

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

BOOK IX

EXTRACT FROM THE PREFACE

1. SUCH are the most conspicuous transactions of this Olympiad, that is, of the four years which an Olympiad must be reckoned to contain; and I shall endeavour to include the history of them in two books.

142d Olympiad,  
B.C. 212-208.

I am quite aware that my history has an element of austerity in it, and is adapted to, and will be approved by only one class of readers, owing to the uniformity of its plan. Nearly all other historians, or at any rate most, attract a variety of readers by entering upon all the various branches of history. The curious reader is attracted by the genealogical style; the antiquarian by the discussion of colonisations, origins of cities, and ties of blood, such as is found in Ephorus; the student of politics by the story of tribes, cities, and dynasties. It is to this last branch of the subject that I have had a single eye, and have devoted my whole work; and accordingly have, as I said before, accommodated all my plans to one particular class of narrative. The result is that I have made my work by no means attractive reading to the majority. Why I thus neglected other departments of history, and deliberately resolved to confine myself to chronicling actions, I have already stated at length; however, there is no reason why I should not briefly remind my readers of it again in this place, for the sake of impressing it upon them.

2. Seeing that many writers have discussed in many varieties of style the question of genealogies, myths, and colonisations, as well as of the foundations of cities and the

consanguinity of peoples, there was nothing left for a writer at this date but to copy the words of others and claim them as his own,—than which nothing could be more dishonourable ; or, if he did not choose to do that, to absolutely waste his labour, being obliged to acknowledge that he is composing a history and bestowing thought on what has already been sufficiently set forth and transmitted to posterity by his predecessors. For these and sundry other reasons I abandoned such themes as these; and determined on writing a history of actions: first, because they are continually new and require a new narrative,—as of course one generation cannot give us the history of the next; and secondly, because such a narrative is of all others the most instructive. This it has always been: but it is eminently so now, because the arts and sciences have made such an advance in our day, that students are able to arrange every event as it happens according to fixed rules, as it were, of scientific classification. Therefore, as I did not aim so much at giving pleasure to my readers, as at profiting those who apply to such studies, I omitted all other themes and devoted myself wholly to this. But on these points, those who give a careful attention to my narrative will be the best witnesses to the truth of what I say. . . .

#### THE HANNIBALIAN WAR

*In the previous year (212 B.C.) Syracuse had fallen: the two Scipios had been conquered and killed in Spain: the siege-works had been constructed round Capua, at the very time of the fall of Syracuse, i.e. in the autumn, Hannibal being engaged in fruitless attempts upon the citadel of Tarentum. See Livy, 25, 22.*

3. Entirely surrounding the position of Appius Claudius, Hannibal at first skirmished, and tried all he could to tempt him to come out and give him battle. But as no one attended to him, his attack became very like an attempt to storm the camp; for his cavalry charged in their squadrons, and with loud cries hurled their

B.C. 211. Coss.  
Gnaeus Fulvius  
Centumalus, P.  
Sulpicius Galba.  
The Romans were  
still engaged in  
the siege of Capua.

javelines inside the entrenchments, and the infantry attacked in their regular companies, and tried to pull down the palisading round the camp. But not even so could he move the Romans from their purpose: they employed their light-armed troops to repulse those who were actually attacking the palisade, but protecting themselves with their heavy shields against the javelins of the enemy, they remained drawn up near their standards without moving. Discomfited at being neither able to throw himself into Capua, nor induce the Romans to leave their camp, Hannibal retired to consult as to what was best to be done.

Q. Fulvius and Appius Claudius, the Consuls of the previous year, were continued in command there, with orders not to leave the place till it fell. Livy, 26, 1. Hannibal tries to raise the siege.

It is no wonder, in my opinion, that the Carthaginians were puzzled. I think any one who heard the facts would be the same. For who would not have received with incredulity the statement that the Romans, after losing so many battles to the Carthaginians, and though they did not venture to meet them on the field, could not nevertheless be induced to give up the contest or abandon the command of the country? Up to this time, moreover, they had contented themselves with hovering in his neighbourhood, keeping along the skirts of the mountains; but now they had taken up a position on the plains, and those the fairest in all Italy, and were besieging the strongest city in it; and that with an enemy attacking them, whom they could not endure even the thought of meeting face to face: while the Carthaginians, who beyond all dispute had won the battles, were sometimes in as great difficulties as the losers. I think the reason of the strategy adopted by the two sides respectively was, that they both had seen that Hannibal's cavalry was the main cause of the Carthaginian victory and Roman defeat. Accordingly the plan of the losers after the battles, of following their enemies at a distance, was the natural one to adopt; for the country through which they went was such that the enemy's cavalry would be unable to do them any damage. Similarly what now happened at Capua to either side was natural and inevitable.

The determination and cautious tactics of the Romans.

4. For the Roman army did not venture to come out and give battle, from fear of the enemy's horse, but remained resolutely within their entrenchment; well knowing that the cavalry, by which they had been worsted in the battles, could not hurt them there. While the Carthaginians, again, naturally could not remain any longer encamped with their cavalry, because all the pastures in the surrounding country had been utterly destroyed by the Romans with that very view; and it was impossible for animals to come from such a distance, carrying on their backs hay and barley for so large a body of cavalry, and so many beasts of burden; nor again did they venture, when encamped without their cavalry, to attack an enemy protected by a palisade and fosse, with whom a contest, even without these advantages in their favour, was likely to be a doubtful one if they had not got their cavalry. Besides this they were much alarmed about the new Consuls, lest they should come and encamp against them, and reduce them to serious straits by cutting off their supplies of provisions.

These considerations convinced Hannibal that it was impossible to raise the siege by an open attack, and he therefore changed his tactics. He imagined that if by a secret march he could suddenly appear in the neighbourhood of Rome, he might by the alarm which he would inspire in the inhabitants by his unexpected movement, perhaps do something worth while against the city itself; or, if he could not do that, would at least force Appius either to raise the siege of Capua, in order to hasten to the relief of his native town, or to divide the Roman forces; which would then be easier for him to conquer in detail.

5. With this purpose in his mind he sent a letter-carrier into Capua. This he did by persuading one of the Capuans of his Libyans to desert to the Roman camp, and his purpose. thence to Capua. He took this trouble to secure the safe delivery of his letter, because he was very much afraid that the Capuans, if they saw him departing, would consider that he despaired of them, and would therefore give up hope and surrender to the Romans. He wrote there-

fore an explanation of his design, and sent the Libyan the day after, in order that the Capuans, being acquainted with the purpose of his departure, might go on courageously sustaining the siege.

When the news had arrived at Rome that Hannibal had encamped over against their lines, and was actually besieging their forces, there was a <sup>Excitement and activity at Rome.</sup> universal excitement and terror, from a feeling that the result of the impending battle would decide the whole war. Consequently, with one heart and soul, the citizens had all devoted themselves to sending out reinforcements and making preparations for this struggle. On their part, the Capuans were encouraged by the receipt of Hannibal's letter, and by thus learning the object of the Carthaginian movement, to stand by their determination, and to await the issue of this new hope. At the end of the fifth day, therefore, after his arrival on the ground, Hannibal ordered his men to take their supper as usual, and leave <sup>Hannibal starts.</sup> their watch-fires burning; and started with such secrecy, that none of the enemy knew what was happening. He took the road through Samnium, and marched at a great pace and without stopping, his skirmishers always keeping before him to reconnoitre and occupy all the posts along the route: and while those in Rome had their thoughts still wholly occupied with Capua and the campaign there, he crossed the Anio without being observed; and having arrived at a distance of not more than forty stades from Rome, there pitched his camp.

6. On this being known at Rome, the utmost confusion and terror prevailed among the inhabitants,— <sup>Terror at Rome.</sup> this movement of Hannibal's being as unexpected as it was sudden; for he had never been so close to the city before. At the same time their alarm was increased by the idea at once occurring to them, that he would not have ventured so near, if it were not that the armies at Capua were destroyed. Accordingly, the men at once went to line the walls, and the points of vantage in the defences of the town; while the women went round to the temples of the gods and implored their protection, sweeping

the pavements of the temples with their hair : for this is their customary way of behaving when any serious danger comes upon their country. But just as Hannibal had encamped, and was intending to attempt the city itself next day, an extraordinary coincidence occurred which proved fortunate for the preservation of Rome.

For Gnaeus Fulvius and Publius Sulpicius, having already enrolled one consular army, had bound the men with the usual oath to appear at Rome armed on that very day ; and were also engaged on that day in drawing out the lists and testing the men for the other army :<sup>1</sup> whereby it so happened that a large number of men had been collected in Rome spontaneously in the very nick of time. These troops the Consuls boldly led outside the walls, and, entrenching themselves there, checked Hannibal's intended movement. For the Carthaginians were at first eager to advance, and were not altogether without hope that they would be able to take Rome itself by assault. But when they saw the enemy drawn up in order, and learnt before long from a prisoner what had happened, they abandoned the idea of attacking the city, and began devastating the country-side instead, and setting fire to the houses. In these first raids they collected an innumerable amount of booty, for the field of plunder upon which they were entered was one into which no one had ever expected an enemy to set foot.

7. But presently, when the Consuls ventured to encamp within ten stades of him, Hannibal broke up his quarters before daylight. He did so for three reasons :—first, because he had collected an enormous booty ; secondly, because he had given up all hope of taking Rome ; and lastly, because he reckoned that the time had now come at which he expected, according to his original idea, that Appius would have learnt the danger threatening Rome, and would have raised the siege of Capua

<sup>1</sup> Or "legion," according to others. But as both Consuls are engaged in the business, it seems reasonable to refer it to the two consular armies of two legions each.

and come with his whole force to the relief of the city ; or at any rate would hurry up with the greater part, leaving a detachment to carry on the siege. Publius had caused the bridges over the Anio to be broken down, and thus compelled Hannibal to get his army across by a ford ; and he now attacked the Carthaginians as they were engaged in making the passage of the stream and caused them great distress. They were not able however to strike an important blow, owing to the number of Hannibal's cavalry, and the activity of the Numidians in every part of the field. But before retiring to their camp they wrested the greater part of the booty from them, and killed about three hundred men ; and then, being convinced that the Carthaginians were beating a hasty retreat in a panic, they followed in their rear, keeping along the line of hills. At first Hannibal continued to march at a rapid pace, being anxious to meet the force which he expected ; but at the end of the fifth day, being informed that Appius had not left the siege of Capua, he halted ; and waiting for the enemy to come up, made an attack upon his camp before daylight, killed a large number of them, and drove the rest out of their camp. But when day broke, and he saw the Romans in a strong position upon a steep hill, to which they had retired, he decided not to continue his attack upon them ; but marching through Daunia and Bruttium he appeared at Rhegium, so unexpectedly, that he was within an ace of capturing the city, and did cut off all who were out in the country ; and during this excursion captured a very large number of the Rhegini.

8. It seems to me that the courage and determination both of the Carthaginians and Romans at this crisis were truly remarkable ; and merit quite as much admiration as the conduct of Epaminondas, which I will describe here for the sake of pointing the comparison.

He reached Tegea with the allies, and when he saw that the Lacedaemonians with their own forces in full were come to Mantinea, and that their allies had mustered together in the same city, with the intention of offering the Thebans battle ; having

The passage of  
the Anio.

Hannibal  
turns upon his  
pursuers.

The rapid march  
of Epaminondas  
to Sparta, and  
back again to  
Mantinea. See

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