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*Cassius Dio*

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**Cassius Dio : The Roman History: The Reign of Augustus (Penguin Classics)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Roman History: The Reign of Augustus (Penguin Classics):

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35 people found the following review helpful. More Urban Legend Than History By R. A. Forczyk Compared to well-written ancient histories by Tacitus, Suetonius or Ammianus Marcellinus, Cassius Dio's history of the reign of Augustus is a great disappointment. Cassius Dio was a Greek (c. 163-235 AD) who wrote the history about 214-226 AD. Although Dio was well educated, his approach is far less methodical and tends to focus on what would now be called "urban legends." Throughout these pages, there is a seemingly endless recounting of strange incidents and oddities involving sea monsters, odd sounds, weird apparitions, statues frowning or bleeding, tigers, swarms of ants or bees, flames, wolves, comets, owls and even crows dropping "flaming fragments of meat." At times the reader will be embarrassed for Cassius Dio and wish that some of these pages had been lost to posterity. While there is no doubt that Dio does offer a full account of sorts of the reign of Augustus, there is little information that is not better presented by Suetonius or Tacitus. The history consists of seven books (chapters), numbered 50-56, that cover the period 32 BC to 14 AD. While there are some missing parts, these are not very significant. The Penguin edition begins with a 29 page introduction that is interesting and informative. There are a series of maps that cover most of the empire in this period but as usual, Penguin omits to cover the crucial area of the Balkans. Much of the campaigns of Tiberius, Drusus and Germanicus in Dacia and Moesia that are mentioned in the history are not depicted on any of the maps. The history begins with two books covering the confrontation between Mark Antony and Octavian. While interesting, the account is very superficial and the decisive Battle of Actium is glossed over with little detail. Book 52, which covers the infamous "debate" between Agrippa and Maecenas about the virtues of monarchy and democracy, is a 37-page historical wasteland. Aside from the obvious fact that the author inserted this fictional dialogue to expound his own theories of government, much of the dialogue is inconsistent with the characters and of little practical historical value. The history gets back on track with the narrative in Book 53 and Dio does discuss interesting aspects of the development of the principate in the early years. For example, to maintain the pretense of senatorial rule, Augustus allowed the senate to administer the interior provinces of the empire while he governed the frontier provinces. However since the Roman army was only deployed in the frontier provinces, Augustus effectively controlled all the military resources in the empire (including his Praetorian Guard). Dio also mentions the Roman expedition down the Red Sea in 24 BC, which reached as far as modern-day Yemen. There is also considerable detail on the Imperial family in the last half of the book, which fans of "I Claudius" will find interesting, and readers will note how Robert Graves used rumors of imperial plots and conspiracies mentioned by Dio to weave his tale. The last two books, 55 and 56, are the most interesting from the point of view of the military historian. Although Dio rarely goes into great detail, he does discuss the campaigns of Tiberius, Drusus and Germanicus at some length. On pages 213-215, Dio provides an order of battle for the legions, the origin of each legion and a discussion of the military budget. It is interesting that initially Augustus paid military pensions out of his own funds and then reverted to a 5% death inheritance tax to supplement the military budget; it is apparent from Dio that the Roman army in Augustus' time was maintained on a financial shoestring. The Battle of Teutoburgerwald is also discussed and Dio suggests that the Romans were lulled into a false sense of security by conspiring German tribes and committed the mistake of making an essentially administrative road march (complete with camp followers) through hostile territory. After this catastrophe, Augustus was hard-pressed to scrape up replacements and was forced to conscript freedmen by lots and execute malingerers. Clearly, the Roman Empire had no reserve military capacity - it was all in the window. Finally, Dio concludes that the main contribution of Augustus was the length of his 44-year reign, which provided vital stability to Rome. By the time that Augustus died, Romans had grown accustomed to monarchy and did not yearn for an unfamiliar Republic (which brought back distant memories of civil war).

Following Rome's long road to peace after decades of civil war, Cassius Dio provides the fullest account of the reign of the first emperor in Books 50 through 60 of his Roman History. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Language Notes Text: English, Greek (translation) About the Author John Carter retired from a Senior Lectureship at Royal Holloway college, University of London, in 1992. He collaborated with Ian Scott-Kilvert on Cassius Dio's *The Roman History* (1987) for Penguin Classics, and other published work includes a history of Augustus' rise to power, *The Battle of Actium* (1970), and editions of Suetonius' *Life of Augustus*, *Divus Augustus* (1982), and of Julius Caesar's own account of his war with Pompey, *Civil War* (2 vols., 1991 and 1993).