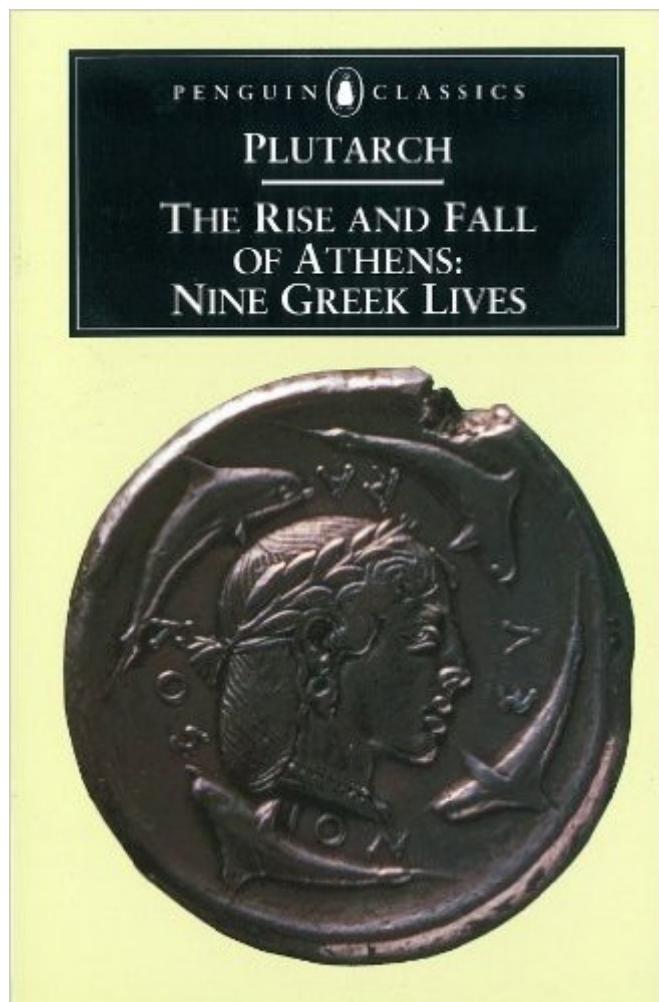


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The Rise And Fall Of Athens: Nine Greek Lives (Classics)



Synopsis

Nine Greek biographies illustrate the rise and fall of Athens, from the legendary days of Theseus, the city's founder, through Solon, Themistocles, Aristides, Cimon, Pericles, Nicias, and Alcibiades, to the razing of its walls by Lysander.

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Customer Reviews

Through 9 Greek Lives (Theseus, the democracy builder; Aristides, the 'Spartan' Athenian; Themistocles, the arrogant but victorious supreme commander; Solon, the legislator; Cimon, the alcoholic but conquering oligarch; Pericles, the noble and unselfish democrat; the richissime Nicias, exploiter of silver mines; Alcibiades, the debauched double-dealing chameleon; and Lysander, the killer of Athens and its democrats), Plutarch sketches eminently the main political and social issues of ancient Greece and of Athens in particular. In Athens, the vicious battle between the few and the many, the haves and have-nots, equality and liberty was fought through two political parties: the aristocrats (oligarchs) supported by Sparta, Socrates, Plato and the priests ('the power of the ruler as the image of the god') on the one hand, and on the other hand, the democrats. The Greek cities

were evidently united against their common enemy, Persia, whose policies aimed at defeating the Greek outright or at inciting them to destroy one another. But the cities fought one another even in foreign countries (e.g. for the gold mines in Thrace). It all ended with Niceas's disastrous expedition in Sicily and Lysander's bloody victory over Athens. Plutarch's book is still very actual indeed. He shows us Pericles as the first Keynesian, organizing huge public works and 'transforming the whole people into wage-earners', or the anti-scientific stance of religion ('natural philosophers belittled the power of the gods by explaining it away as nothing more than the operation of irrational causes'). Plutarch is an excellent psychologist: 'people as so often happens at moments of crisis, were ready to find salvation in the miraculous rather than in a rational course of action'.

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