

History of Rome

(1957)

TAGS:



General information	
<i>Title of the work</i>	Storia di Roma
<i>Title of the work in english</i>	History of Rome
<i>Year of publication</i>	1957
<i>Publisher</i>	Rizzoli
<i>Original language</i>	Italian
<i>Target and Age Group</i>	General public



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Additional information

Contents & Purpose

The book is a historical essay about the history of ancient Rome, yet deployed in an informative and manner that draws the reader in. It covers the centuries from its foundation, rooted in the myth, up till the empire's collapse due to barbarian invasions.

A very general appendix about the main events in chronological order is provided. The appendix is divided into "political and military events" on one side and "civil, artistic and cultural events" on the other. Even this timeline isn't solely limited to facts; on the contrary, it makes a succinct yet quite prosaic first narration of the main events.

Thereafter, the proper historical telling takes place. It is divided into sixteen chapters titled as follows: *Ab Urbe condita*; *Poor Etruscans*; *The Agrarian Kings*; *The Merchant Kings*; *Porsenna*; *SPQR*; *Pyrrhus*; *Education*; *The cursus honorum*; *The Gods*; *The City*; *Carthage*; *Regulus*; *Hannibal*; *Scipio*; *Graecia capta* (My translation from Italian).

In 2018 Rizzoli published a revised edition, with added illustrations. This goes along with the overall informative and popular tone of the book; it may appeal especially to the youngest reader.

Further comments

The work first appeared as a serial supplement to the Italian newspaper *Domenica del Corriere*, in the fifties. When the articles were eventually collected and published in 1957, Montanelli was widely accused not only of superficiality and carelessness, but even impiety. In fact, Montanelli's informal writing, adopted for what was considered an academic field of interest, was quite unusual for his times. And yet mostly because of this it made such an overall impression. Montanelli's defense against such accusations from the academic circles is mostly to be found in the foreword of the 1988 reprint of the book. Here he openly admitted that with his *Storia di Roma* he did not claim to add any original contribution to the understanding of Roman history, neither did he give any new interpretations to historical events. He considered that he was successful because he engaged "a few thousands Italians, so far uninterested in it (i.e. Roman history) due to the pompousness with which it was told to them before" (my translation). His very purpose was to attract Italians to their own history, teach them about its characters with the vividness of true and once living men, instead of



marbled statues. Interestingly, Montanelli had previously experienced the fascist era of the Italian government. One of the themes of Benito Mussolini's rhetoric about the national conscience was indeed a reference to the ancient glorious Roman past. Historical Roman figures were overall anachronistically presented with the only purpose to serve the regime. With an in-depth view of the pulsing core of Roman history and its protagonists, Montanelli tried to revitalize and make more attractive what was often confined within the academic circle.

Montanelli's style is geared towards keeping the reader highly engaged throughout the narrative. One of the main rhetorical devices he adopted is the use of plural first person pronoun. This leads the author to use such expressions as "we don't know", "we are sure about it", "as far as we know", "we doubt", "we ignore", "we don't know precisely". These constructions are usually concentrated in the beginning of the chapters, when introducing the main topics. By so doing the author makes an attempt to position himself at the same level as the readers, attracting them to what is presented as an informal and horizontal conversation between author and reader.

Furthermore, Montanelli often tends towards using a colloquial register, in order to highlight the exciting ancient events which stands out compared to the usual pattern of academic communication.

The author depicts historical facts and figures combining them with classical mythology and ancient popular figures. This expedient brings the readers closer to facts and leads them to a fuller, more inclusive and possibly longer-lasting understanding. This trend is obvious particularly in the first part of the book, where the historical events are thickly interspersed with the mythological narrative which the ancient authors themselves used to explain events from the remote past.

