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Hannibal: The Military Biography Of Rome's Greatest Enemy

HANNIBAL

*The
Military Biography
of Rome's
Greatest Enemy*

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Synopsis

The Romans' destruction of Carthage after the Third Punic War erased any Carthaginian historical record of Hannibal's life. What we know of him comes exclusively from Roman historians who had every interest in minimizing his success, exaggerating his failures, and disparaging his character. The charges leveled against Hannibal include greed, cruelty and atrocity, sexual indulgence, and even cannibalism. But even these sources were forced to grudgingly admit to Hannibal's military genius, if only to make their eventual victory over him appear greater. Yet there is no doubt that Hannibal was the greatest Carthaginian general of the Second Punic War. When he did not defeat them outright, he fought to a standstill the best generals Rome produced, and he sustained his army in the field for sixteen long years without mutiny or desertion. Hannibal was a first-rate tactician, only a somewhat lesser strategist, and the greatest enemy Rome ever faced. When he at last met defeat at the hands of the Roman general Scipio, it was against an experienced officer who had to strengthen and reconfigure the Roman legion and invent mobile tactics in order to succeed. Even so, Scipio's victory at Zama was against an army that was a shadow of its former self. The battle could easily have gone the other way. If it had, the history of the West would have been changed in ways that can only be imagined. Richard A. Gabriel's brilliant new biography shows how Hannibal's genius nearly unseated the Roman Empire.

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Customer Reviews

This is more like 4.5 stars but I'll round up since I won't let me give half-stars. Wow, I'm not sure what to say. I am by no means an expert on military history or strategy. I got this while looking for a biography of Hannibal. This book is that but so much more. There is so much interesting information packed into this not-too-long book. As for the biography, there is an understandable amount of missing information as we simply don't know much about Hannibal aside from his invasion of Rome. However, author provides a lot of information and educated guesses regarding Hannibal's early and later life. The author has a decent writing style that isn't textbook-dry and kept my interest up. Perhaps the most interesting part for me was the authors description of the Carthaginian armies and the Roman armies and how wars were fought in the ancient world. As someone fairly ignorant of military strategy, I found this to be illuminating. The section on army logistics and how ancient armies had to be supported in the field was a huge eye-opener... something you definitely don't see in the movies. That's one thing I really enjoyed about this book. In addition to describing Hannibal's exploits, Mr. Gabriel spends the beginning chapters discussing army composition, weapons, infantry and logistics. This helps pave the way for his explanations for why Hannibal did this or that. I began to understand a bit why certain decisions are made, why Hannibal lost, why armies did what they did in the ancient world. As much as I enjoyed reading this book, I did have a minor nitpick, the only reason I would have given it a 4.5/5 if I could.

Unfortunately this seems to be a bit of a mixed bag - I had read and enjoyed Gabriel's work on Scipio, so decided to try this to complement it. There is some to admire in this book, but sadly, there is also a lot that drags his work down. He contradicts himself on several occasions (particularly in his use of John Lazenby in regards to Hannibal's continued victories in Italy after Cannae - he uses Lazenby's work almost word for word, but when he comes to the battles themselves later, simply presents Livy's exaggerated Roman victories - without even referring to what he'd written earlier following Lazenby... he doesn't even try to analyse the differences, or present why Lazenby came to the conclusions he did... he also misses out small successes of Hannibal - at Geronium for example, and on his withdrawal from Rome when he savaged the Rome camp at night before marching back...) It's annoying as there is also quite a lot of good stuff in here that I haven't found in other books on the subject (and I've read a lot - close to thirty!) refuting Delbrück's claims on the

nature of Roman defenses and Hannibal's chances of a successful siege, presenting an intriguing case for why Hannibal didn't attack Rome after Lake Trasimene, being that he had a relatively healthy army, access to rich plains to support it, and being only 80 miles from Rome, he also considers the logistical side of warfare.

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