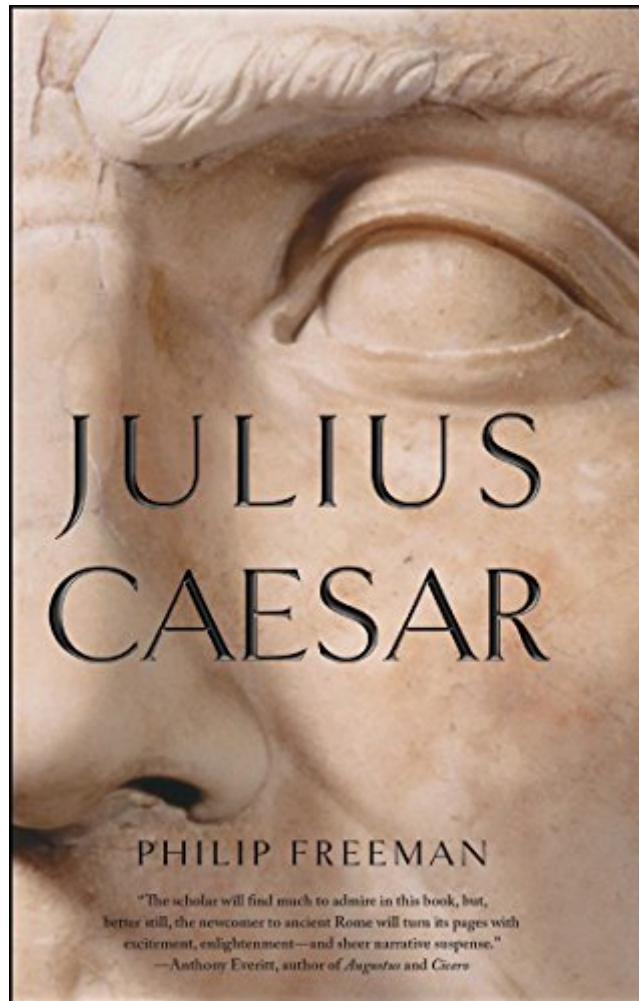




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Julius Caesar



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

This is not just about Julius Caesar, but it is more about the fall of the Roman Republic, which was the first mass destruction of a Roman Government (which would not occur again for another 500 years or so). It is about The Republic, Caesar, Pompey, Crassus, Cato, Cicero, etc. Julius Caesar was a populist (kind of like a liberal, though a self-serving one). Cato, Cicero, and others were more optimate (part of the aristocracy). Rome was a republic that had two consuls elected every year, which were somewhat like military executives, and then had the senate as a legislature, with tribunes who held veto power. Caesar lived in a period much like our own, where each

of the two "party" was out to get the other and they had fundamentally different philosophies. The big difference is that Rome was expanding into an empire. In Rome, great oration and great military leadership were the most admired qualities one could have. Julius Caesar climbed to the top because he had a surplus of both. Philip Freeman wrote biographies about Julius Caesar and about Alexander the Great. They were very different leaders, but both were on their way to conquering the world before they died suddenly. Alexander the Great made fast progress and always won. Julius Caesar made fast progress, but lost, over and over again, but won in the end. Julius Caesar was renowned as a great attorney and an orator along the lines of Cicero, yet he lost most important cases. He was the High Priest. He was a poet, a writer and a motivational speaker. He was an unsurpassed statesman and political strategist. He was an armchair psychologist. He was a military genius who won battles with relentless daring as often as with military strategy. He lived his long career always on the brink of utter destruction, militarily, politically and financially for the first half. Most of the most important battles he fought, he was sure to lose. Most of the elections he sought to win, he was likely to lose, and he went "all in." He owed enough money for much of his career that if he lost any major election, he would likely have had to flee Rome to avoid becoming a slave or worse. He was boxed in by enemies and undermanned in almost every major conflict in which he partook. Alexander the Great used tactics and long swords to win wars. Julius Caesar used daring and luck, combined with the

usual Roman ability to engineer weapons and defenses during the heat of battle and to move in perfect formation and such. This work takes you from the early days of Julius Caesar and before (Marius and Sulla) through his assassination and the formation of the Second Triumvirate immediately preceding the formation of the Roman Empire with Octavian (Augustus) as the first emperor. The main part of the text does not mention the Second Triumvirate, but it does mention Octavian, and then the book ends. My only criticism is that it should have gone through 27 BCE for completeness. (I have not read the appendix, maybe it is there). So, from around 44 BCE through 27 BCE was "skipped." However, the book is called "Julius Caesar" and not "The Fall of The Roman Republic and Julius Caesar," so I guess that explains it.

Well done book on the mighty Caesar. Freeman has an easy and informative writing style. This is more about the man Caesar, than the General Caesar. Caesar's battles are really not highlighted, (and no diagrams either) and that is OK, since there are many other books on Caesar highlighting his battles with diagrams. See Richard A. Gabriel's "The Great Battles of Antiquity," (1994), or the more expensive three volume set "Empires at War." With that said, there is a battle that defines the man. IMO the defining battle for Caesar was The Battle of Pharsalus (48 BC) against Pompey. Pompey has just defeated Caesar at Dyrrachium: "Caesar knew he had escaped only by the grace of Pompey's excessive caution." page 276. At Pharsalus, Caesar was outnumbered, fighting against "Roman soldiers," not tribal warriors, and Pompey. Freeman presents Pharsalus causally, and again with no diagrams, describes Caesar's decisive move, "Caesar took one glance at Pompey's enormous array and realized immediately what his opponent planned to do." page 279. OK, but do you realize that not too many men could have realized immediately what to do under that incredible pressure. Caesar placed about six cohorts (this number varies with the author) at an oblique angle BEHIND the cavalry on Caesar's right wing so that Pompey and Labienus could not see that the six cohorts were there. Then as Labienus' cavalry attacked, Caesar's cavalry gave way and backed up to allow the six cohorts to attack Labienus' cavalry on their left flank, which broke Labienus' cavalry. Then the six cohorts rolled up Pompey's left wing. I just do not think Freeman shows the magnitude of Caesar's move, again, under incredible pressure, and Caesar's insight into directing the decisive move of concealing the six cohorts behind his cavalry. Not too many men could do that under that kind of pressure, but Caesar did, and won the battle. As Napoleon summed up the Battle of Austerlitz in one sentence: "Whilst they march to turn my right, they present me their flank." "Encyclopedia Britannica," 1961, Volume 2, page 699. Caesar's move at Pharsalus was brilliant and

won the battle that day. Overall, Freeman's book on Caesar is well worth buying, reading and enjoying.

Philip Freeman's biography of one of Rome's greatest and most controversial figures reads like a Fantasy novel. Similar to his students, I knew a little about Julius Caesar--The Ides of March, Crossing the Rubicon, what's shown in HBO's Rome, etc.--but didn't really grasp how masterful of a tactician and how ambitious Julius Caesar was, right up until the Ides, until I delved into Freeman's book. I found myself fascinated by Caesar's accomplishments and wouldn't stop turning this book's pages to find out how he continually managed to overcome obstacles where everything seemed so stacked against his favor. Freeman has managed to make a very fulfilling backstory of one of history's most powerful figures into a very readable and interesting book.

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