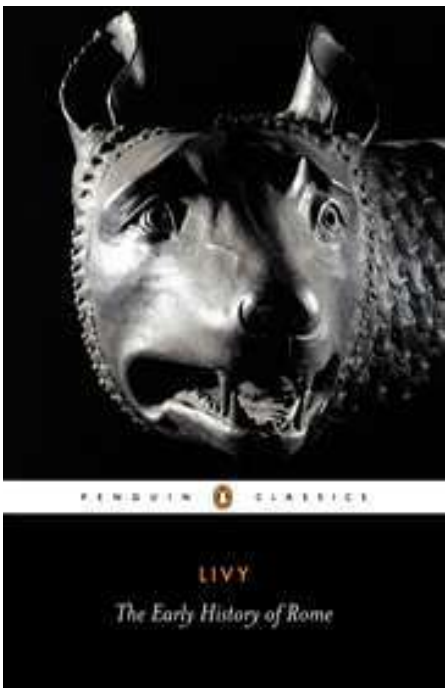

The History of Rome, Books 1-5: The Early History of Rome

Livy , Aubrey de Sélincourt (Translator) , Robert Maxwell Ogilvie (Introduction) , Stephen P. Oakley (Preface)

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Livy (c. 59 BC-AD 17) dedicated most of his life to writing some 142 volumes of history, the first five of which comprise The Early History of Rome. With stylistic brilliance, he chronicles nearly 400 years of history, from the founding of Rome (traditionally dated to 757 BC) to the Gallic invasion in 386 BC - an era which witnessed the reign of seven kings, the establishment of the Republic, civil strife and brutal conflict. Bringing compelling characters to life, and re-presenting familiar tales - including the tragedy of Coriolanus and the story of Romulus and Remus - The Early History is a truly epic work, and a passionate warning that Rome should learn from its history.

The History of Rome, Books 1-5: The Early History of Rome Details

Date	:	Published March 28th 2002 by Penguin Classics (first published -29)
ISBN	:	9780140448092
Author	:	Livy , Aubrey de Sélincourt (Translator) , Robert Maxwell Ogilvie (Introduction) , Stephen P. Oakley (Preface)
Format	:	Paperback 488 pages
Genre	:	History, Classics, Nonfiction, Ancient History, Roman

From Reader Review The History of Rome, Books 1-5: The Early History of Rome for online ebook

Andrea Way says

Read for university this year. This was an intersection read and helpful if wanting to learn more about Ancient Rome.

Darwin8u says

I'm reading primarily the Penguin Livy (Four Vol) and the Loeb Classics Livy (14 Volumes), but I'm primarily reviewing the Loeb versions. So for the Early History of Rome please see my reviews of:

1. Livy I: History of Rome, Books 1-2
2. Livy II: History of Rome, Books 3-4
3. Livy III: History of Rome, Books 5-7

Otherwise:

Look, that you may see how cheap they hold their bodies whose eyes are fixed upon renown!"
- Livy, Book II, xii 13

"Oratory was invented for doubtful matters"
- Livy, Book III, lv 3

"Vae victis!"
- Livy, Book V. xlviii. 9

Book 1 (Rome Under the Kings) & Book 2 (The Beginnings of the Republic)

This might be the first book to bankrupt me. Or rather books. I own several versions of Livy (Folio, The first Penguin (Books 1-5), second (Books 6-10), and third (Hannibal; Books 21-30), plus the first six volumes of the Loeb's History of Rome by Livy). I've decided to track and read through the Loeb, while listening to Audible, but that is going to require me to buy another 8 volumes. The good from that is, well, eight more little red books. The bad? Well, these little books retail for $26 (although you can usually find either really good used copies or new copies for $12-$18). So I'm looking at almost $200 to finish purchasing these books and I've already spent about $60. So, why read the Loeb version?

Quod est in Latinam verso | Because Latin is on the left
Et lingua mea sedenti in recto | And English sits on the right *

Now those who know me, KNOW I don't read or speak Latin. So, why is having Livy in Latin and English that important? Because some day I DO want to read Latin. Because it pleases me. Because if I read on the recto side a phrase that strikes my fancy, like:

"Their name was irksome and a menace to liberty."

- Livy, Book II. ii. 4

I can go almost straight across and discover what that was in Latin:

"Non placere nomen, periculosum libertati esse."

It delights me. I know that probably sounds a bit affected and effete, but hell it entertains me. I don't complain that American consumers spend more than $25.3 billion a year on video games. So, let me have my 14 little red books. I'm not sure how fast I'll get through all of them. I think for my family's financial stability I'll drip and drab these out through-out the year.

* I kill me.

Book 3 (The Patricians at Bay) & Book 4 (War and Politics)

My second (of fourteen) Livy's History of Rome covers books 3 and 4 (467-404BC). It largely deals with early growing pains in Rome as its second census shows its population swollen beyond 100,000. The tensions between the plebs (represented politically by the tribunes) and the patricians (represented politically by the senate). My favorite parts of Book 3 dealt with Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus, the machinations of the decemvirs, and Appius Claudius claiming Verginius' daughter Verginia as a slave.

My favorite part of Book 4 was the debate over a law about marriage between patricians and plebeians and the right for plebeians to be consuls. Canuleius' speech from this section was brilliant, and could easily have been used 2000+ years later when debating a woman's right to vote, etc.. Here are some of Livy's best lines:

'When we raise the question of making a plebeian consul, is it the same as if we were to say that a slave or a freedman should attain that office? Have you any conception of the contempt in which you are held? They would take from you, were it possible, a part of the daylight. That you breathe, that you speak, that you have the shape of men, fills them with resentment." (Book IV, iii 7-8)

"'But,' you say, 'from the time the kings were expelled no plebeian has ever been consul.' Well, what then? Must no new institution be adopted? Ought that which has not yet been done -- and in a new nation many things have not yet been done -- never to be put in practice, even if it be expedient?" (Book IV, iv 1).

"Finally, I would ask, is it you, or the Roman People, who have supreme authority? Did the banishment of the kings bring you dominion, or to all men equal liberty?" (Book IV, v 1).

Book 5 (Gauls at Rome)

One of my favorite characters in the book is Marcus Furius Camillus, one of Rome's great, early generals. He was given at his death the title of Second Founder of Rome after he helped to defend a sacked Rome against the Senoni chieftain Brennus and his gallic warriors.

Some men are generals. Some are statesmen. Others just seem to have it all. Camellus is one of those men who seem destined to lead, protect, and inspire. These three books are filled with battles, wars, and manly, martial speeches. I think one of the best parts of these early Roman histories of Livy are his speeches.

Obviously, he is embellishing things and probably making a great deal up, but still -- this is damn good stuff. Here are some of Livy's best lines:

'Do we think the bodies of our soldiers so effeminate, their hearts so faint, that they cannot endure to be one winter in camp, away from home; that like sailors they must wage war with an eye on the weather, observing the seasons, incapable of withstanding heat or cold?" (Book V, vi 4)

"The gods themselves never laid hands upon the guilty; it was enough if they armed with an opportunity for vengeance those who had been wronged." (Book V, xi 16).

"...since it commonly turned out that in proportion as a man was prone to seek a leading share of toil and danger, he was slow in plundering." (Book V, xx 6).

Jeremy says

Straight forward and enjoyable, there are none of those 20 page long digressions which plague the greek historians. The real draw of this is that it shows how a small settlement in the ancient world developed and gained power until it became an entire civilization. It's obvious that Livy really really loves Rome, and at times it can feel like pure propoganda, but its balanced out with some very even-handed depictions of major conflicts and crazy personal ambitions. In their early stages, you can't help but root for these scrappy guys and their big dreams.

Marijan says

kao i ve?ina povijesnih izvora-negdje brže, negdje sporije, ovdje govor, ondje klasna borba, tu i tamo 'i idu?e godine volš?ani i sabinjani su harali po selima' i tako. tko voli povijest Rima, dobro je za pro?itati.

Jan-Maat says

[founded on the firm principle of taking whatever ever you want, fairly and squarely, by force of arms (hide spoiler)]

Justin Evans says

I'm going to read as much of Livy as I can stomach over the summer. My stomach comes into it because I don't have the patience for or the interest in military hijinx to see me through every page. And I fear that this volume is setting a high bar for those to follow. There's war here, sure, but a real stress on internal matters instead.

And those internal matters are, essentially, what people who haven't read Marx think Marx is: the patricians will come up with any excuse to maintain their privileges (inter alia, patriotism, security, religion, dignity, tradition...), and the plebeians will fold sometimes, but always come back and demand better treatment. The

early history of Rome, as told by Livy, is class warfare. This is fascinating stuff, if a little repetitive (tribunes introduce a law to give the plebes more land; the senate rejects it; scuffles; appeals to the Greatness of Our State by the senate; plebes let it lie for a while so they can beat up on the Aequii or whomever; the law gets passed; the patricians find a new way to screw over the plebes; repeat from the top). But the repetition is made bearable by some great stories, and the overall pace. We move pretty quickly from year to year.

I was also surprized by Livy's ability to think critically about his sources. Everyone says Livy just reports miracles and tall tales as if they were true; in my experience, he's pretty good about highlighting when that's going on. On the other hand, he has no interest in making his story cohere, which is a bit sad. On the other hand, that lack of coherence means the reader can judge for herself why things happened as they did, and Livy's occasional moralizing never seems to heavy handed, or to influence his actual presentation. Looking forward to the second set of five.

Oh, one thing: the translation is kind of funny. Luce delights in using uncommon words when there's no real need for it; no doubt it's meant to represent archaisms in Livy himself, but it might annoy you.

Yann says

Passionnant ! La naissance de Rome. Au delà des épisodes connus (Remus et Romulus, les Horaces et les Curiaces, Numa,Tarquin, Lucrèce, Brennus, ...), outre les peintures de bravoures ou de félonies, des guerres incessante, Tite-Live dessine la constitution d'un espace politique caractérisé par une rivalité permanente entre plébéiens et patriciens. Ballotés de périls en périls, Rome tire profit de ses expériences et créé petit à petit les institutions qui permettent de conserver au mieux l'équilibre et le bien public. C'est centré sur Rome , donc on voyage moins qu'avec Hérodote, les situations ne sont pas aussi complexes et instructives que dans Thucydide, mais on ne s'ennuie jamais, grâce à un style clair et agréable, à un sujet grandiose et édifiant.

Roman Clodia says

This has sometimes been dismissed because of the 'inaccuracy' of the history, but the very idea of history in classical times was different from our definition: there was no strict divide between literature, history and (moral) philosophy and so we shouldn't judge ancient works by the same criteria that we might use of modern history books. Livy, writing under Augustus, was, like his contemporary Vergil, mythologising about the foundation of Rome, and his story of where the Romans came from and how the Roman character was formed, tells us more about Roman self-identity (or the way they wanted to see themselves) at the turning point between the Republic and the principate than about the past.

Having said that, Livy tells a fabulous story: from the early kings to their expulsion by the first Marcus Brutus and the beginning of the Republic, from Rome's small beginnings to her conquests and domination of Italy, it's all here. All the familiar stories of Romulus and Remus mothered by the wolf, Horatius at the bridge, the rape and suicide of Lucretia, the tragic story of Corialanus and his mother are here, and it's fascinating to read them in their original context.

Livy is lively, tragic, vivid and witty and that all comes over in the translation. Read this together with Vergil

and compare their creative conception of what it means to be Roman, where they have come from and where they are going.

Bas says

"They were all, in their way, successive ‘founders’ of Rome. Moreover it cannot be doubted that Brutus, who made for himself so great a name by the expulsion of Tarquin, would have done his country the greatest disservice, had he yielded too soon to his passion for liberty and forced the abdication of any of the previous kings. One has but to think of what the populace was like in those early days – a rabble of vagrants, mostly runaways and refugees – and to ask what would have happened if they had suddenly found themselves protected from all authority by inviolable sanctuary, and enjoying complete freedom of action, if not full political rights.

In such circumstances, unrestrained by the power of the throne, they would, no doubt, have set sail on the stormy sea of democratic politics, swayed by the gusts of popular eloquence and quarrelling for power with the governing class of a city which did not even belong to them, before any real sense of community had had time to grow.

That sense – the only true patriotism – comes slowly and springs from the heart: it is founded upon respect for the family and love of the soil. Premature ‘liberty’ of this kind would have been a disaster: we should have been torn to pieces by petty squabbles before we had ever reached political maturity, which, as things were, was made possible by the long quiet years under monarchical government; for it was that government which, as it were, nursed our strength and enabled us ultimately to produce sound fruit from liberty, as only a politically adult nation can."

Pete daPixie says

I thought Livy's 'The Rise of Rome' Books 1-5 to be some of the hardest reading I've done for quite some time. Like eating cardboard. The more I read, the harder it was to digest the thing. A historian whose work I read recently, my colander brain prevents recall of who this was, advocated strongly for reading the literature of a period to fully understand the history. So I met the advice half way in deciding to read this book.
Titus Livius wrote 142 books in this monster series of his history of Rome, from it's foundation in 753bc to 9bc. Only 35 books survive. (Thank the gods for that!) This series from 1-5 covers the formation of the city of Aeneas, after the fall of Troy, with guest appearances from Hercules and the dynamic duo of Romulus and Remus. Book 5 ends with the sack of the city by the Gauls in 390bc.
What is incredible about Livius' work is that all of this data was available at all in the first century bc. As well as consulting earlier historical writings from Fabius Pictor, Licinius Macer or Valerius Antias, he was also able to access histories recorded in the Linen Books kept in the Temple of Juno Moneta. (This was also home to Rome's mint, hence our money.)
Occasionally the narrative contains a gem. Information of the first settlements on Rome's hills, or the founding of temples or the mythical creation of the Isola Tiberina. However the bulk of this work covers the almost continuous attrition between the city and her neighbours, the Sabines, Etruscans, Volsci, Aequi, Fabii, Veii, etc. Or who were consuls for the year. What politics occupied the senate. Who stabbed who in the back, or who was sent into exile. Who offended the plebs.
As Livius states, 'the fates ordained the founding of this great city and the beginning of the world's mightiest

empire, second only to the power of the gods.' On the subject of gods, Romulus and Remus were born from a Vestal virgin, the father was Mars. The children were cast adrift in a basket to be reared by a she wolf. It is also interesting to learn that Romulus ascended bodily to heaven and that Rome was bidden to perform rituals by a voice from heaven on Mount Alba. All very familiar.

Jim says

This year I have determined to read a number of books written during the Roman Republic and Empire. I have started with Livy's **The Early History of Rome**, which covers the period from the founding of Rome to the sacking of the city by the Gauls in 386 B.C.

Although Livy was no match for the dark power of Tacitus, the story he tells is one of war all the time. From its founding, Rome was constantly at war with the Etruscans, the Sabines, the Volsci, and other nearby peoples. At the same time, from early in their existence, the patrician classes and the common people (or plebs) were at each other's throats. For the most part, the classes would come to some agreement when war threatened -- but not always.

It is interesting to speculate how it was that the Romans became so powerful after the Punic Wars with the Carthaginians. Could it be that they were so used to war that, over the centuries, they developed a superior military that was able to take on all comers?

Jon says

I read the reviews of Livy's History and I see that his writing has been badly misunderstood. Critics make two charges against it; one worthless, and one worthwhile.

The first is that Livy is reliant on myth and miraculous stories. He includes tales that are not possibly true, or have been pilfered from the Greeks. They complain also that Livy is too credulous about fantastic occurrences like, for example, when he observes talking cows or phenomenal weather.

But this charge is frankly stupid. It is preposterous to expect of ancient historians sensibilities that are modern. And, in any case, it presumes to judge what is the method best equipped for recounting a political story. This entry then will waste no more time answering charges of this sort. They do not deserve the dignity of a reply, let alone a serious one.

There is however a second criticism of Livy, one that must be answered. It says that Livy's History is flat; it is shaped to read as "And then... And then... And then...", one consul after another, and has no arc or great complication that it builds to. Livy, they say, is giving epic history, but without epic form. And by that reason his History is boring. It is tedious and dull, and at times almost admittedly so--when, for example, Livy emphasizes "once again" the Aequians and the Volscians are pillaging the Roman hinterland, since such, like his History, are routine in pattern.

This criticism is partly right, but mostly wrong. I concede his History is arranged in unepic form, but this is by design, not by accident. And when one reflects upon it, it's usage is actually quite ingenious.

If one wants to read the Rise of Rome, you must turn to Polybius. This is where Rome's rise as such is given in the classic history. Not however with Livy. His is the History of the Republic of Rome. They are different--the Rise and the Republic. And where the first might require epic arrangement, the second does not. Instead Livy has organized his narrative as a montage. The origin and life of Romulus, for example, is really a collection of unrelated accounts, but each to a purpose. First there is the story of Romulus's and Remus's adolescence; then their revenge against a wicked king; then the foundation of Rome and Remus's death; then a comparison between Hercules and Romulus; then the abduction of Sabine women; then the betrayal of a Roman fort by Tarpeius's daughter; then the intervention of Sabine women; and finally Romulus's strange disappearance. The narrative here does not aggregate into something larger. Though it progresses with time, each is a story of its own, adjoined only by the coincidence of their Roman association.

This technique of story-making is distinctive. And readers may be wrongly expecting from Livy qualities of the larger Roman genre of history that is dominated by the Polybian style. In Tacitus, in Gibbon--there you see the epic form of history told.

The question then should not be why Livy went wrong in his recount. That question, I have just argued, is a misapprehension of his History. Instead the question should be what motive Livy had to write the way that he did? Why the anti-epic? Was it a repudiation of Caesarian politics? Was Livy nostalgic for the Republic? Was it that he wanted to designify the great moments in their relation to the little? Did he want to elevate the ordinary travails of republican life to the level of the extra-ordinary? Or was his meaning purely moral? And does the History figure then only as a stage on which to portray the famous life lessons of Roman virtue?

These are questions to which I have not the answer. But they are questions that are fair to ask. And those who wait for Livy to ascend to lofty themes rather than attend to the small, will have had an experience similar to having heard something without listening to it.

Roger Burk says

Livy tells the traditional story of the first 365 years of Rome, from the wanderings of Aeneas to the sack of the city by Gauls in 386 B.C. Myth slides seamlessly into legend and then on into history. There is perhaps too much detail on who was consul each year and what inconclusive battles they fought, but the main events make a gripping story.

It seems early Rome was set up by random gangs of freebooters and riffraff who found a convenient place on top of the Palatine Hill to base their husbandry and raiding. Livy himself calls them "a rabble of vagrants, mostly runaways and refugees" (p. 105). Some of their kings were descended from slaves. Unlike Greeks, they welcomed many others, including former enemies, to join their commonwealth and receive citizenship. Around 670 B.C. (according to the tradition) they defeated the town of Alba Longa, whence their initial founders had come, and integrated the defeated into Rome, giving them citizenship and including their patricians into the Senate. But the Alba Longans had to move--the old town was demolished and all the houses pulled down (but not the temples, the Romans being a pious folk). This seems a shaky foundation for an integration of peoples on terms of equality, but the tradition assures us that it happened.

We learn that the early kings of Rome were elected by the people and confirmed by the Senate, though they served for life and their word was law. After the kings were expelled in 507 B.C., we have consuls, also elected and also having final decision authority, but two of them at a time, each a check on the other, and serving for one year only (and they could be tried and condemned after their term for what they did in

office). For the following century, while the Greeks entered their Golden Age, Rome fought more or less annual inconclusive wars with their neighbors, the Sabines, Aequians, Volscians, Etruscans, and so on, most within 10 or 20 miles of Rome. The method of war was to march into hostile territory and build a defensible camp, then raid the countryside until the enemy showed up and offered battle. One side or the other got defeated and scattered and fled to their walled town. The next year they did it again.

For 427 B.C., we learn of pious Romans' antipathy towards foreign forms of worship. A new cult was deemed debased and superstitious and so banned. The ancient Roman practices of getting divine instructions from the livers of animals and the flights of birds continued.

Warfare developed little during this long century, but politics did. Roman law did not provide for bankruptcy, and insolvent debtors could literally be put in chains, Roman citizens though they were. The plebs got tired of the patrician Senate and consuls deciding such things, and got constitutional change via a remarkable use of civil disobedience. In 493 B.C. they picked up and moved out of town to the Aventine Hill, leaving the patricians in a panic over the defenseless state of the town. The plebs were granted the right to elect tribunes whose person was sacrosanct and who could veto any act of the consuls. In 451 B.C. the "Twelve Tables" of laws were posted publicly to provide a sort of government by consent of the governed. More power-sharing was demanded by the plebs, and in many years "military tribunes with consular power" were elected instead of consuls. It's not so clear what the difference was, beyond the non-patrician title and the fact that these tribunes were three or four or more in number, not two. These military tribunes could legally be plebeians (unlike consuls), but they almost never were. Livy's sympathies are pretty clearly with the patricians in all this, but he does give us the contrast with a neighboring city where similar conflicts led to civil war, much bloodletting, and finally defeat and incorporation into Rome.

As the decades passed the Romans got better at achieving decisive results in their wars. One after another, neighboring towns and peoples asked for treaties of alliance, meaning mutual raiding ceased but they accepted political subordination to Rome. Finally, around 392 B.C. the Romans decided to crack the biggest nut: Veii, the biggest Etruscan town, and only nine miles from Rome. After ten years of investing it every campaigning season, the Roman army broke through the walls and poured into the city, slaughtering every one they found. After a while the slaughter ended, and such population as survived and lay down their arms in surrender was sold into slavery. The great idol of Juno was moved from the main Veiian temple to Rome (with its own acquiescence, according to a story the Livy recounts without committing to its truth). The city was left desolate and deserted. The plebes wanted the lands divided among the people and perhaps the town repopulated with emigrants from Rome, but the Senate would have nothing to do with the idea.

I suspect Livy means us to ponder the connection between the fate of Veii and what happened to Rome a few years later. In 386 B.C. an army of Gauls appeared out of nowhere, scattered with inexplicable ease the Roman army sent to deal with it, and appeared before the walls of the defenseless city. However, they did not invest the city or assault it until the next day, giving the Senate some time to make a few decisions. The city was not provisioned for a siege and there were not enough fighting men to man the walls, so what young men were there were instructed to go with their families to the citadel on the Capitoline Hill and hold that place for as long as possible. The Vestal Virgins were instructed to preserve the sacred objects as best they could and carry on the rites as long as one was alive to do it; they buried what they could not carry and set out with the rest on foot for Caere, twenty miles away. The older senators decided to array themselves in their robes of state and sit in the courts of their houses to await their fate. The plebeians were left to flee leaderless across the Tiber and then wherever they could go.

The next day the Gauls were amazed to find the gate of Rome open before them, and inside all the houses of the rich unlocked. This bewildered them for a while, but after a while a Gaul pulled the beard of a senator

sitting in his court, the senator whacked the Gaul with his ivory rod, and the Gaul then killed the senator. That broke the spell, and the usual slaughter, pillage, and burning began. However, the citadel held out for the months it took for the scattered Roman remnants and their allies to put together an army that could convince the Gauls to leave the smoking ruins. (We are assured that they were all intercepted and slaughtered before making it home, and the ransom they were paid recovered.)

In the aftermath, the plebs and tribunes tried to convince the Senate to move the town wholesale to the still-intact town of Veii. There was much deliberation, but ultimately sentimental and religious ties to the site of Rome prevailed and the city was rebuilt.

Livy cannot really say what of this is sober history and what is exaggeration or simple legend. Neither can we. All I can say is that if it didn't happen that way, it ought to have.

Paul says

Even for a huge Latinophile, this history is a bit hard-going. I've probably been spoiled having read Tacitus and Plutarch in the past, with their endlessly entertaining sassy character assassinations. Livy is a lot more... sober.

I suppose it's mainly because so little is actually known about the history of early Rome. For the first book in this volume, this actually makes for a fascinating weaving of fact and myth: the almost certainly mythological figures of Aeneas, Hercules (and maybe Romulus and Remus?) make their appearances, augurs proclaim their divinations, Sabine women are kidnapped, and an Island is created in the Tiber out of discarded wheat stalks from the Campus Martius. This is all great.

However, the next four books are unbearably dry, consisting mainly of recounts of cyclical campaigns against the various peoples surrounding early Rome - interchangeable nations such as the Aequii, Volscii, Veii, Etruscans, Sabines... Livy isn't interested in telling us much about these peoples, or about the Roman people for that matter. I would have liked a more thorough discussion about every day life in early Rome, but this is limited to the odd account of agrarian reform (a particular bugbear of Roman Republican patricians), uppity tribunes and rowdy plebs. This is interesting enough the first few times around, but I get the impression that early Roman history was of a cut-and-paste kind: military campaign, pleb uprising, new consuls appointed, rinse and repeat.

But one can't be too harsh on Livy. He was writing history for a very different audience and for different reasons than modern historians, so we must be lenient if the style is not to our tastes. The great historian E.H. Carr wrote that works of history tell you more about the writer's contemporary time than they do about their subject matter, and I'm a great believer in this. It is a privilege to be able to read the words of a man who is separated from us by two millennia.

Plus, look no further than the Romans for comical names. Spurius Furius and Mettius Fufettius, I'm looking at you.

Suzanne says

This translation was first published in 1960 and it retains a scholarly and serious tone that tends to be abandoned in favor of a more accessible simplicity such as is found in modern translations of ancient texts. Where "accessible simplicity" means "dumbed down patter". All the same it really is accessible to all but the most simple-minded reader. How do I know? I read it with what I think was great success. I even enjoyed it and looked forward to my hour with this book and a mug of coffee every morning.

Would I have like it as much without the coffee? No.

This isn't a very serious review because, as usual, I feel utterly unqualified to review it. I've written nothing of merit. I have buried in my reading history multiple encounters with V.C. Andrews. I'm not climbing into the ring with Livy and Aubrey de Selincourt.
