



# Rubicon: The Triumph and Tragedy of the Roman Republic

*By Tom Holland*

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**Rubicon: The Triumph and Tragedy of the Roman Republic** By Tom Holland

The Roman Republic was the most remarkable state in history. What began as a small community of peasants camped among marshes and hills ended up ruling the known world. "Rubicon" paints a vivid portrait of the Republic at the climax of its greatness - the same greatness which would herald the catastrophe of its fall. This was the century of Julius Caesar, the gambler whose addiction to glory led him to the banks of the Rubicon, and beyond; of Cicero, whose defence of freedom would make him a byword for eloquence; of Spartacus, the slave who dared to challenge a superpower; of Cleopatra, the queen who did the same. Tom Holland brings to life this strange and unsettling civilization, with its extremes of ambition and self-sacrifice, bloodshed and desire. Yet alien as it was, the Republic still holds up a mirror to us. Its citizens were obsessed by celebrity chefs, all-night dancing and exotic pets; they fought elections in law courts and were addicted to spin; they toppled foreign tyrants in the name of self-defence. Two thousand years may have passed, but we remain the Romans' heirs.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

After a palace coup demolished the reign of King Tarquin of Rome in 509 B.C., a republican government flourished, providing every person an opportunity to participate in political life in the name of liberty. As Holland, a novelist and adapter of Herodotus' Histories for British radio, points out in this lively re-creation of the republic's rise and fall, the seeds of destruction were planted in the very soil in which the early republic flourished. It was more often members of the patrician classes who had the resources to achieve political success. Such implicit class distinctions in an ostensibly classless society also gave rise to a new group of rulers who acted like monarchs. Holland chronicles the rise to power of such leaders as Sulla Felix, Pompey, Cicero and Julius Caesar. Some of these leaders, such as Pompey, appealed to the masses by expanding the republic through military conquest; others, like Cicero, worked to reinforce class distinctions. Holland points to the suppression of the Gracchian revolution—a series of reforms in favor of the poor pushed by the Gracchus brothers in the second century B.C.—as the beginning of the end of the republic, providing the context into which Julius Caesar would step with his own attempts to save the republic. As Holland points out, Caesar actually precipitated civil wars and helped to reestablish an imperial form of government in Rome. With the skill of a good novelist, Holland weaves a rip-roaring tale of political and historical intrigue as he chronicles the lively personalities and problems that led to the end of the Roman republic. Maps.

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From [Booklist](#)

*\*Starred Review\** Ancient history lives in this vivid chronicle of the tumultuous events that impelled Julius Caesar across the one small river that separated the Roman Republic from cataclysmic civil war. With the narrative talents that have established him as a prominent radio personality and novelist, Holland pulls readers deep into the treacherous riptide of Roman politics. To show how Caesar eventually masters that tide—if only temporarily—Holland first traces the bloody career of the ruthless dictator Sulla, who rescues an imperiled Republic even as he breaches its founding traditions. Those breaches deeply disturb the moralist Cato, but the indulgent luxury of a post-Sullan world suits Caesar well enough: a popular favorite, he sets the fashion in loose-fitting togas—and waits for his fated opening. Recounting Caesar's eventual seizure of power in pages as irresistibly cadenced as the legionnaires' march, Holland probes the tragic ironies that quickly expose the bold conqueror to idealistic assassins, who themselves soon perish in the rise of the Augustan Empire. Not a work for scrupulous scholars, but a richly resonant history for the general reader. *Bryce Christensen*

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Review

'Holland has the rare gift of making deep scholarship accessible and exciting. A brilliant and completely absorbing study' A. N. Wilson, author of *The Victorians* 'This is the best one-volume narrative history of the Rome between King Tarquin and Emperor Augustus I have ever read. The story of Rome's experiment with republicanism - peopled by such giants as Caesar, Pompey, Cato and Cicero - is told with perfect freshness, fine wit and true scholarship' Andrew Roberts

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