


## **Rome: A Cultural, Visual, and Personal History**

*Robert Hughes*

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## **Rome: A Cultural, Visual, and Personal History** Robert Hughes

From Robert Hughes, one of the greatest art and cultural critics of our time, comes a sprawling, comprehensive, and deeply personal history of Rome—as city, as empire, and, crucially, as an origin of Western art and civilization, two subjects about which Hughes has spent his life writing and thinking.

Starting on a personal note, Hughes takes us to the Rome he first encountered as a hungry twenty-one-year-old fresh from Australia in 1959. From that exhilarating portrait, he takes us back more than two thousand years to the city's foundation, one mired in mythologies and superstitions that would inform Rome's development for centuries.

From the beginning, Rome was a hotbed of power, overweening ambition, desire, political genius, and corruption. Hughes details the turbulent years that saw the formation of empire and the establishment of the sociopolitical system, along the way providing colorful portraits of all the major figures, both political (Julius Caesar, Marcus Aurelius, Nero, Caligula) and cultural (Cicero, Martial, Virgil), to name just a few. For almost a thousand years, Rome would remain the most politically important, richest, and largest city in the Western world.

From the formation of empire, Hughes moves on to the rise of early Christianity, his own antipathy toward religion providing rich and lively context for the brutality of the early Church, and eventually the Crusades. The brutality had the desired effect—the Church consolidated and outlasted the power of empire, and Rome would be the capital of the Papal States until its annexation into the newly united kingdom of Italy in 1870.

As one would expect, Hughes lavishes plenty of critical attention on the Renaissance, providing a full survey of the architecture, painting, and sculpture that blossomed in Rome over the course of the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, and shedding new light on old masters in the process. Having established itself as the artistic and spiritual center of the world, Rome in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries saw artists (and, eventually, wealthy tourists) from all over Europe converging on the bustling city, even while it was caught up in the nationalistic turmoils of the Italian independence struggle and war against France.

Hughes keeps the momentum going right into the twentieth century, when Rome witnessed the rise and fall of Italian Fascism and Mussolini, and took on yet another identity in the postwar years as the fashionable city of "La Dolce Vita." This is the Rome Hughes himself first encountered, and it's one he contends, perhaps controversially, has been lost in the half century since, as the cult of mass tourism has slowly ruined the dazzling city he loved so much. Equal parts idolizing, blasphemous, outraged, and awestruck, *Rome* is a portrait of the Eternal City as only Robert Hughes could paint it.

## **Rome: A Cultural, Visual, and Personal History Details**

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Author : Robert Hughes

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# From Reader Review Rome: A Cultural, Visual, and Personal History for online ebook

## Anne says

I'm not one to rate a book only one star, especially one that as highly lauded as this book but I gotta say that I absolutely did not enjoy any part of this book. This is particularly surprising due to the fact that I am a history major with an intense interest in architecture and art history, but its true, I absolutely could not get into this book. From the very beginning I should have realized that I was not going to enjoy it due to the author's lack of structural and historical organization. Mr Hughes would jump from speaking about a painter, to the picture, to a second painter, and then would speak about the early life of the first painter. Also, did I mention an extremely insufficient number of pictures within this book? Ok, don't judge but this is an art history and architectural history book and Mr Hughes' descriptions of the buildings and paintings were so inadequate that I was having a hard time picturing buildings, paintings, and sculptures that I had just seen in Rome three years ago. I think a lot would have been added if the publisher had included some photos of the buildings or paintings that the Mr Hughes discussed at length in the chapters in which he was describing it. But perhaps the publisher could not do that because there was absolutely no organization in any of the chapters. The book was exhaustively researched but there was so much information that the point of the book got lost in the author's musing on different artistic theories and methods. This book had great potential but it fell really flat for me. I'm sorry Mr Hughes but this was just not for me.

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## Tony says

ROME: A Cultural, Visual, and Personal History. (2011). Robert Hughes. \*\*\*.

The two books I have previously read by Hughes, "The Fatal Shore" (A history of Australia), and "Goya" (A biography of the artist), were both excellent, and I was looking forward to this one, his latest. I was disappointed. Although it is a large book – over 450 pages – it still tries to cover too much. There are actually several books hidden in this one that are yearning to get out. For example, Chapters 1 through 5 cover the history of Rome from Romulus and Remus to the removal of the Papacy to Avignon. The chapters are titled: Foundation, Augustus, Later Empire, Pagans vs. Christians, and Medieval Rome and Avignon. He does this in just over two hundred pages! Most readers would be overwhelmed at how much detail he includes in these chapters. Most of it has been covered before, but usually in multi-volume sets aimed at the near-scholarly reader. It is not until he gets to Chapter 6, The Renaissance, that the book starts to become readable. Hughes is primarily an art critic, having served as the critic for "Time" up until 2001. His coverage of the Renaissance deals mostly with the art of the period. Although much is familiar, he does manage to bring out little-known facts about the various artists and the political and religious patronage that was behind their works. Chapters after this one all deal with art through the ages of Rome: Rome in the Seventeenth Century, High Baroque (Bernini, Borromini, Etc.), Eighteenth-Century Rome (Neo-classicism and the Grand Tour), The Nineteenth Century: Orthodoxy vs. Modernity, Futurism and Fascism, and, finally, Rome Recaptured. The last two chapters deal primarily with the times before WW II, and the time after to the present day. It is the interplay between art and politics that concerns him here, and represents the "personal history" he talks about in his title. In all honesty, the early chapters on the history of Rome are less readable than the later chapters that deal with Rome's art scenes. He simply tried to jam too much into the history portion. Rome has a lot of history! In any event, I got the impression that the author's heart was not in the early parts of this work, but if you are willing to accept the latter part of this book apart from the earlier part, it still carries the subject of this study well.

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## Grace Tjan says

First, I must say that the title is a bit puzzling. I thought that “Visual History” meant something like ‘pictorial history’, but there are too few pictures in the book to justify it. There is art and architecture galore, but other than that, there is a dearth of discussion about other aspects of culture. As for the personal, aside from a few brief anecdotes about the author's various visits to Rome, there is precious little. Judging from the contents, perhaps the book should be titled ‘Art and Architecture in Rome, with Brief Historical Asides’ --- or something to that effect.

There is some history in the earlier chapters, which deal with the Roman Empire and its papal successor, but once Hughes gets to the Renaissance, it's all art and artists. History only resurfaces after the great works of art have dwindled by the 19th century. Then, it's almost exclusively political history. The dichotomy is at times disorienting --- I'd love to know more about the political and cultural context of the great artistic eras, or about how the city was governed, and how ordinary citizens lived. Instead, we get some tangential history that is interesting in itself, but is not that relevant to Rome, such as the history of the Albigensian Crusade (obviously, it has something to do with the papacy, but it took place entirely in Provence).

The art history/criticism that is the meat of this book is brisk, bristling with interesting details and occasionally memorably phrased: the Sistine Chapel's ceiling is “almost all body, or bodies. The only sign of a nature that is not flesh is an occasional patch of bare earth and, in the Garden of Eden, a tree”; Caravaggio “thrashed about in the etiquette of early Seicento Rome like a shark in a net.” It is fascinating to learn about the history of all of those obelisks that dot the Roman landscape and the engineering feats that were accomplished to move and erect them. Or about the creative recycling/vandalism that went on through Rome's history until relatively recent times (the Colosseum, for example, was used as a convenient quarry for the new Vatican, and the ancient bronze cladding of the Pantheon was stripped to make Bernini's massive *baldachino* in St. Peter's). Hughes goes beyond the familiar superstars like Michelangelo and Raphael, covering lesser-known artists like Guido Reni (“There can be few painters in history whose careers show such a spectacular rise to the heights of reputation, followed by such a plunge to the depths.”) and Annibale Caracci, who painted the staterooms of Palazzo Farnese. This was done during a particularly dissolute era in the history of the Church, when it was perfectly okay for a cardinal, later Pope Paul III, to have his private residence decorated with pagan soft porn scenes with a bestial twist like this one (it's *classical!* --- it's from Ovid's *Metamorphoses!*):

### **The Rape of Ganymede by Jupiter's Eagle with Satyrs**

Ouch!

Hughes points out that “to call such a theme inappropriate for a future pontiff would be a mistake: he had been made a cardinal by the Borgia Pope Alexander VI, whose mistress was Alessandro Farnese's sister, Giulia Farnese. Moreover, he had four illegitimate children of his own, plus an unknown number of by blows.” As a Jesuit-educated ex-Catholic, Hughes pulls no punches against his former faith, in most cases with some justification --- scathingly denouncing the corrupt Renaissance papacy, the reactionary Church of the 19th century, the appeasement of Nazis and Fascists in the 20th, and the \$ 500 “hefty ransom” that the Vatican demanded for a private tour of the Sistine Chapel today. But he's at his crankiest (and funniest) best when charting the decline of 21st century Rome, where statesmanship has gone down from this

## **Augustus of Prima Porta**

to this

“...a multi-multi-millionaire...who seems to have no cultural interest...apart from top-editing the harem of blondies for his quiz shows.”

and art has degenerated from this

to this

“Opening the can would, of course, destroy the value of the artwork. You cannot know that the shit is really inside, or that whatever may be inside is really shit...so far none has been opened; it seems unlikely that any will be, since the last can of Manzoni’s *Merda d’artista* to go on the market fetched the imposing sum of \$80,000.”

No shit, indeed.

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## **Daniel Etherington says**

Inevitably packed with information about this most incredible of cities, Hughes' Rome could, however, have done with a serious edit. Not only is it overlong and repetitive, it's also scattered with factual errors, never a good sign for a book that's ostensibly authoritative. (Eg p232 it refers to Clement V as a former "Italian cardinal" - he was French, and this is the whole thrust of the argument in the section about the papacy moving to Avignon; eg p543 it has the dates for Ammianus Marcellinus as "c300-95CE". Eh? It should read "c330-395CE".)

He also casually perpetuates dubious myths like referring to Monte Casino as a "venerable fortress and abbey" - it was actually a monastery and abbey. The Nazis weren't using it as a fortress, that was just the argument the Allies used for destroying it.

The Epilogue gives away the flaw in this book - Hughes moans about the current state of Rome, and Italy. Sure, the Berlusconi era wasn't pretty or a cultural high-point, but Rome is, and remains, and extraordinary place, despite how the experience of mass tourism in the Sistine may compare to Hughes' privileged experiences in the 70s, or even in the 50s when he first visited the city. It just seems to indicate the he didn't have a sufficiently present or consistent relationship with the reality (as opposed to academic verison) of the city to provide a credible voice.

For a better book on recent Rome I'd recommend *Whispering City: Rome and Its Histories* or for a more entertaining and psychologically more penetrating(though scattershot) read I'd recommend *Al Dente: Madness, Beauty and the Food of Rome*. David Winner, despite its clichéd title. (I've not read *Rome: The*

Biography of a City yet so can't comment on that.)

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### **Ashley Cobb says**

I picked this book up on a whim. I was in Barnes and Noble's, it was on a discount rack for \$6.95. As a Latin teacher, the allure of the deal was too good to pass up. I selected this book prior to my completion of "How To Read a Book" so I did none of the pre-reading exercises I learned in that book before making the decision to buy this one. The sub-title of "A Cultural, Visual, and Personal History" really drew me in. I was thinking it would be an overview of Rome (the empire). I scanned the table of contents and soon realized it wasn't a History of Rome (the Empire) but more of a history of Rome the city from ancient times to late 20th century. I was still intrigued so I plunged in. The book opens with a few details about the author. He is an Australian who received his education from a Catholic school (this becomes important later on). The first three chapters deal with the Roman Empire. There was a decent narrative but at times some of his facts seemed off. I wasn't sure if that was my faulty understanding of Roman history or errors on his part. (Other reviews on this book I have read suggest the latter). After the fourth chapter, the glaring issues begin to surface. While I thought this book was going to be a history of Rome, it is really the history of Art from Rome. I do not fault the book or the author for it not being what I originally supposed (that is on me and my failure to pre-read well) but the fault lies within the delivery. Once the person of Christ enters the timeline of earthly history it became very obvious that the author is an ex-Catholic. He seems to delight and relish in pointing out the errors of the church and mistakes made by various popes throughout the ages. He stands as an anti-Luther if you will. Only instead of pointing errors and guiding towards reform, Hughes just sets out to impugn and disparage the church. The rest of the book feels almost schizophrenic as he hops from history to art to critic of the church seemingly haphazardly. His timeline is jerky as he often moves on then jumps back, almost like a person telling a story who forgot an important part and is backtracking. I learned some interesting things and I don't regret the book but readers should be aware of his bias. This book could have really benefited from better editing. Worth the read if you love art or history, hard to slog through if you don't.

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### **Hadrian says**

This is a sweeping, searing history of the Eternal City, giving a grand tour of the city, immersed in history.

This history is primarily focused on the art and culture of the city, offering cutting remarks on the political side of things. With such eminent leaders as Berlusconi, who could blame him for being dismissive?

The only flaw I could notice was that the book needed even more pictures - but that isn't so bad - Google the relevant art works and you should follow Hughes' whirlwind tour of the city just fine.

The book ends with a warning on cultural decay and overcrowding of the city, but there is the hope that this city will somehow survive, shambling onwards, despite everything.

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### **Ruth says**

Don't go into this expecting an even-handed, evenly-balanced history of Rome. Hughes is no historian. He is an art critic, and as such he makes a fine art critic. They say that to a hammer everything looks like a nail. To

an art critic, the story is told in the art. This is a mostly easily readable, idiosyncratic history by an opinionated writer who focuses on the art, especially in the second half of the book—even to the point of occasionally wandering rather far afield from Rome itself. That said, I wish I'd known all the stuff in this book when I was teaching Art History.

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### **Ed Ward says**

This appears to be Hughes' last book, and my guess is that he was pretty sick by the time the final stages of production were happening. It's poorly edited, with some bits repeating, several times in some instances.

That's the bad news. The good news is that this is a fine overview of the city, its art and architecture, and Hughes' involvement with it as a young man fresh from Australia. Is it as good as his Barcelona book? Not at all. Is it worth spending several evenings reading? Absolutely. As might be guessed, he's real good on Classical-era Rome (making the point, which I'd never seen clarified, that there is no "Roman" art from this period, just refinements of Greek models, occasionally in the hands of actual Greeks), the Renaissance, and especially the 20th Century, although his attempts to deal with post-WW II art in Rome isn't very interesting.

In short, a book for Hughes fans to pick up after they've read almost everything else by him.

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### **Jim Mullen says**

Art critic Robert Hughes' book Rome is a highly opinionated history and art tour of the Eternal City. Major tourist attractions are almost ignored as they have been much covered elsewhere and there are no recommendations for restaurants, no shopping tips for hipsters, no advice on where to stay. Bernini is much more presence than Michelangelo, Caravaggio more than Raphael, the Piazza Navona more than St. Peter's. There are wonderful asides on how hard it is to move and raise a 500 ton obelisk without breaking it without the benefit of a modern crane, on the fact that ancient Rome probably looked and sounded more like modern Calcutta than the white marble city we see on tv and at the movies. While it wouldn't take more than a week-long to visit all the spots he talks about at length, they are the places you would visit on your second or third visit to Rome, not your first.

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### **Josh says**

Oxford professor Mary Beard recommends skipping the first 200 pages of Rome because it's inaccurate. I recommend reading Hughes's whole book, then reading her corrections. That way you can spend more time in Rome with Hughes's company.

In his first chapter, Hughes tells the story of Giordano Bruno, a heretic who was burned at the stake in 1600 for believing, among other things, the sun was just one of many stars in a vast universe. Bruno told the priests "Maiore forsan cum timore sententiam in me fertis quam ego accipiam / perhaps you pronounce this sentence against me with greater fear than I receive it." After finishing the book, I laughed to realize Bruno doesn't even make the Top 10 list of greatest characters in the book. When the cast includes Julius Caesar, Augustus, Constantine, the deliciously bad emperors — Caligula, of course, and Elagabalus the "transvestite who once arranged for his guests to be smothered in rose petals, dropped through trapdoors in the ceiling of



his palace” — and artists such as Michelangelo and Bernini, it’s quite a couple millennia of stories. (The current millennium might consider some leading roles for women.)

Hughes begins with his personal history of coming to Rome in 1959 from Australia. “For a twenty-one-year-old student to go from memories of Australian architecture... to such near-incomprehensible grandeur was a shattering experience. It blew away, in an instant, whatever half-baked notions of historical ‘progress’ may have been rattling about, loosely attached to the inside of my skull.”

Hughes delights with lines like “The fountain is, in its very essence, an artificial thing, both liquid — formless — and shaped; but the jets of Bernini’s Piazza Navona, glittering in the sun, mediate with an almost incredible beauty and generosity between Nature and Culture. Thanks to its fountains — but not only to them — the Roman cityscape constantly gives you more than you expect or feel entitled to as a visitor or, presumably, a citizen. *What did I do to deserve this?* And the answer seems ridiculously simple: *I am human, and I came here.*”

Later he reminds us tastes change, and not just for how we view the Colosseum’s blood sports. Charles Dickens thought Bernini’s monuments were “intolerable abortions.” Percy Bysshe Shelley loved the remains of ancient Rome but judged modern Italians “degraded, disgusting & odious.”

Hughes offers an interesting reading of the fascist era. “One cannot imagine a new Hitler arising in Germany, but a new Mussolini in Italy is neither a contradiction in terms nor even unimaginable.”

A few more passages:

A description of an memory palace for Gabriele D’Annunzio with a a torpedo cruiser: “From time to time, her bow guns used to be fired, in salute to the poet’s genius. They no longer are, because after nearly a century they (like his verses) have run out of ammunition.”

"Painting and sculpture are silent arts, and deserve silence (not phony reverence, just quiet) from those who look at them. Let it be inscribed on the portals of the world's museums: what you will see in here is not meant to be a social experience. Shut up and use your eyes. Groups with guides, etc. admitted Wednesdays only, 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. Otherwise, just shut the fuck up, please, pretty please, if you can, if you don't mind, if you won't burst. We have come a long way to look at these objects too. We have not done so to listen to your golden words. *Capisce?*"

“It wasn’t built in a day and can’t be understood in one, or a week, or a month or year — in however much time you may allot to it, a decade or a guided bus ride. It makes you feel small, and it is meant to. It also makes you feel big, because the nobler parts of it were raised by members of your own species. It shows you what you cannot imagine doing, which is one of the beginnings of wisdom. You have no choice but to go there in all humility, dodging the Vespas, admitting that only a few fragments of the city will disclose themselves to you at a time, and some never will. It is an irksome, frustrating, contradictory place, both spectacular and secretive. (What did you expect? Something easy and self-explanatory, like Disney World?) The Rome we have today is an enormous concretion of human glory and human error. It shows you that things were done once whose doings would be unimaginable today. Will there ever be another Piazza Navona? Don’t hold your breath. There is and can be only one Piazza Navona, and, fortunately, it is right in front of you, transected by the streams of glittering water - a gift to you and to the rest of the world from people who are dead and yet can never die. One such place, together with all the rest that are here, is surely enough.”

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## **Radiantflux says**

65th book for 2018.

Big sprawling history of Rome (and to a lesser extent Italy) over 2500 years, from its foundation through the early 21st Century, mainly (as you would expect from Hughes) though it's art. I suspect there are problems with details here and there, but the overall picture is fascinating and provides a rich and layered appreciation of the city and its people.

4-stars.

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## **Gaylord Dold says**

Montefiore, Simon Sebag. *Jerusalem: The Biography*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York (650pp.\$35)

Hughes, Robert. *Rome: A Cultural, Visual, Personal History*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York (498pp.\$35)

On the 8th of the Jewish month of Ab in A.D. 70, the armies of the Roman Emperor Vespasian, commanded by his son and heir Titus and numbering some 60,000, were camped before the walls of Jerusalem. Inside the walls, perhaps half a million starving Jews survived the diabolical conditions and were still, mostly defiant. Before he was done, Titus and Roman legionnaires had killed, tortured, crucified, or taken to Rome half the city's population, reduced the city itself to rubble, and invaded the Holy Temple, all to destroy the Jewish rebellion and disperse the strange cultists of Christianity.

This story and many more, some equally astounding, are compellingly told by historian Simon Sebag Montefiore, whose previous book, "Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar," is perhaps the finest, strangest, most penetrating book ever written about Soviet Russia. For Montefiore, the history of Jerusalem is the history of the world, the chronicle of a penurious provincial town amid the Judean hills---and later, the strategic battlefield of clashing civilizations. Home to many sects, city of many names, Jerusalem is a place of such delicacy that it is described in Jewish sacred literature in the feminine.

In a word, Montefiore's massive history of this both terrestrial and celestial city is magnificent. Detailed, illustrated beautifully, and told in sweeping prose organized chronologically from King David's establishment of the city as a capital to the 1967 war, "Jerusalem" is a spectacular book for general readers. In between King David and the war is an amazing span of history, nearly 3,000 years worth, and Montefiore does justice to nearly every one. This is a book about the ages, for the ages.

Unfortunately, Australian art critic Robert Hughes' new book about Rome has almost none of the authority, charm, wisdom or style of Montefiore's book about Jerusalem. Billed as both a cultural and personal history, Hughes has included precious little of the former (though it is thick with art history) and only a snippet of the latter, most being devoted to the author's personal dislike of Rome's shallow and frivolous videocracy under Berlusconi (now relegated to the sidelines). I'm happy to report that Hughes loves Italian movies of the 50s and 60s, and does a good job explaining cinema's resurrection after World War II. But how can this be a cultural history when it disenfranchises food, style, most architecture, city and street life, poetry, music, sex, kinship, sex and wine?

The book is divided into period: early Rome, Empire, Medieval, Renaissance and so on. Much of the early Roman period reads like a Cliff's Notes, while many of the time periods are so heavily adumbrated with "art history" that the book dies a slow death page by page. Of greater interest and more lively written is the chapter covering the 18th century, neoclassicism and the Grand Tour, as well as the chapter on futurism and fascism.

One imagines Hughes burdened by the contract to write this book and employing several round-the-clock researchers to feed him batches of notes on file cards. Given Hughes' distinguished background in art criticism and his profound and wide-ranging expertise, it is surprising that this knowledge somehow seems a burden that he offloads on his readers. There are many books about Rome. This is one book that simultaneously says too much and too little.

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### **Philip Girvan says**

"Anyone who thinks of the young Picasso as a prodigy should reflect on the young Bernini, and be admonished. There was no twentieth-century artist, and certainly none of the twenty-first century, who does not look small beside him." -- p.283

Hughes's formidable intellect, the depth of his expertise, his refusal to mince words, particularly as concerns (post) modern art (he doesn't like it), and the sheer force of his writing make him an magnificent guide to Rome. I've never read a book that made a city come alive as this one does. The focus, always, is the art but the amusing and/or thoughtful observations, curious tidbits, and historical context provided by Hughes makes the book all the more valuable. Highly recommended.

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### **Melody Nelson says**

An excellent book, spoiled by the extremely patronising and frankly ignorant epilogue. Totally unnecessary to finish such an interesting book with an old man's rant about " the good old days".

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### **Thomas Simard says**

This book is as wonderful as the city he describes.

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### **Beth says**

This book is nothing if not thorough. It follows the history of the city of Rome in sometimes excruciating detail, from the mythical twins suckling at the she-wolf down through relatively modern times. I'm glad I read it, but it was far too much of an investment to do again. The book ends up following a similar track as the city itself: ancient chapters--Punic wars, caesars, etc.--were riveting; the middle ages were such that even the most skilled author couldn't be expected to liven them up; the Renaissance brought things back to life;

1700-1900 dragged; WWII cranked it up again. To me, by far the best reading was in the early chapters as Hughes describes the feel of the city today. I've been there twice, and he gets it absolutely right.

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### **Rob Atkinson says**

\* 3 1/2 stars \*

An entertaining and informative read for anyone who knows and loves Rome, or wants an account of the city weighted towards its aesthetic history -- particularly its art and architecture. Hughes is best when discussing the art of the Renaissance and thereafter, and there are especially rich sections on Baroque Rome and the 20th c. avant garde, particularly Futurism, and its links to Mussolini's brand of fascism. However the book is marred by a few avoidable errors in its recounting of Rome's political and social history, the kind of errors a good fact checker should have picked up, and any lay historian with a working knowledge of ancient Roman history/European history is likely to find these errors in chronology jarring and off-putting.

That said, Hughes is generally good company, a curmudgeonly art historian with decidedly conservative tastes who writes in an anecdotal and refreshingly frank style. He doesn't mind bucking canonical opinion, especially when it comes to the modernist canon, and one can't help laughing at some of his observations. For a wonderful history of Rome I would first recommend Christopher Hibbert's "Rome: Biography of a City", to which this work would make excellent supplementary reading. In combination they will equip anyone interested in Rome with a rich understanding of its fascinating historical and aesthetic evolution from its founding to the present day.

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### **Sarah says**

Because I am in.

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### **Katie says**

I wish I had finished this book BEFORE going to Rome, since there are so many tidbits about various neighborhoods and monuments that would give a more immersive experience. Robert Hughes is not at all a travel writer. He is an art critic, so 3000 years of Roman history is told largely through the lens of its art. I was fascinated by the accounts of the lives of the regular ancient Romans, by Bernini's fame and eventual fall in his lifetime, and the (same with Guido Reni). I didn't know that the road from the Colosseum to the Emmanuele Vittorio Memorial was created as a parade ground by Mussolini (the primary walking route from our hotel to the center of the city), or that the street with the fancy vegetarian restaurant was THE 18th century location for artists' studios, or anything about what it could possibly be like to have to upright a broken obelisk and move it without the aid of heavy machinery.

This is a truly fascinating book that gave so much context to my recent trip to Rome, even if I read half of it after I got back. Highly recommended and very readable.

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## **Chris says**

This isn't so much a history of Rome as more of an artist history of Rome, not that is a bad thing. Hughes is wonderful (or was wonderful). His writing his full of humor and love.

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