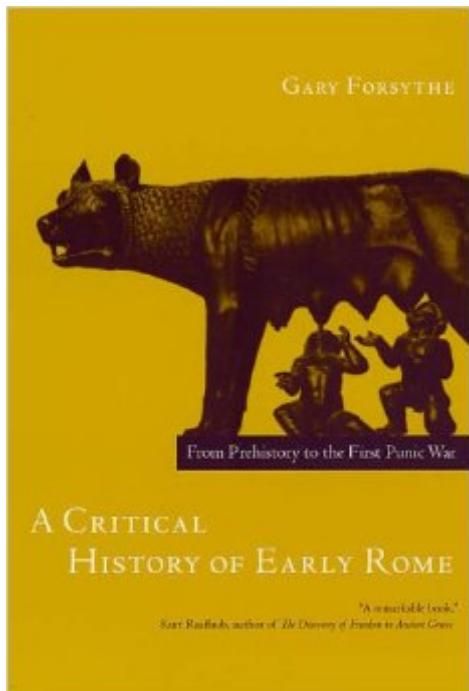


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A Critical History Of Early Rome: From Prehistory To The First Punic War



Synopsis

During the period from Rome's Stone Age beginnings on the Tiber River to its conquest of the Italian peninsula in 264 B.C., the Romans in large measure developed the social, political, and military structure that would be the foundation of their spectacular imperial success. In this comprehensive and clearly written account, Gary Forsythe draws extensively from historical, archaeological, linguistic, epigraphic, religious, and legal evidence as he traces Rome's early development within a multicultural environment of Latins, Sabines, Etruscans, Greeks, and Phoenicians. His study charts the development of the classical republican institutions that would eventually enable Rome to create its vast empire, and provides fascinating discussions of topics including Roman prehistory, religion, and language. In addition to its value as an authoritative synthesis of current research, *A Critical History of Early Rome* offers a revisionist interpretation of Rome's early history through its innovative use of ancient sources. The history of this period is notoriously difficult to uncover because there are no extant written records, and because the later historiography that affords the only narrative accounts of Rome's early days is shaped by the issues, conflicts, and ways of thinking of its own time. This book provides a groundbreaking examination of those surviving ancient sources in light of their underlying biases, thereby reconstructing early Roman history upon a more solid evidentiary foundation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The author has produced a timely corrective to the traditional narrative history of Rome's beginnings written by T J Cornell a decade before. Cornell's work is exhaustive but a fair proportion of its target

audience will not be critical of his general acceptance of the later narrative sources for early Rome nor are they likely to challenge Cornell's confidence in the tradition they contain. Forsythe intervenes at this point, providing us with a survey of Rome's history to the first Punic war that is sceptical about how much we can know with certainty, with greater scepticism the further back in time we go. This is an important work for scholarly and general audiences. But one will wonder too whether it amounts more to an over-corrective to Cornell than to simply a judicious and cautious history. Forsythe's scepticism mostly consists of pronouncements that a figure, date or event transmitted by the narrative tradition (usually Livy) is "unhistorical". This is often stated without offering alternate explanations and, in some cases, without any justification, sometimes when it is not immediately clear why such an element of the tradition should so obviously be a later intrusion. Readers should therefore be aware that "critical" is the operative word in this book and, while that is to be praised in view of the difficult nature of the evidence, one should, every now and then, turn that critical faculty back on to any author who makes claims about what is and what is not an authentic element in a highly problematic tradition.

This extensive reference work that covers from the Neolithic period to nearly the end of the Republic is not a casual read. Voluminous source references, ancient and modern, integrated into the text along with interspersed sociology and history makes for some difficult reading. It's more suitable as a study text than a popular history. It will likely be a standard reference covering ancient development of Italian immigrations followed by the Roman kingdom and Republic. Forsythe is especially adept at weaving mythical origins into the history. He covers development of religion and the legal system including a chapter devoted to the twelve tables. The best of the book is a history of the Etruscans, Latins, Sabines, Samnites, etc. and their gradual incorporation into the eventual 35 tribes that became Roman citizens. Development of early Roman foreign policy starting with Greece and Carthage is very well done. A history of Italian warfare, Roman defeats as well as successes is interspersed with sociology. Forsythe is careful to explain that the historical sources carry a heavy pro-Roman bias, leaving room for further research into veracity. Reading from start to finish is a hard push, but the more I indulge in browsing this book the more I appreciate it.

I have enjoyed this book, but for many readers that are not used to a text book style almost of a book

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