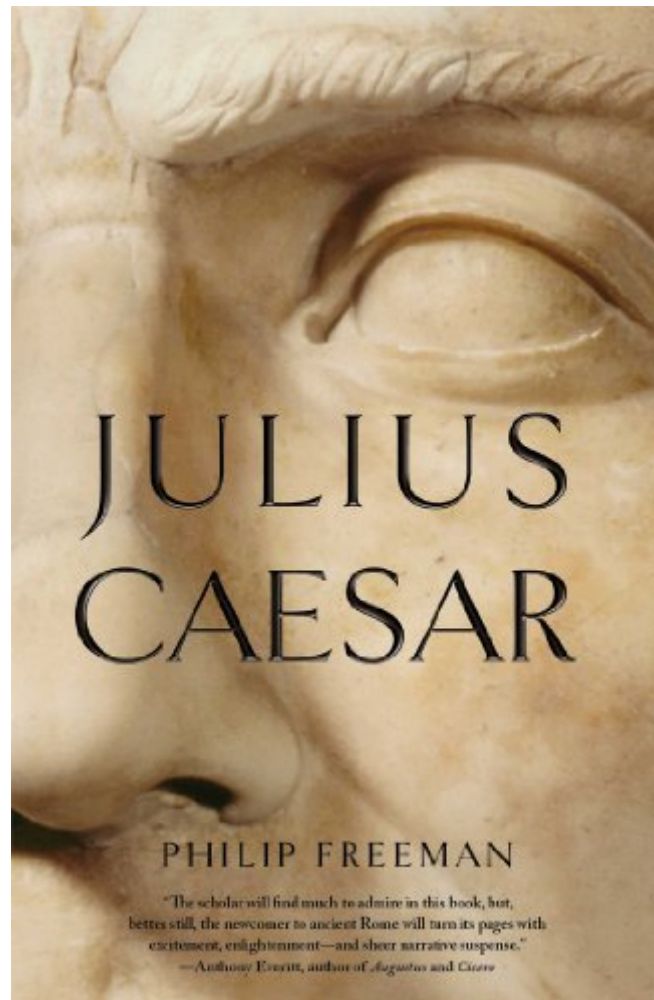


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Julius Caesar



Synopsis

More than two thousand years after his death, Julius Caesar remains one of the great figures of history. He shaped Rome for generations, and his name became a synonym for "emperor" -- not only in Rome but as far away as Germany and Russia. He is best known as the general who defeated the Gauls and doubled the size of Rome's territories. But, as Philip Freeman describes in this fascinating new biography, Caesar was also a brilliant orator, an accomplished writer, a skilled politician, and much more. Julius Caesar was a complex man, both hero and villain. He possessed great courage, ambition, honor, and vanity. Born into a noble family that had long been in decline, he advanced his career cunningly, beginning as a priest and eventually becoming Rome's leading general. He made alliances with his rivals and then discarded them when it suited him. He was a spokesman for the ordinary people of Rome, who rallied around him time and again, but he profited enormously from his conquests and lived opulently. Eventually he was murdered in one of the most famous assassinations in history. Caesar's contemporaries included some of Rome's most famous figures, from the generals Marius, Sulla, and Pompey to the orator and legislator Cicero as well as the young politicians Mark Antony and Octavius (later Caesar Augustus). Caesar's legendary romance with the Egyptian queen Cleopatra still fascinates us today. In this splendid biography, Freeman presents Caesar in all his dimensions and contradictions. With remarkable clarity and brevity, Freeman shows how Caesar dominated a newly powerful Rome and shaped its destiny. This book will captivate readers discovering Caesar and ancient Rome for the first time as well as those who have a deep interest in the classical world.

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Customer Reviews

According to Philip Freeman's account, Julius Caesar may have been the most misunderstood man in history. He owed his military and political career to the plebians, the lower class Romans with whom he sided. By doing this he won the never-ending antipathy of the patrician families who controlled the Roman senate. As a general Caesar led from the front. When he was in danger of losing a battle to the patrician forces in Spain, he charged the opposing line single-handedly, embarrassing his men into redoubling their efforts, snatching victory from defeat. We know as much as we do about Caesar thanks to his own account of the GALLIC WARS, which has survived, and Freeman quotes from it extensively. Perhaps Caesar's most impressive victory was the BATTLE OF ALESIA, where he fought a two front battle against the Gauls under Vercingetorix whom he'd cornered in the city, only to be confronted by 100,000 Gaulish soldiers in his rear. We see Caesar rise from a poor patrician family living in the slums of Rome to work his way up from military tribune, to sequester, to aedile, to praetor and eventually consul of Rome. One of his first official acts was to redistribute land to the plebians and the Roman soldiers, some of which was taken from the rich patrician families who controlled the Senate. On his way to becoming consul, Caesar was in charge of keeping the Appian Way in good repair. Caesar was not only a great general and politician, he was also an engineer, a great public speaker, and a lawyer. We also get a good look at the Roman Civil Wars. At first, Caesar gained power through a triumvirate with the great general Pompey and Crassus a rich Roman senator.

Countless books have been written about Julius Caesar. In many of them, anecdotes and rumors have crept in and masqueraded as facts. One of the things I liked about this excellent piece is that the author takes on some of these myths and documents the truth behind them. For example, there was a famous incident when Caesar declined to rise when he was approached by a deputation of Senators, as tradition and respect required. Caesar later put it about that this was due to his illness rather than his attempt to behave like a king. Some authors have adopted Caesar's alibi. Not so, according to Freeman, who provides sources showing that Caesar, indeed, wanted to be King of

Rome in name as well as in fact. I thought that the most insightful part of the book was the focus on Caesar's disdain and disapproval for many of the excesses of the Roman Republic. For example, (while still a mere Senator) Caesar introduced legislation that was intended to put a stop to the hallowed custom whereby a Roman Governor would plunder the province to which he was assigned. Caesar's law on this subject endured throughout the many centuries of the Roman Empire as a model of sound legal drafting. In point of fact, the author makes a convincing case showing that when Caesar crossed the Rubicon, surely knowing that the Republic would never be the same, he did so in the belief that the Republic had to be fundamentally restructured and modernized. Caesar rightly viewed the Roman Republic as an oligarchy designed to allow a small clique of rich Senators to maintain their dominance and plunder Rome's neighbors. The city-state government, satisfactory for governing Rome and the nearby environs, was completely inadequate to govern Rome's far-flung empire, or even just Italy.

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