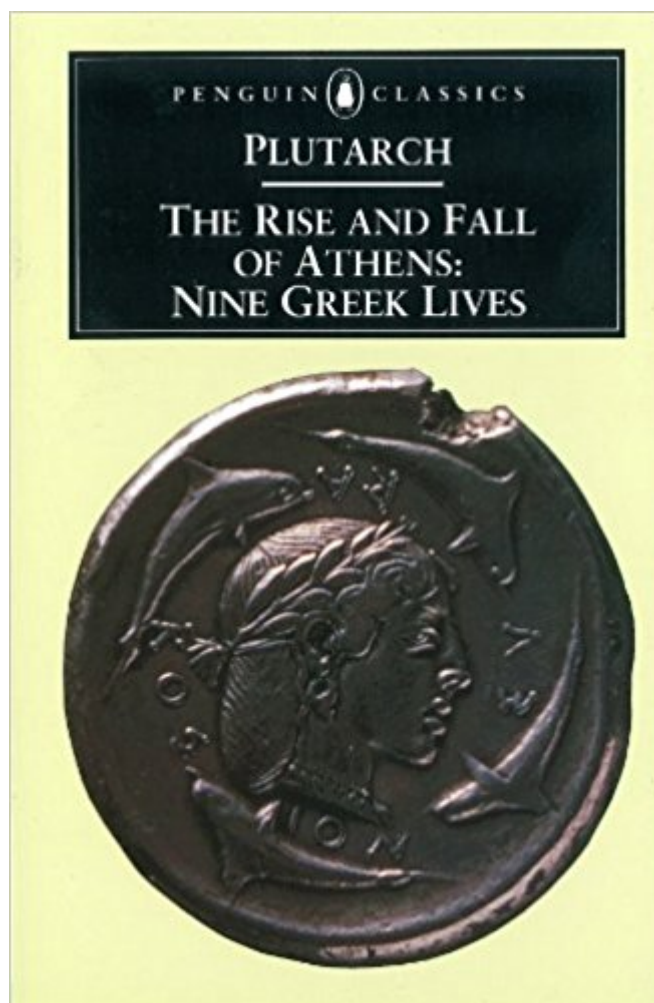


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The Rise And Fall Of Athens: Nine Greek Lives (Classics)



Synopsis

Nine Greek biographies illustrate the rise and fall of Athens, from the legendary days of Theseus, the city's founder, through Solon, Themistocles, Aristides, Cimon, Pericles, Nicias, and Alcibiades, to the razing of its walls by Lysander.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

very good condition

very good

Very nice binding in this edition looks great on the shelf. They don't make books like this anymore. Worth getting if you like old prints.

It's a classic and it's Plutarch.

I just got back from the Greek Isles last year. This book is better than those I bought and looked at there.

This book does a disservice to the academic community. Obviously intended for undergraduates or those who may have some interest in the classics, Penguin has chopped up some of Plutarch's Parallel Lives of the Greeks and Romans and presented them as a history of the Rise and Fall of Athens. There are two primary problems with this method of presentation. First, Plutarch's aim in writing this work was to highlight the parallels between Greek and Roman public figures and show in each the importance of a virtuous character. By selecting only the Greek lives Penguin deliberately subverts the author's explicit intention. Second, Plutarch's lives are meant, not as history, but as moral exemplars. By no means is this text anything like an account of The Rise and Fall of Athens. The reader will gain no insight into what made Athens so distinctive and important to Western civilization. Even Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian war gives more insight into Athens' distinctiveness (see Pericles' Funeral Oration) and, moreover, is a work of real history. I am not sure what the editors at Penguin were thinking in selecting these lives and selling the book as the Rise and Fall of Athens (a hackneyed phrase if ever there was one). Interested readers should turn to one of the many versions of the Lives available on the internet before wasting their money on this dismemberment of Plutarch.

The nature of the polis has been floating around my head of late. The clear decline of American democracy has been chronicled from the Classical perspective by the late Senator Robert C. Byrd in his "The Senate of the Roman Republic: Addresses on the History of Roman Constitutionalism". It is a look at the failure of republicanism from a distance of 2000 years. This excerpt from Plutarch's "Parallel Lives" covers the rise and fall of not just the Athenian Empire but Athenian democracy from Plutarch's perspective of 400 years. Covering the lives, intrigues, and machinations of eight Athenians and one Spartan it follows the heights of honor and patriotism, and the lows of avarice and traitorous behavior. As one reads the work one realize that the capacity of brilliance and darkness is a commonality of the human experience. While the Ancients are alien to us, they are also still lurking within for better and worst. As Plutarch envisioned in his original historiography these individuals are meant to provide a moral lesson on the nature of the body politic. It is as applicable today as it was 2000 years ago. As we regard the antics and corruption of our democracy at all levels we see the same repugnant behaviors and greed acting as a disintegrating process including wars, recessions, trading and military alliances, and irrational partisanship. Hopefully,

through the positive insights we can find a way to redeem our politics and our nation.

The sketches contained here of nine influential Greeks are fascinating on their own account even though they were originally written as part of the parallel lives of Greeks and Romans. I don't pretend to be a scholar of Ancient Greece but I do have a keen interest in it and I found Plutarch's writing in this interpretation and Penguin Edition quite accessible and as I became more engrossed actually very engaging and exciting in sections. Organized chronologically he covers Theseus the founder of Athens, Solon the lawgiver, and various military and political figures who follow most notably Pericles. I found the sections on Nicias, Alcibiades and Lysander absolutely fascinating in their descriptions of later military campaigns, particularly the campaign in Sicily against the Syracusians. Alcibiades emerged for me as one of the more interesting characters who combines great military leadership with personal flaws to an astonishing degree. I've had this book on the shelf for a long time and now that I finally picked it up it was much more of an exciting read than I had expected. Highly recommend it.

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