



WELCOME TO OUR NOVEMBER BOOK, HISTORIANS!

We will meet on Tuesday, November 14 at 6:30 to discuss *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome* by Mary Beard, Classics professor at the University of Cambridge and pin-up for 2013 in *The Olde*, the British version of AARP. The book covers the first 1,000 years of Roman history. As you read, imagine yourself studying Roman history under a really interesting professor who is passionate about her subject. Beard assumes that her reader is an intelligent person who is fascinated by Roman history and by the ways that

historians have characterized the Romans over centuries of study. As one critic says, “She pulls us into the faculty lounge and remarks about debates that can make or end academic careers.” In the process, Beard sets right some misunderstandings about Roman history and introduces us to people who will seem familiar in terms of their taste and humor, but very different in terms of what they considered acceptable social behavior.

Beard discusses the major figures of Roman history such as Julius Caesar, Hannibal, Spartacus, Nero, Cleopatra, Augustus and Caligula. We see these men through the eyes of their contemporaries as well as through the eyes of the famous Roman writers who were fascinated by these historical figures, men such as Cicero, Livy, Horace, Virgil and Pliny the Younger.

The central theme of *SPQR* is the distinctive understanding of citizenship held by the Romans. The idea that one could be a citizen, even a partial citizen, of a place where one did not live, and had perhaps never been, was revolutionary. As we debate citizenship today, it is very interesting to see how the Romans dealt with citizens who spoke different languages and had very different cultural backgrounds, yet considered themselves to be Roman in every way that mattered.

In *SPQR*, Beard focuses on these questions of citizenship, identity, power, and empire. As you read, note the ways that Roman ideas about these issues are woven into our American culture. Remember that the founders of the United States considered themselves to be Romans in many ways, but Romans with a distinctively American twist. Beard makes clear that we are, in fact, very different from the Romans, and yet, the founders were right to see Roman ways of thinking woven into the very fabric of our republic. In what ways do you see us following Roman ideas of government and citizenship? In what ways are we different? What surprised you about how Romans think about the world and their place in it? Do you agree with Beard that the Roman empire happened through a blend of hard empire and soft empire? How Rome became Rome is still hotly debated among scholars. What do you think about Beard’s explanation? In our November meeting, we will join with centuries of scholars in the debate over Rome. Come prepared for an exhilarating evening!

Just a reminder that our December meeting of *The Historians* is only two weeks after the November 14 meeting. You might want to read ahead. On December 5 we will be discussing *Hero of the Empire: The Boer War, a Daring Escape, and the Making of Winston Churchill* by Candice Millard. Many of you will remember Millard from last spring when we read her book *River of Doubt* about Teddy Roosevelt and the Amazon. *Hero of the Empire* focuses on a pivotal incident in Churchill’s life which generally rates only a line or two in his biography but which Millard argues did much to shape the man that he became.

I am looking forward to discussing Roman history with you on Tuesday, November 14 at 6:30. Mary Beard is one of my favorite historians. I hope you enjoy reading her as much as I do.

Donna McBride