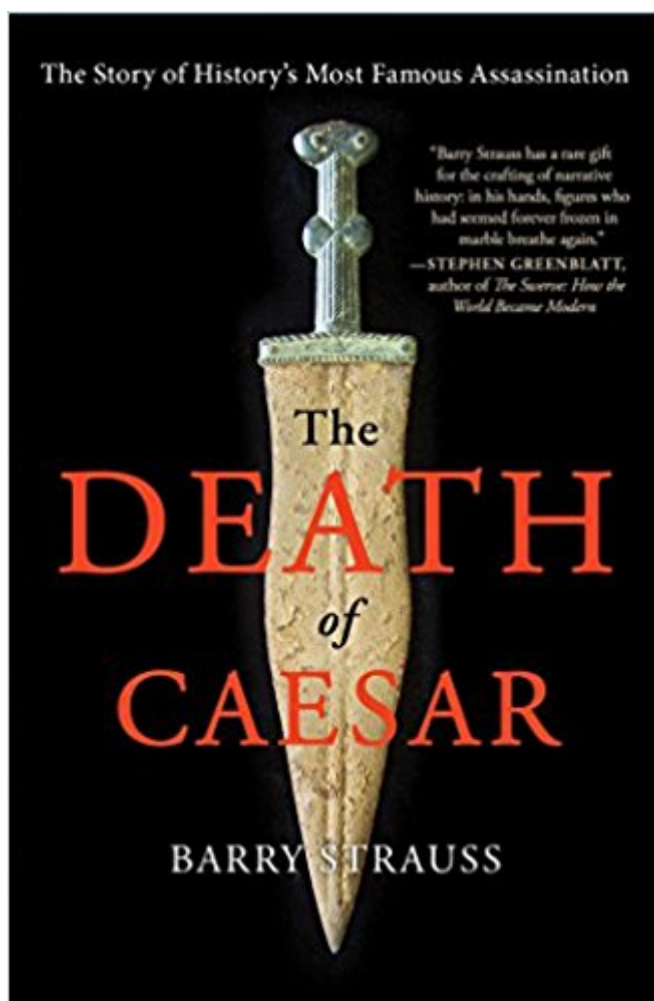


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# The Death Of Caesar: The Story Of History's Most Famous Assassination



## Synopsis

In this story of the most famous assassination in history, *The Death of Caesar* “the last bloody day of the [Roman] Republic has never been painted so brilliantly” (The Wall Street Journal). Julius Caesar was stabbed to death in the Roman Senate on March 15, 44 BC—the Ides of March according to the Roman calendar. He was, says author Barry Strauss, the last casualty of one civil war and the first casualty of the next civil war, which would end the Roman Republic and inaugurate the Roman Empire. *The Death of Caesar* provides a fresh look at a well-trodden event, with superb storytelling sure to inspire awe (The Philadelphia Inquirer). Why was Caesar killed? For political reasons, mainly. The conspirators wanted to return Rome to the days when the Senate ruled, but Caesar hoped to pass along his new powers to his family, especially Octavian. The principal plotters were Brutus, Cassius (both former allies of Pompey), and Decimus. The last was a leading general and close friend of Caesar’s, who felt betrayed by the great man: He was the mole in Caesar’s camp. But after the assassination everything went wrong. The killers left the body in the Senate and Caesar’s allies held a public funeral. Mark Antony made a brilliant speech—not “Friends, Romans, Countrymen” as Shakespeare had it, but something inflammatory that caused a riot. The conspirators fled Rome. Brutus and Cassius raised an army in Greece but Antony and Octavian defeated them. An original, new perspective on an event that seems well known, *The Death of Caesar* is “one of the most riveting hour-by-hour accounts of Caesar’s final day I have read....An absolutely marvelous read” (The Times, London).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Barry Strauss has a rare gift for the crafting of narrative history: in his hands, figures who had seemed forever frozen in marble breathe again. The Death of Caesar deftly depicts a world in which tangled motives, Machiavellian strategies, and a dose of sheer accident conspired to bring down the most powerful man in the world." (Stephen Greenblatt, author of *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*) "[A] compelling, clarifying account of one of history's most dramatic assassinations. . . . [Strauss] conveys the complexity of late republican Roman politics while keeping up a lively pace." (Lev Grossman *Time*) "Strauss's account of the world's most famous assassination is as thrilling as any novel." (Robert Harris, bestselling author of the *Ancient Rome Trilogy*) "[A] page-turner. . . . Detail after detail clothes the familiar facts of Caesar's seemingly inevitable murder with fresh images. . . . The last bloody day of the Republic has never been painted so brilliantly." (Greg Woolf *The Wall Street Journal*) "With keen historical insights and the pace of a thriller, Barry Strauss brings vividly to life the Rome of 44 B.C., the final days of Julius Caesar, and the men who killed him. This is history as it should be written—a deeply human story of all the men and women caught up in these famous events." (Adrian Goldsworthy, author of *Augustus: First Emperor of Rome*) "The superb storytelling of Barry Strauss shows that the details of history's most famous assassination are just as fascinating as why it happened. . . . The *Death of Caesar* provides a fresh look at a well-trodden event, with storytelling sure to inspire awe." (Scott Manning *The Philadelphia Inquirer*) "I have never read so detailed an account of the world's most famous assassination—how the plot was planned, the many personalities, the killing itself and the bitter aftermath. The *Death of Caesar* brings back all the suspense of an extraordinary story, as if we weren't sure what was going to happen next. An unputdownable book." (Anthony Everitt, author of *CICERO*) "This history of Caesar by the American academic Barry Strauss is a romp, yes, but a glorious one, through the final months of Rome's most famous ruler. . . . One of the most riveting hour-by-hour accounts of Caesar's final day I have read. . . . An absolutely marvelous read." (Catherine Nixey *The Times (London)*) "Barry Strauss, as both sleuth and classicist, guides us through the why and how of the killing of Julius Caesar. A riveting blow-by-blow account by a masterful scholar and story-teller of a human drama that changed the course of Western history." (Victor Davis Hanson, Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University and author of *THE SAVIOR GENERALS* and *CARNAGE AND CULTURE*) "This stupendous book has all the pace and action of a top-quality thriller—murder, lust, betrayal and high politics—yet it's all true, and comes from the

pen of the world's senior academic expert in the field. A lifetime's study of the ancient sources has gone into Barry Strauss's utterly gripping account of the day that the course of human history radically changed. Superbly researched, wittily written, but above all driven by a truly exciting narrative that never lets up, this is history-writing at its best. Our understanding of what happened on the Ides of March and its chaotic, bloody aftermath is forever changed, and this will be the standard work for decades to come." (Andrew Roberts, author of NAPOLEON: A Life) "I always knew the plunging of those fatal daggers was an epochal moment in Western Civ, but I never knew why until now. Barry Strauss is our all-knowing Vergil, escorting us across the dim landscape of history, enlightening us with precious insight." (Steven Pressfield, bestselling author of GATES OF FIRE and THE LION'S GATE) "A classics thriller. . . . The Death of Caesar teases apart this paramilitary operation of 60 or more conspirators and, in reporting the facts, revokes much of Shakespeare's poetic license in Julius Caesar." (Katharine Whitemore The Boston Globe) "Strauss takes us deep into the psyche of ancient history in an exciting, twisted tale." (Kirkus Reviews (starred review)) "This engrossing account of that pivotal event is exhaustive, yet surprisingly easy to read. . . . The Death of Caesar is brimming with memorable facts." (Joe Queenan Barron's)

Barry Strauss, professor of history and classics at Cornell University, is a leading expert on ancient military history. He has written or edited several books, including The Battle of Salamis, The Trojan War, and The Spartacus War. Visit [BarryStrauss.com](http://BarryStrauss.com).

A very well done, if brief, history. The author builds up to the assassination giving you a thumbnail of most of the key figures. Very well done, in my opinion. Note- the page count includes a very extensive section of references. The actual book is 239 pages long.

Gaius Julius Caesar was assassinated on March 15, 44 BCE by a group of Roman senators. This is arguably the famous assassination in history and a true historical crossroad. I am writing this review very near the 2059th anniversary of Caesar's murder after all of this time does Professor Barry Strauss have anything to add that we don't already know? The answer is a definite yes. Strauss's "Death of Caesar" provides a fast-moving, very written account of WHAT happened on the Ides of March and the MOTIVATIONS of the key actors. By bringing together all of the sources and rethinking the logic behind the murder, the author creates a very lively account of the events. His

conclusions make for a very readable account of the conspiracy and its key actors. One thing that I really appreciate about the book is that it is quite focused. The collapse of the Roman republic (from around 100 to 27 BCE) is one of the best-documented ancient periods and it is very easy to get lost in the details of the civil wars, political machinations, and personalities of the time. For example, instead of going into great detail about the Sulla dictatorship (around 82 BCE) and how it affected Caesar, he gives the reader the bare minimum. Thus the story flows quickly and without interruption. The reader does not get lost in details or confuse the key actors. The book also raises many questions and unearths details. For example, did anybody in the crowded Senate House try to defend Caesar? How much did Cicero and Mark Anthony know about assassination beforehand? Was the assassination a last minute affair or carefully planned? And so on. I personally did not agree with all of Strauss's answers but he was always careful to present many sides of the arguments and to help understand his own conclusions. The Strauss takes a complex view of people's motivations, including that of Caesar. Almost certainly the conspirators had a variety of beliefs of why they were acting: patriotism and love of freedom, personal jealousy and ambitious, and a sense of honor. To say that Brutus killed Caesar to restore the republic and freedom is a simplification; but to say that Brutus did not have any noble ideals is also a simplification. In other words, it is not enough to say "follow the money" or "cui bono" to understand human motivation. I also appreciated his incorporation of women in the story. We don't know nearly as much about the women of the time than the men but we do know that they were important. Strauss does not present them as shrill manipulators (a la Livia in *I, Claudius* or Atia in HBO *Rome*) but also complex figures. In addition to learning more about a cataclysmic event that literally shaped our world in many, many ways, the story of Caesar and the Roman republic is the story of how an old system of government adapts to new circumstances. In the case of Rome, the state proved too fragile to survive.

I've now read four books by Cornell history professor Barry Strauss, and *The Death of Caesar* is perhaps the most eye-opening of them. Whether we first came to the Ides of March by way of Shakespeare, Suetonius, Plutarch, or the reliable histories and biographies written in modern times, we invariably came away with the understanding that Caesar's friend Brutus and the ambitious, coat-changing Cassius were the dual wellspring behind the dictator's assassination. Strauss makes a convincing case that the key man was one who is relatively forgotten in most accounts, Caesar's even closer friend and

longtime lieutenant, Decimus Brutus. Strauss renders a thrilling, almost hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute account of the conspiracy, one that might have come undone at several points. We know how it ends, but it might well have gone another way, with incalculable results for Rome and western civilization. My most surprising read of 2015.

The book is quite interesting especially in view of the fact that the circumstances of the death of Caesar are a mystery to practically no one. However, along with a rich background leading up to the death, it does provide a lot of details that, being grouped differently, allow comparisons that may not have been obvious to amateurs rather than professionals in classical history. Case in point, the enumeration, background and relationship to Caesar of the main conspirators. On the other hand, some of these details and comparisons can become a bit tedious as not all are of the same importance as the background of the perpetrators. So that is the reason I took off one star. The book is written in language that is plain - as compared to academically stilted - and for any amateur interested in classical history a very easy, worthwhile read.

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