

Source: The Histories of Polybius by Polybius □
(translated by Evelyn S. Shuckburgh 1889)

THE HISTORIES OF POLYBIUS

BOOK I

1. HAD the praise of History been passed over by former Chroniclers it would perhaps have been incumbent upon me to urge the choice and special study of records of this sort, as the readiest means men can have of correcting their knowledge of the past. But my predecessors have not been sparing in this respect. They have all begun and ended, so to speak, by enlarging on this theme : asserting again and again that the study of History is in the truest sense an education, and a training for political life ; and that the most instructive, or rather the only, method of learning to bear with dignity the vicissitudes of fortune is to recall the catastrophes of others. It is evident, therefore, that no one need think it his duty to repeat what has been said by many, and said well. Least of all myself : for the surprising nature of the events which I have undertaken to relate is in itself sufficient to challenge and stimulate the attention of every one, old or young, to the study of my work. Can any one be so indifferent or idle as not to care to know by what means, and under what kind of polity, almost the whole inhabited world was conquered and brought under the dominion of the single city of Rome, and that too within a period of not quite fifty-three years ? Or who again can be so completely absorbed in other subjects of contemplation or study, as to think any of them superior in importance to the accurate understanding of an event for which the past affords no precedent.

Introduction.
The importance
and magnitude
of the subject.

B.C. 219-167.

2. We shall best show how marvellous and vast our subject is by comparing the most famous Empires which preceded, and which have been the favourite themes of historians, and measuring them with the superior greatness of Rome. There are but three that deserve even to be so compared and measured: and they are these.

The Persians for a certain length of time were possessed of a great empire and dominion. But every time they ventured beyond the limits of Asia, they found not only their empire, but their own existence also in danger.

- 2. Sparta.
B.C. 405-394.

The Lacedaemonians, after contending for supremacy in Greece for many generations, when they did get it, held it without dispute for barely twelve years. The Macedonians obtained dominion in Europe from the lands bordering on the Adriatic to the Danube,—which after all is but a small fraction of this continent,—and, by the destruction of the Persian Empire, they afterwards added to that the dominion of Asia. And yet, though they had the credit of having made themselves masters of a larger number of countries and states than any people had ever done, they still left the greater half of the inhabited world in the hands of others. They never so much as thought of attempting Sicily, Sardinia, or Libya: and as to Europe, to speak the plain truth, they never even knew of the most warlike tribes of the West. The Roman conquest, on the other hand, was not partial. Nearly the whole inhabited world was reduced by them to obedience: and they left behind them an empire not to be paralleled in the past or rivalled in the future. Students will gain from my narrative a clearer view of the whole story, and of the numerous and important advantages which such exact record of events offers.

3. My History begins in the 140th Olympiad. The events from which it starts are these. In Greece, what is called the Social war: the first waged by Philip, son of Demetrius and father of Perseus, in league with the Achaeans against the Aetolians. In Asia, the war for the possession of

B.C. 220-217.

The History starts from the 140th Olympiad, when the tendency towards

Coele-Syria which Antiochus and Ptolemy ^{unity first shows} Philopator carried on against each other. In ^{itself.} Italy, Libya, and their neighbourhood, the conflict between Rome and Carthage, generally called the Hannibalian war. My work thus begins where that of Aratus of Sicyon leaves off. Now up to this time the world's history had been, so to speak, a series of disconnected transactions, as widely separated in their origin and results as in their localities. But from this time forth History becomes a connected whole: the affairs of Italy and Libya are involved with those of Asia and Greece, and the tendency of all is to unity. This is why I have fixed upon this era as the starting-point of my work. For it was their victory over the Carthaginians in this war, and their conviction that thereby the most difficult and most essential step towards universal empire had been taken, which encouraged the Romans for the first time to stretch out their hands upon the rest, and to cross with an army into Greece and Asia.

Now, had the states that were rivals for universal empire been familiarly known to us, no reference perhaps to their previous history would have been necessary, to show the purpose and the forces with which they approached an undertaking of this nature and magnitude. But the fact is that the majority of the Greeks have no knowledge of the previous constitution, power, or achievements either of Rome or Carthage. I therefore concluded that it was necessary to prefix this and the next book to my History. I was anxious that no one, when fairly embarked upon my actual narrative, should feel at a loss, and have to ask what were the designs entertained by the Romans, or the forces and means at their disposal, that they entered upon those undertakings, which did in fact lead to their becoming masters of land and sea everywhere in our part of the world. I wished, on the contrary, that these books of mine, and the prefatory sketch which they contained, might make it clear that the resources they started with justified their original idea, and sufficiently explained their final success in grasping universal empire and dominion.

A sketch of their previous history necessary to explain the success of the Romans.

4. There is this analogy between the plan of my History and the marvellous spirit of the age with which I have to deal. Just as Fortune made almost all the affairs of the world incline in one direction, and forced them to converge upon one and the same point; so it is my task as an historian to put before my readers a compendious view of the

The need of a comprehensive view of history as well as a close study of an epoch.

part played by Fortune in bringing about the general catastrophe. It was this peculiarity which originally challenged my attention, and determined me on undertaking this work. And combined with this was the fact that no writer of our time has undertaken a general history. Had any one done so my ambition in this direction would have been much diminished. But, in point of fact, I notice that by far the greater number of historians concern themselves with isolated wars and the incidents that accompany them: while as to a general and comprehensive scheme of events, their date, origin, and catastrophe, no one as far as I know has undertaken to examine it. I thought it, therefore, distinctly my duty neither to pass by myself, nor allow any one else to pass by, without full study, a characteristic specimen of the dealings of Fortune at once brilliant and instructive in the highest degree. For fruitful as Fortune is in change, and constantly as she is producing dramas in the life of men, yet never assuredly before this did she work such a marvel, or act such a drama, as that which we have witnessed. And of this we cannot obtain a comprehensive view from writers of mere episodes. It would be as absurd to expect to do so as for a man to imagine that he has learnt the shape of the whole world, its entire arrangement and order, because he has visited one after the other the most famous cities in it; or perhaps merely examined them in separate pictures. That would be indeed absurd: and it has always seemed to me that men, who are persuaded that they get a competent view of universal from episodical history, are very like persons who should see the limbs of some body, which had once been living and beautiful, scattered and remote; and should imagine that to be quite as good as actually beholding the activity and beauty of the living creature itself. But if some one could there and then

reconstruct the animal once more, in the perfection of its beauty and the charm of its vitality, and could display it to the same people, they would beyond doubt confess that they had been far from conceiving the truth, and had been little better than dreamers. For indeed some idea of a whole may be got from a part, but an accurate knowledge and clear comprehension cannot. Wherefore we must conclude that episodical history contributes exceedingly little to the familiar knowledge and secure grasp of universal history. While it is only by the combination and comparison of the separate parts of the whole,—by observing their likeness and their difference,—that a man can attain his object: can obtain a view at once clear and complete; and thus secure both the profit and the delight of History.

5. I shall adopt as the starting-point of this book the first occasion on which the Romans crossed the sea from Italy. This is just where the History of Timaeus left off; and it falls in the 129th Olympiad. I shall accordingly have to describe what the state of their affairs in Italy was, how long that settlement had lasted, and on what resources they reckoned, when they resolved to invade Sicily. For this was the first place outside Italy in which they set foot. The precise cause of their thus crossing I must state without comment; for if I let one cause lead me back to another, my point of departure will always elude my grasp, and I shall never arrive at the view of my subject which I wish to present. As to dates, then, I must fix on some era agreed upon and recognised by all: and as to events, one that admits of distinctly separate treatment; even though I may be obliged to go back some short way in point of time, and take a summary review of the intermediate transactions. For if the facts with which one starts are unknown, or even open to controversy, all that comes after will fail of approval and belief. But opinion being once formed on that point, and a general assent obtained, all the succeeding narrative becomes intelligible.

B.C. 264-261.
I begin my preliminary account in the 129th Olympiad, and with the circumstances which took the Romans to Sicily.

6. It was in the nineteenth year after the sea-fight at Aegospotami, and the sixteenth before the battle at Leuctra; the year in which the Lacedaemonians made what is called the Peace of Antalcidas with the King of Persia; the year in which the elder Dionysius was besieging Rhegium after beating the Italian Greeks on the River Elleporus; and in which the Gauls took Rome itself by storm and were occupying the whole of it except the Capitol. With these Gauls the Romans made a treaty and settlement which they were content to accept: and having thus become beyond all expectation once more masters of their own country, they made a start in their career of expansion; and in the succeeding period engaged in various wars with their neighbours. First, by dint of valour, and the good fortune which attended them in the field, they mastered all the Latini; then they went to war with the Etruscans, Gauls, and Samnites, the Etruscans, the Samnites, who lived on the eastern and northern frontiers of Latium. Some time after this the Tarentines insulted the ambassadors of Rome, and, in fear of the consequences, invited and obtained the assistance of Pyrrhus. This happened in the year before the Gauls invaded Greece, some of whom perished near Delphi, while others crossed into Asia. Then it was that the Romans—having reduced the Etruscans and Samnites to obedience, and conquered the Italian Celts in many battles—attempted for the first time the reduction of the rest of Italy. The nations for whose possessions they were about to fight they affected to regard, not in the light of foreigners, but as already for the most part belonging and pertaining to themselves. The experience gained from their contests with the Samnites and the Celts had served as a genuine training in the art of war. Accordingly, they entered upon the war with spirit, drove Pyrrhus from Italy, and then undertook to fight with and subdue those who had taken part with him. They succeeded every-

B.C. 387-386.
The rise of the
Roman dominion
may be traced
from the retire-
ment of the Gauls
from the city.
From that time
one nation after
another in Italy
fell into their
hands.

The Latini.

The Etruscans,
Gauls, and Sam-
nites.

Pyrrhus,
B.C. 280.

Southern Italy.

Pyrrhus finally
quits Italy, B.C.

where to a marvel, and reduced to obedience all the tribes inhabiting Italy except the Celts; after which they undertook to besiege some of their own citizens, who at that time were occupying Rhegium.

7. For misfortunes befell Messene and Rhegium, the cities built on either side of the Strait, peculiar in their nature and alike in their circumstances.

The story of the Mamertines at Messene, and the Roman garrison at Rhegium, Dio. Cassius *fr.*

Not long before the period we are now describing some Campanian mercenaries of Agathocles, having for some time cast greedy eyes upon Messene, owing to its beauty and wealth, no sooner got an opportunity than they made a treacherous attempt upon that city. They entered the town under guise of friendship, and, having once got possession of it, they drove out some of the citizens and put others to the sword. This done, they seized promiscuously the wives and children of the dispossessed citizens, each keeping those which fortune had assigned him at the very moment of the lawless deed. All other property and the land they took possession of by a subsequent division and retained.

1. Messene.

Agathocles died, B.C. 289.

The speed with which they became masters of a fair territory and city found ready imitators of their conduct. The people of Rhegium, when Pyrrhus was crossing to Italy, felt a double anxiety. They were dismayed at the thought of his approach, and at the same time were afraid of the Carthaginians as being masters of the sea. They accordingly asked and obtained a force from Rome to guard and support them.

2. Rhegium, Livy Ep. 12.

Pyrrhus in Sicily, B.C. 278-275.

The garrison, four thousand in number, under the command of a Campanian named Decius Jubellius, entered the city, and for a time preserved it, as well as their own faith. But at last, conceiving the idea of imitating the Mamertines, and having at the same time obtained their co-operation, they broke faith with the people of Rhegium, enamoured of the pleasant site of the town and the private wealth of the citizens, and seized the city after having, in imitation of the Mamertines, first driven out some of the people and put others to the sword. Now, though the Romans were much annoyed at this transac-

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



The Complete Text can be found on our CD:
Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature
which can be purchased on our Website :

www.Brainfly.net

or

by sending **\$64.95** in check or money order to :

Brainfly Inc.

5100 Garfield Ave. #46

Sacramento CA 95841-3839

TEACHER'S DISCOUNT:

If you are a **TEACHER** you can take advantage of our teacher's discount. Click on **Teachers Discount** on our website (www.Brainfly.net) or **Send us \$55.95** and we will send you a full copy of *Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature* **AND** our *5000 Classics CD (a collection of over 5000 classic works of literature in electronic format (.txt))* plus our *Wholesale price list*.

If you have any suggestions such as books you would like to see added to the collection or if you would like our wholesale prices list please send us an email to:

webcomments@brainfly.net