



Julius Caesar

Philip Freeman

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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.

Julius Caesar Details

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From Reader Review Julius Caesar for online ebook

Kiwi Begs2Differ \ says

I approached this book with a bit of apprehension. Last year I loved Alexander the Great by the same author, will this book be able to draw me in and involve me at the same level? I shouldn't have worried. I was captivated by Caesar's story as much as I was by Alexander's.

Caesar is obviously one of the most famous figures of all times, but even if you know your history well and know what's going to happen, Freeman makes it so fresh. In the pages of this book, you feel the tension in the senate during Catilina conspiracy, Caesar's leadership and bravery during the conquest of Gaul takes your breath away (view spoiler), and you marvel at the engineering skills of Roman military (view spoiler).

The book provides many examples of Caesar's talents as astute politician, populist strategist, military genius, brave soldier, natural born leader but also as a merciless enemy (view spoiler) and a person with double standards (view spoiler).

Freeman gives the social, political and economic contexts to Caesar's decisions and explains well the reasons behind his innovative reforms such as the granting of citizenship to worthy (and wealthy) provincials, the instalment of senators and government officials from the military, sons of former slaves and even foreigners, and even the adoption of the solar calendar and leap year that are still in use today.

There are only few authors able to make non-fiction books into genuine page turners, while there are many who will prefer the easier genre of historical fiction or, worse, resort to historical fantasy to entice the readers.

Philip Freeman is a magnificent History teller and now one of my favourite authors. A must read for all Ancient Rome enthusiasts. Highly recommended. 4.5 stars

Favourite quotes:

"Human nature everywhere yearns for freedom and hates submitting to domination by another." This kind of refreshing honesty is typical in Roman writers from the earliest days of the Republic to the fall of the empire. The Romans never pretended that they were bringing freedom or a better way of life to the peoples they conquered.

They frankly admitted that they were only interested in increasing their own power, wealth, and security through conquest. They had no particular desire to spread classical culture throughout the world unless it served their own plans to better control a province. Caesar freely admits that the Veneti were simply fighting for liberty, just as he would have done in their place. Nevertheless, he was determined to crush them.

Caesar had never been able to win the hearts of the nobility. His power base was firmly set among the common people he had served as a magistrate and the soldiers he had recruited and fought along side in battles across Gaul. It was Caesar's army—made up of no-nonsense, dependable, and absolutely loyal men he raised from the farms and small towns of Italy and the Province—that would determine his future.

judy says

I had doubts about this book. Julius Caesar, one of history's greats, in under 400 pages? Still, since I actually

hadn't read a biography of Caesar, I might as well press on. It starts somewhat typically (read uninteresting) but as time goes by and Caesar begins his career as a soldier, the pace picks up dramatically. Let me put it this way--this book would make a heck of an action movie. Caesar's brilliance in developing new tactics on the spot and doing the unexpected ranks with any big screen thriller. A brilliant man who fought quite a few almost equally brilliant men. He did some great things for Rome while acting in political capacities but as a general and leader of men, there is no equal. This kind of book normally wouldn't be my choice but it was riveting. Now I want to read more books about him and just hope I'm not disappointed.

Jeffrey Brooks says

Good introduction to those who aren't familiar with the material; a brisk and pleasant read for those who are. Some editing issues, but overall a very enjoyable read.

Joe says

The author prefaces this book with a quick anecdote which provided the motivation to write this biography. With interest waning during his springtime Latin class, Professor Freeman revived his students' interest with a quick Julius Caesar Q&A. The students knew little of the historical figure besides his name, but were fascinated by what Freeman shared with them. The author generalized this observation to the general reading public and has written a straightforward and engaging biography. And for a Julius Caesar novice like me, it fit the bill perfectly.

Caesar lived, conquered and reigned during the first century BC so his historical record is understandably limited; therefore this book is not a dense day to day chronicle of his life. The author does assemble what is known without straying too far from its subject. Caesar was born into a well known family who were down on their financial luck at the time of his birth. So although Caesar had a foot in the aristocracy camp of Rome, he was much more comfortable with and beloved by the common man. This "accident of birth" placed Caesar in an advantageous position to exploit the turmoil between the aristocracy and the citizenry of the Roman Republic 2000 years ago.

The book chronicles Caesar's many accomplishments, his rapid ascendancy to the top of the Roman power pyramid and his murder. Just Caesar's military successes are noteworthy; he and his army battled and were victorious in much of the civilized world of that time. The scope and breadth of these conquests – the number of soldiers brought to the field, the miles marched, ships built and the miles of long siege walls constructed – are astounding. The political scene in Caesar's Rome, with its conniving and scheming, rivals anything we've witnessed in modern times.

Adding to the mix, personal anecdotes and observations are sprinkled throughout the book which provides the reader a "feel" for the man – for instance Caesar fathered a child with Cleopatra and he sported a comb-over.

There are a lot of names and titles in the book which does take some getting used to, but Caesar's story propels the reader through the narrative. And the sign of any good book is the incentive after reading it - to read more on the subject... and I will.

Bandit says

Terrific biography of a fascinating man, a great (in a proper sense of the word) man. Freeman does a phenomenal job of making history not only accessible, but compelling as well. The book was educational, interesting and never boring. Though, of course, this is the story everyone knows the ending too. Very glad I found and read this book, nonfiction and/or history doesn't always read this exciting. Highly recommended.

Curtis says

Best biography ever read. While politically incorrect, to some degree, I unapologetically view him as the most impressive man who ever lived after reading the biography. He faced such awesome adversity and challenges and always ended-up on top (except until the fateful Ides of March). One is led to believe he almost had divine guidance and protection, until you come to the logical conclusion that he was a true genius in leading people to making strategic, calculated risks. His desire to clean-up the corrupt, partisan, oligarchical senate has some strong parallels to today. Cemented my fascination with Roman history and culture -- had only read historical fictions on Rome until then.

Mary says

Philip Freeman's "Julius Caesar" is a comprehensive biography of the Roman conqueror that is as straightforward and readable as the general's own "Gallic Wars". Freeman not only stitches together the various ancient accounts of Caesar's exploits but adds context to his activities by including helpful background information about his various adversaries pulled from a wealth of modern scholarship. He recounts Caesar's conquest of the Celtic tribes of Gaul against a vivid tapestry of the Celtic culture gleaned from such works as Rankin's "Celts and the Classical World, Cunliff's "The Ancient Celts", and Green's "The World of the Druids". I especially found the defeats or near-defeats suffered at the hands of the Celts as fascinating as Caesar's famous victory at Alesia.

The details of a surprise attack by Belgic tribes was particularly intense and sadly ironic because Caesar was essentially saved by his future Civil War opponent, Labienus.

"He [Caesar] had been caught unprepared for a surprise assault of such force and speed. His army would surely have been overwhelmed had it not been for the training and experience they had gained during the past year. There was no time to call his officers together and form a plan , so each organized whatever men were nearest and struck back at the Belgae. With a herculean effort, the Roman troops on the eastern side of the battlefield were able to push the Atrebatas and then the Vironmandui back across the river with heavy losses on both sides, but the Nervii on the western end would not yield and pressed the Romans until they fell back in a hopeless struggle to save their camp. The Nervii stormed over the uncompleted walls of the Roman stronghold, killing many of the legionaries and threatening to outflank the Roman forces who had already crossed the river. Caesar had been rushing madly to every corner of the battlefield, but when he saw the dire threat at the camp, he leapt from his horse, grabbed a sword, and joined the fray."

Although Caesar's men rallied with their commander beside them calling them by name, their plight was dire. They managed to stop the encirclement and were presently reinforced by the the arrival of the two

legions that had escorted the baggage train. But the real turning point of the battle hinged on the counterattack led by Labienus who, seeing Caesar's desperate struggle, dashed back across the river.

"His arrival brought such hope to the beleaguered men around Caesar that even those who had been seriously wounded propped themselves against their shields for support to continue to fight."

With the tide of battle now turned the Belgic warriors demonstrated their own ferocity and determination to remain an unconquered people.

"As the hours passed, the Romans slowly tightened the circle on them, hacking and killing as each Belgic warrior fought with all his might. In the end, the few Nervii who were left stood on a mound formed by their fallen comrades and - pulling the Roman spears from the dead bodies of their friends - threw them back down at the legions."

These images brought echoes of Thermopylae to mind.

Many critics of Caesar's activities in Gaul have portrayed Caesar and his commanders as ruthless perpetrators of genocide without significant provocation but Freeman, using the details of engagements retold in Caesar's Gallic Wars, recounts numerous incidents of Gallic duplicity after peace agreements were concluded. But Freeman also points out that Caesar did not delude himself with proclamations that he was bringing "civilization" to the Gauls. Instead he said Caesar candidly observed, "Human nature everywhere yearns for freedom and hates submitting to domination by another."

"The Romans never pretended that they were bringing freedom or a better way of life to the peoples they conquered." Freeman states. "They frankly admitted that they were only interested in increasing their own power, wealth, and security through conquest."

I have previously only read isolated passages of accounts of Caesar's Alexandrian Wars so I also found that portion of Freeman's book particularly fascinating. Many books and films about this period seem to omit most references to intervention by Cleopatra's sister Arsinoe and her commander Ganymedes. Many accounts of the confrontation between the Alexandrians and Caesar seem to focus on the activities of the Egyptian general Achilles and the spoiled child-pharaoh Ptolemy XIII. But Freeman recounts how Achilles was actually murdered by Ganymedes and most of the near disasters suffered by Caesar's forces, besieged in the palace, were masterminded by this militarily astute courtier. Freeman also details the urban warfare that Caesar was forced to conduct in Alexandria that sounded eerily familiar to anyone who watches CNN regularly. I was also surprised to read that the often-portrayed luxurious "honeymoon" cruise up the Nile was a deliberate show of military force since the royal barge was accompanied by over 400 ships crammed with Roman troops. I am now more convinced than ever that Caesar's effort to father a child with Cleopatra was a deliberate act to obtain a client king related by blood to secure Egypt without annexing it and risking its plunder by a corrupt proconsular governor in the future.

Freeman mentioned Caesar's epilepsy only in passing early on in the text. This surprised me since I have long suspected that a head wound Caesar sustained on campaign was actually the cause of the increased frequency of seizures Caesar suffered toward the end of his life and perhaps one of the reasons for the apparent lack of political judgment he exercised at the time of the Africa triumph when he included unpopular tableaux depicting the deaths of Scipio and Cato. Freeman only observed that Caesar showed particularly bad taste in celebrating a triumph over his Roman opponents and how this had upset his normally adoring crowd. There were at least four significant seizures documented by the ancient sources (Plutarch, Suetonius, Appian, and Pliny) that modern experts conclude, according to J. R. Hughes, Department of Neurology, School of Medicine, University of Illinois at Chicago, "were probably complex partial seizures: (1) while listening to an oration by Cicero, (2) in the Senate while being offered the Emperor's Crown, and in military campaigns, (3) near Thapsus (North Africa) and (4) Corduba (Spain)."

Drs. J.G Gomez, J.A. Kotler, and J.B. Long, Division of Neurological Surgery, Holy Cross Hospital, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, conducted a pathological analysis of Caesar's reported symptoms and behavioral changes in 1995 and suggested he may have been suffering from a brain tumor. "The patient had late onset of seizures in the last two years of his life, headaches, personality changes. Upon reexamination of existing Julius Caesar iconography, busts, statues and minted coins no skull deformities have been noted. Identification of a skull deformity as described by Suetonius would have confirmed the suspicion of meningioma involving the convexity of the cerebral hemispheres. Meningioma or slow-growing supratentorial glioma may well have been responsible for this man's illness."

In any event, I think a man who had demonstrated such a superior grasp of Roman politics in the past would not have committed such blunders on purpose or because success had simply "gone to his head".

Freeman included a wonderful compendium at the end of the book that listed his sources for various sections within the text that is a valuable reference for readers wishing to learn more about specific events in Caesar's life. A comprehensive bibliography and index rounded out the text's impressive list of source materials. There were only two things contained in the book that gave me pause. One was a reference to a pilum not being designed as a throwing weapon but rather a thrusting weapon. I think this must have been a lapse in editing as Freeman was comparing Roman weapons with other weapons of the ancient world. Alexander's Macedonians carried sarissas, that, unlike commonly used Greek spears, were not designed for throwing but for thrusting. Likewise, the Roman gladius was designed for thrusting rather than slashing. But a Roman pilum was designed to bend on impact to make it difficult to remove and Freeman pointed this out. So, I would think a weapon so designed was obviously intended primarily for throwing. The other error was the inclusion of an image of a sculptured head of Lucius Cornelius Sulla labeled as Gaius Marius in the photo insert section. It was provided by the Bridgeman Art Library and perhaps the labeling error was theirs. The head is in the permanent collection of the Glyptotek in Munich, Germany as indicated but according to an overwhelming majority of people on the web, including the scholars who maintain Vroma.org, the head belongs to Marius' arch enemy, Sulla. See <http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/optima...>

Satwik Govindarajula says

After finishing the book, I feel in equal measures, enlightened and confused.

The book in itself seems excellent and truly immersive.

Freeman has done an amazing job at recounting the events through apparent vigorous research.

The only question I am left with at the end, though is about Caesar's motivations towards the end, leading to such a tragic end to his legacy.

If I were to believe everything from the book, casting aside any interpretative anomalies in favour of Freeman's expertise in the field, Caesar had been the metaphorical good guy right until the time he was given the ultimate control. Even Freeman himself could only give us a few presumed bases for such actions, though nothing seems to really add up. Hubris seems like as good a reason as any, although it seems highly uncharacteristic of Caesar to succumb to it.

I would be eternally grateful if someone could suggest another book which will explain this.

Travis says

This was a good overview of Julius Caesar's life, but if you are well read on Ancient Roman history and the

Roman Civil War, this book won't provide much new information for you. In order to make this book fit into its small page size, the author had to leave out a lot of details in regards to battles and personal conflicts, although he talks about the latter in a bit more detail than the former.

However, the one area where the author delves into detail is in describing the tribes of Gaul and Germany, making the Gallic Wars/Invasion of Britain sections the longest. I think Freeman has written previous works on Celtic tribes, so his experience shows and I learned a few things about the tribes/conflicts I previously didn't know.

Although the nitpicking historian in me caught a few errors, such as when Freeman stated the pilum was used for stabbing, not for throwing, when in fact it was for throwing. A fact he seems to get right later on in the book.

The ending also feels very, very rushed and concludes in record time, talking in little detail about Caesar's reforms upon winning the war, his excesses, the plotters and the plot to assassinate Caesar.

I would recommend this book highly to new comers or those with limited knowledge about Julius Caesar, as it will get you started in the right direction. I wouldn't recommend it for those well versed in the era or those looking for intense levels of detail about battles or Caesar's struggle with the Optimates.

Matt says

As a historian, Philip Freeman is thorough. As a writer, Freeman is thoroughly entertaining. He has succeeded brilliantly in bringing to life one of the most famous historical figures of all time. I found myself captivated by Freeman's narrative style and I flew through his engaging story of Caesar's life and times. Having read Shakespeare's treatment a number of times, it was thrilling to fill in the blanks and better understand the historical context in which this fascinating life was lived. Time and again I found myself fully invested in the tension between Caesar's populist sympathies and despotic ambition. Freeman's scholarship is never in doubt but the really pleasant surprise is his ability to turn even the minutiae of everyday life in the first-century B.C. into an integral part of a captivating tale. From the political hotbed of Rome to the wild outposts of Gaul and beyond, Freeman will have you absorbed. A truly wonderful book. Highly recommended.

Kinksrock says

This is an easily read and enjoyable biography of Julius Caesar. Up to this point, I was mostly familiar with Julius Caesar from Shakespeare's play and mentions of him in other history books.

Those of you who read my reviews of history and biographies will be able to predict what criticism is coming: Although the two maps at the beginning of the book are helpful, especially the one of Gaul, this book could have used more maps. Most of the book is about Caesar's battles, and I would have liked to have had maps showing those battles.

After reading this book, I am not filled with the same admiration of Caesar that I had of Napoleon after reading about him. Caesar comes across as mostly being a warrior. Yes, at the end, there's a brief section talking about his other accomplishments, such as putting into effect the calendar that we still use today and inventing a delicious salad. (Okay, I'm joking about the second.) But I don't come out of reading this book

with an appreciation of why Alexander Hamilton would call him the greatest man who ever lived. A great general, yes, but extremely brutal, so much so that our modern day sensibilities are disgusted to read of how he slaughtered the tribes he defeated and sold the survivors into slavery. A skilled politician, yes, but not always sensitive to how his acts would turn others against him. In the end, I understood why a group of senators felt it was necessary to assassinate him.

Nancy says

I love it when some of the best writing in classical studies comes from professors at smaller colleges like Philip Freeman, who hails from Luther College in Iowa. This is the second book by Freeman that I've read, and I enjoy his books not only for their scholarship but their wonderful sense of narrative. Here his subject is another ambitious and brilliant military strategist whose deeds shaped the world we live in. What really surprised me in reading this though is how much I didn't know about Julius Caesar.

I assumed that he came from a noble family, but hadn't realized how prestigious it was, though in decline for some time, impoverished and on the margins of Roman power.

That he grew up in a low-class neighborhood of Rome called Suburba (from whence comes our word "suburb"), a grimy, gritty area known for "its tradesmen, prostitutes, and foreign residents," where he lived in the family home for over 30 years.

(This background would explain both his ambition and his populist leanings, though one has to wonder how much his sympathies really lay with the people and how much he used this as a political springboard. Rome was a republic, but it was ruled by the leading families whose interests were self-serving and whose politics were corrupt; freemen had the vote, but it was usually bought, and the ruling families controlled the people with free bread allotments and entertainment in the form of public baths and spectacles like gladiatorial contests. Caesar and others in the populist party sought to trim the power of the ruling elite, legislate land reform, and extend Roman citizenship, all measure unpopular with the wealthy upper-class.)

That he was a gifted orator and lawyer as well as an accomplished writer.

That his climb to the apex of political power began rather ironically (since he notorious for seducing the wives of other men) with his election to the highest religious office in Rome, that of Pontifex Maximus, which was conferred upon the winner for life and came with a house in the Forum.

That he sought his fortune (really more than glory) through military conquest and he did that by subduing the Gauls.

That the man he formed a crucial alliance with early in his career, Pompey the Great, who became his son-in-law when he married off his daughter to him, was the man he later turned against and went to civil war with, a contest Caesar won and which led to his being named "dictator for life."

That he was assassinated on the eve of setting out for what would have been another lengthy military campaign, this time in the east, against the Parthians in modern-day Iran.

That his last words whispered to Brutus, who Caesar was fond of, were not "Et tui, Brute?" as Shakespeare would have it, but according to Suetonius and Dio Cassius, "Kai su, teknon?" which although apparently tricky to translate from the Greek, has been taken to mean "Even you, my child?"

David Ruiz says

A remarkable man that Gaius Julius Caesar was. I never seem to be astonished by the life of Julius Caesar and his greatest accomplishments that led to the demise of the Roman Republic that would later lead to the rise of the Roman Empire. This book talks about his life and his rise to power, how he came to be who he became.

Masen Production says

“Philip Freeman's Julius Caesar is a fascinating and well-written book. I have read many books on the life of Julius Caesar and he is one of my favorite leaders of all times. I can understand what it must have been to serve under him or stand against him. Even 2000 years later one knows that he was a master tactician, intelligent politician, supreme leader who stood in front always and above all he too had flaws which finally saw to his downfall.

Freeman's book provides a highly readable account of Caesar's fascinating life. A journey from the Suburbs (suburbia) of Rome to the master military leader and engineer of innovative skills under pressure. His years as Pontifex Maximus (chief priest of Rome). Among other things he redesigned the calendar to the one we still use today. To the extent the Month of July is attributed to his family name Julian.

After reading this book we are left to form our own opinion of this controversial man. I strongly recommend this book to all.”

Martin says

I initially began to read this book as "filler" material, you know the time when you have finished one book and are still looking for the next book that interests you. However, once I started reading I couldn't stop. This was an easy read with just the right amount of detail and summary to keep it interesting. My view on Julius Caesar has been modified and my understanding of politics as well.

I recommend this book to anyone interested in great men and their deeds as well as anyone with an interest in history. I feel better educated after reading this book.
