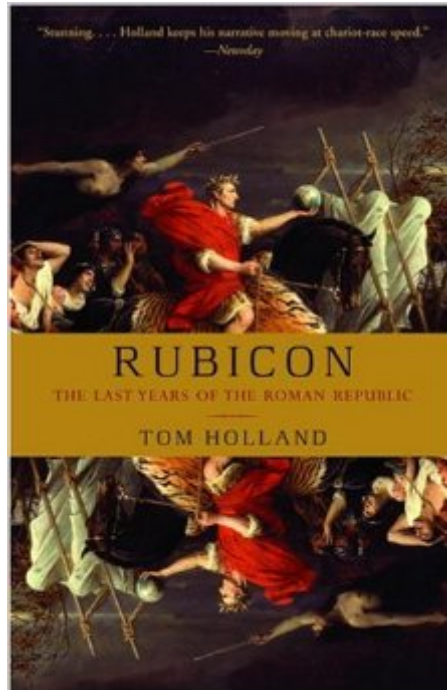


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Rubicon: The Last Years Of The Roman Republic



Synopsis

In 49 B.C., the seven hundred fifth year since the founding of Rome, Julius Caesar crossed a small border river called the Rubicon and plunged Rome into cataclysmic civil war. Tom Holland's enthralling account tells the story of Caesar's generation, witness to the twilight of the Republic and its bloody transformation into an empire. From Cicero, Spartacus, and Brutus, to Cleopatra, Virgil, and Augustus, here are some of the most legendary figures in history brought thrillingly to life. Combining verve and freshness with scrupulous scholarship, Rubicon is not only an engrossing history of this pivotal era but a uniquely resonant portrait of a great civilization in all its extremes of self-sacrifice and rivalry, decadence and catastrophe, intrigue, war, and world-shaking ambition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It is easier to pin point the ending of Tom Holland's book than its beginning - it ends with the death of Augustus in 14 AD, years after the Roman Republic has ceased to exist in anything but its name. The beginning of Holland's book, like the beginning of the end of the Roman Republic, is harder to spot. Does it start with the fall of Carthage? With the murder of reformer tribunes Tiberius Gracchus and Gaius Gracchus? Or with the first clashes between Marius and Sulla? Holland tells it all, in a spellbinding narrative that is hard to put down. In just under four hundred pages, we get a short overview of the early republic, and then a focused narrative its final century. This is the story of some of history's greatest men and women, from Sulla to Cato, Pompey and Cicero and Cleopatra, and of course, Julius Caesar. It is a tale of murders and political maneuvering, honor and greed and lust. And, complicated as it all is, Holland serves as a fine guide through the intricate web of the dying republic. I think it's the power of the prose, above anything, that makes Holland's book so

fascinating. It reads like a novel, probably the best written account of the Roman World I've read since Robert Graves's *I, Claudius*. At times, he may use anachronistic terms for the narrative ('location, location, location', or 'Mutually Assured Destruction') - but that's a misdemeanor that is easily forgivable, and some may find it charming. In the blow by blow account of the political struggles, it is sometimes hard to see a larger scheme or thesis. In as far as there is one, it is probably that the decline of the Roman Republic came through the rise of the Roman Empire.

The Roman republic, the world of SPQR ("Senatus populusque Romanus"), has always been for me a set of brightly colored slides, snapshots of highlighted moments in jumbled order: Spartacus' crucified army, Caesar stabbed in the Forum, Cleopatra dying on a barge in Atrium, Hannibal crossing the Alps, Cato and Cicero holding crowds spellbound orating about something or other, net and trident facing spear and shield in the gladiatorial circle. And of course, Caesar returning from long years in Gaul, on the bank of the Rubicon. This compulsively readable book put it all together in one seamless narrative, and replaced my slides with a breathtaking movie that has it all: epic battles, dynastic soap opera, noble patriotism, eyecatching eccentricity, treacherously shifting alliances, scheming and backstabbing and dazzling hypocrisy, with the survival of a great democracy always at stake and always at risk. Holland pumps an incredible quantity of information into your head, with each personage and event so naturally connected to its neighbor that you don't feel surfeited. As a result, every component has the benefit of a richly detailed context. What's best is the confidence with which Holland conveys the ethos of the Republic, which is surprisingly alien, yet has points of analogy with our own. Though plenty of plundering and graft goes on, only one major figure, Crassus, acts mainly out of pecuniary motives. Nevertheless, as our own capitalistic democracy's dynamism has been driven by the relentless competition for scarce monetary resources, the Roman republic derived its energy from a relentless competition for "glory", the scarce commodity of high reputation.

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