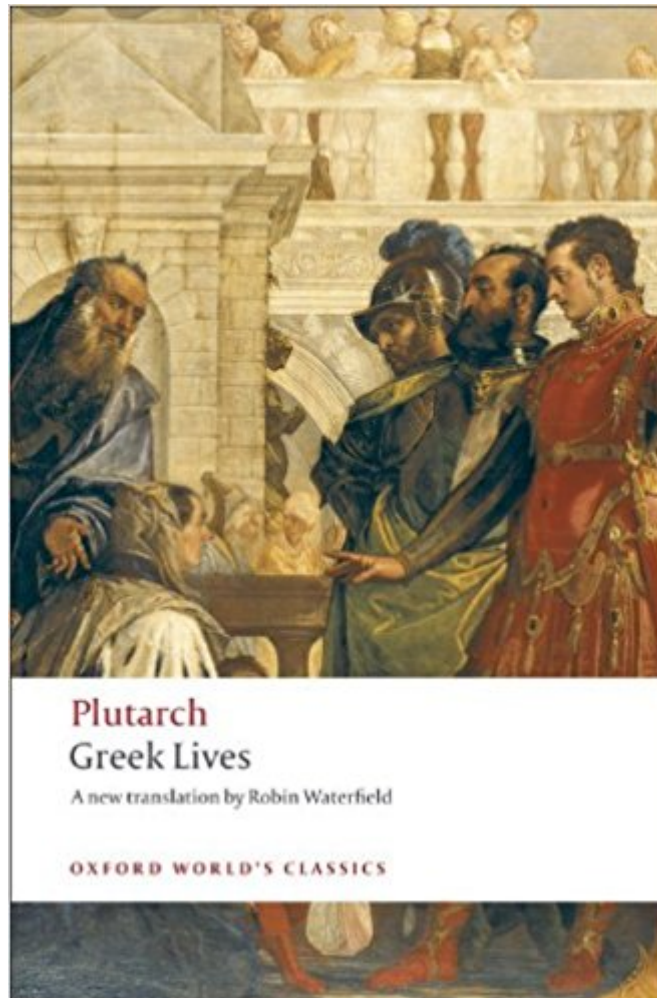


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# Greek Lives (Oxford World's Classics)



## Synopsis

Lycurgus, Pericles, Solon, Nicias, Themistocles, Alcibiades, Cimon, Agesilaus, Alexander`I treat the narrative of the Lives as a kind of mirror...The experience is like nothing so much as spending time in their company and living with them: I receive and welcome each of them in turn as my guest.'In the nine lives of this collection Plutarch introduces the reader to the major figures and periods of classical Greece. He portrays virtues to be emulated and vices to be avoided, but his purpose is also implicitly to educate and warn those in his own day who wielded power. In prose that is rich, elegant and sprinkled with learned references, he explores with an extraordinary degree of insight the interplay of character and political action. While drawing chiefly on historical sources, he brings to biography a natural story-teller's ear for a good anecdote. Throughout the ages Plutarch's Lives have been valued for their historical value and their charm. This new translation will introduce new generations to his urbane erudition. The most comprehensive selection available, it is accompanied by a lucid introduction, explanatory notes, bibliographies, maps and indexes.

**ABOUT THE SERIES:** For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the widest range of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, helpful notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

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## Customer Reviews

I hate Plutarch, if only because he is indispensable. His numerous Lives are all that is left of large sections of Greek and Roman history, or are essential corroboration for other, scarce sources. To modern readers, Plutarch can easily sound annoying. His portraits are invariably red-cheeked and gleaming-eyed. Vice and virtue are his main measures of men (and the few women). 'His skin used to emit a delightful odour and... his mouth and whole body used to be bathed in a fragrance which filled his clothes,' he says of Alexander. And later: 'his self-restraint was apparent in his stubborn disregard for physical pleasures. He also had less penchant for wine than is generally thought. He gained his reputation because he dragged out the time he took over each cup, but it was time spent talking rather than drinking...' Yeah, right. Yet this is excellent, colourful, and entertaining biography. The characters jump out of the page. The times are evoked magnificently. Some people like to see in Plutarch timeless lessons on human psychology and behaviour; without going so far, his Lives certainly provide unmatched insights into the thoughts and beliefs of the ancients. As to history, one needs to be aware how this came to us. In antiquity, works were copied in schools, especially of rhetoric. Thus what ensured they were reproduced in large numbers, and had a chance of survival in the ensuing Dark Age, was style, not content. Likewise, medieval copyists, all monks, were interested in the moral lessons of the works they preserved. (There are exceptions to this: invaluable papyri were found intact in the Egyptian desert; but these are rare.) Plutarch passed both the stylistic and moral tests. But he lacks the structure of a Thucydides or a Polybius.

Without a doubt, it is fascinating to read biographies based on ancient sources that no longer exist. Plutarch's Lives draws from multiple such primary sources as well as scholarly works from ancient Greece. There's no denying this. Further, much of the information on the ancient Greeks Plutarch writes about is not today available from other sources. The biographies themselves were very popular when they were written, which explains why they were preserved and we can read them today. Reading only the Greek bios without the Roman ones against which almost all of them were paired up with has shortcomings, but it depends what you want to get out of the collection, though the introductions do a nice job of filling this information in. This edition itself has very nice 4-page introductions to each biography as well as a very nice, longer introduction to the biographies as an

entirety. The footnotes are very helpful. I wanted to read all of them, but because they were listed separately in the back of the volume, it was extremely disruptive constantly flipping back and forth. I'd gladly pay double for an edition with footnotes included in the text, or at least at the bottom of each page. The translation was fine, no complaints here. On the down side, the biographies themselves tend to be more about the persons themselves than about factual/solid historical information. It's like reading about how George Washington never told a lie, threw a silver dollar across the Potomac, and had ill-fitting dentures, as opposed to how Washington helped create a new nation. Frequently, the footnotes point out that other sources portray the subject differently. I was never sure when Plutarch was bending the facts to fit the theme he was trying to get across.

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