

Livy and polybius on the life of hannibal from carthage

Life



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Hannibal, arguably the greatest war hero of the Ancient World, second to Alexander the Great was both loved and hated throughout the Hellenic world and has remained a major historical character studied through ancient history circles today. Livy and Polybius two brilliant ancient historians have left an invaluable insight into the life of Hannibal from Carthage and have documented in their writings the footsteps of this most famous warlords achievements against Rome.

This essay will include an outlook on Hannibal from both authors perspectives, Livy and Polybius and will also include who the historians were, when they wrote and what type of works they performed. Livy was a Roman historian who existed between 59 B. C- 17 A. D. Born Titus Livius in Patavium the most elegant city in Italy, came from Aristocratic blood and born into a world of opportunity and luxury.

Livy lived many years after the battles between Hannibal and Rome approximately 150 years later so his sources of writing were not first hand accounts so therefore not entirely accurate. Livy moved to Rome at the age of 30 and after a brief stint writing and teaching philosophy began a large scale documentation on the history of the Roman empire. Due to a wealthy family inheritance Livy was financially free to live a quiet life of study in the library, becoming the most influential author of his era. Livy, s writing was very colourful and dramatic with a very story telling style.

He was brilliant at glamourising Rome stating history was written by the winners, making the enemy read bigger and bolder than they really were, a gross style of exaggeration to allow rome to seem like an unconquerable

<https://assignbuster.com/livy-and-polybius-on-the-life-of-hannibal-from-carthage/>

dynasty who defeated the undefeatable. A very imaginative story telling style that won many hearts throughout the Hellenic world. I am Roman, I am great, Rome is great. Livy had no political or military blood lines or experience in public office, was not a man of war but more an academic who wanted to escape the evils of civil war so present during his time and escape to the library to write about the joys of the past.

In book 21 of his ancient writings Livy shows positive perspectives on Hannibal declaring him the commander and chief of the Carthaginians and a soldier who led the way in battle, the first to enter the fight and the last to leave the battle. Livy also states that Hannibal was an opportunist who continuously practiced and observed others where necessary to become a great leader of men, however Livy does conclude his view speaking in negative terms about Hannibal's inhumane cruelty, absence of truth, disrespects oaths and has no sense of religious codes.

The truth is that Rome never defeated the Carthaginians in battle and during their last battle at Cannae the Roman army were slaughtered by Hannibal losing 70,000 men in one day, the Romans never fought the Carthaginians on land again and were forced to find other methods in exterminating their enemy, Livy never gave the reader an exact truth but more a moral story of history as he was an astute Roman who loved all things Rome. Polybius was an Ancient Historian from Greece, one of the greats.

His views of Roman history provided his readers with historical means for individual self improvement. Polybius was born in Megalopolis in 202 B. C the son of Lycortas a general of the Achaean league. With his father's influence

<https://assignbuster.com/livy-and-polybius-on-the-life-of-hannibal-from-carthage/>

Polybius served as an ambassador to Egypt and also served as a cavalry commander. In 169 B. C Polybius was dispatched to assist Rome against Macedon however Rome suspected Polybius of half hearted support and was shipped to Rome as a political hostage living comfortably under house arrest behind the city walls of rome.

Eventually Polybius was appointed tutor to Roman aristocratic children and given permission to access Roman documents and readings in order to utilise his craft of writing literature. Polybius became honoured by both Greeks and Romans and was an eyewitness to historical events of his day including the 3rd macedon war and the 3rd punic war. Polybius insisted on travelling to where the history was made, to the battle fields, engaging other military men, including tracking down other military soldiers who fought fore and against Rome in the 1st and 2nd Punic wars.

Polybius on Hannibal reads a very neutral account basing his views on eyewitness accounts including his own and referencing from other readings and sources of history. Polybius was himself a man of war who had real life experience into the mindset of a soldier in battle. His opinions neither favour nor ridicule Hannibal. Polybius endeavoured and discovered in book 9 an honest side to the character of Hannibal stating for I think that men in these circumstances are compelled, not occasionally but frequently, either by the suggestions of friends or the complexity of affairs, to speak and act contrary to real principles.

Polybius unearths here the human condition of Hannibal a highly motivated man, a man with a plan who did not just sit around, a man groomed for war

<https://assignbuster.com/livy-and-polybius-on-the-life-of-hannibal-from-carthage/>

his whole life and loyal to the oath of his father, I will hate Rome my whole life. Polybius also expresses a comparison in book 9 mentioning other exceptional historical figures like Cleomones from Sparta, a most excellent king and most cruel tyrant and then again as a positive individual most obliging and benevolent. Polybius is clearly stating a reasoning here acknowledging the cruel reality of war and how generals are compelled to change with the changes of circumstance.

Having studied the historical writings on Livy and Polybius the reader can conclude that Polybius was more favourable to Hannibal. Although Livy did praise Hannibal in the early passages of book 21 he did conclude by attacking his code of conduct and methods when campaigning and on the battle field and illustrates Hannibal as an extremely cruel character. Livy failed to use primary sources in his readings accompanied with his story telling style, his readings were written from an entertainment point of view particularly to the Romans as Hannibal was a true enemy to Rome.

Polybius however prided himself on keeping it real and stating only the facts, praising his heroes or villains only if they deserved it. , expressing always a non biased opinion. Polybius always documented his findings from eyewitness accounts and information stemmed from interviews he had performed personally with those who had served beside Hannibal, taking himself along the exact same routes tracing Hannibals steps to where the history occurred.

Livy and Polybius writings of the punic wars between Rome and Hannibal from Carthage painted a picture of his achievements and gave insight into

<https://assignbuster.com/livy-and-polybius-on-the-life-of-hannibal-from-carthage/>

the man known as Hannibal, the difference between the two authors were the styles in resourcing the material to keep the work accurate and correct. Polybius achieved plausible accounts which deems him the most credible. It's a pity that all historians were not as good as Polybius.