the period being discussed, but it is beautifully written, in a grand, authoritative manner that I really enjoyed. I'm very glad that I read it, even if it was an abridgement (this is the only abridged version of a work I have read, and the only one I ever plan on reading), and I definitely look forward to reading the complete, unabridged version some time in the future.

Olethros says

-Culminó una época y empezó otra.-

Género. Ensayo.

Lo que nos cuenta. Trabajo sobre la historia de la Antigua Roma, desde periodos previos a su fundación envuelta en brumas hasta el final de la República con Cayo Julio César, que se sumerge en religión, cultura, arte, política y todos los aspectos que constituyen la sociedad romana. En realidad, el autor tenía previsto continuar con nuevos volúmenes que llegarían hasta bien avanzada la época imperial pero nunca lo hizo.

¿Quiere saber más de este libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

[http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com/...](http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com/)

Moni Mitre says

Great for pure history lovers, otherwise, a slow kill. Don't know how I managed to survive reading it... Why this earned the Nobel Prize for Literature, I don't know. It's written well, but it's more like a higher ed history book than the type of writing that earns such prize, in my opinion. But what do I know...
