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CHAPTER 1

# SOURCES

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The period covered by this volume saw a vast expansion of Roman power, an expansion which extended Roman military and political domination over virtually the entire Mediterranean world, from west to east, from Spanish tribes to Hellenistic kingdoms. At the beginning of the period the cities, leagues and kingdoms of the Hellenistic world which lay to the east of the Adriatic lived a largely separate existence, as yet barely touched by Rome; by the end, although (except in Macedonia) the imposition of Roman administration still lay in the future, effective Roman political control was an established fact. This outcome had a profound influence upon the nature of the literary sources which yield both the framework and much of the detail of our knowledge; for the greater part of them have Rome at the centre of their interest and show us the rest of the Mediterranean peoples, both of the west and of the east, primarily in relationship to Rome. Thus although in the western lands there is much archaeological evidence, revealing military constructions, habitations, and a multitude of artifacts, the historical context to which this has to be related is almost entirely Roman. In the east, though the nature of the material is somewhat more complicated, it is still difficult to build up independently of Roman affairs a picture which has much coherence and detail, even for the early part of the period. Admittedly some help can be obtained here from the considerable body of numismatic and of epigraphic evidence. The evidence of coins is particularly useful in resolving a number of chronological problems, especially in connection with some of the dynasts and usurpers whose reigns were short, while for certain of the more remote Hellenistic kingdoms it is fundamental; and the survival of numerous inscriptions, especially inscriptions erected by Hellenistic cities, casts many shafts of light – usually narrow but often intense – upon matters of chronology, political allegiance, administration and royal policies.[1] Nevertheless both coins and inscriptions acquire much of their value as evidence when they are

[1] Section IV below.



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related to contexts which must be derived largely from literary sources; and for the Hellenistic world, particularly in affairs unrelated to Rome, these are sparse and often fragmented, and frequently permit the reconstruction of only a sketchy outline of events.

Aside from the accidents of loss, which, though erratic, grievously afflict the records of every period of Ancient History, there are two particular reasons for this state of affairs in relation to this period. Firstly, although the Hellenistic world was a world well acquainted with literature and literary composition, and although in the third century it had had a number of distinguished historians of its own, there followed a long period, including the years covered by this volume, during which it produced little major historical writing apart from the work of Polybius, whose central interest was the growth of Roman power and who in several respects was clearly a special case. Admittedly a very large number of local histories and some other monographs on special topics were written in the Hellenistic age[2] and it is plausible to assume that some of them were written in the period now under discussion (all are lost and many cannot be dated); but by their nature these had very limited subject-matter and many probably had only a modest circulation. So apart from these local histories there did not exist for the use of later historians or for transmission to us a substantial body of contemporary historical writing concerned primarily with the Hellenistic world. Secondly, for writers of later generations, living in a Roman empire, it was entirely natural that in the main their concern with this period should revolve around the affairs of Rome.

A partial exception to this widespread practice of treating Hellenistic history simply as an aspect of Roman history is to be found in the work of Pompeius Trogus. Trogus, who in the time of Augustus wrote in Latin a 'universal history' which he entitled '*Historiae Philippicae*', dealt with the Hellenistic period in no less than twenty-eight of his forty-four books. The work is lost but is known in outline from surviving tables of contents (*prologi*) of the individual books and from an epitome made by a certain Justin, probably in the third century A.D. Trogus himself, inevitably and properly, devoted several books to Rome's wars in the east, but even when dealing with the second century B.C. he managed to devote a good deal of space to affairs of the Hellenistic powers in which Rome was not involved. For a number of events these summaries of Trogus are the only evidence; more importantly their sketchy narrative plays a key part in establishing the overall framework of events.

[2] It is reasonable to bracket with these the concluding sections of the history of Phylarchus and the memoirs of Aratus, both of which were concerned with European Greece down to 220 B.C. Both were drawn upon by Polybius for his introductory material in books I and II, which covered events to that year.

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There is another notable exception to the general pattern of evidence for the period. The uprising of the Jews under the Hasmonaeans against Seleucid domination is an episode of Hellenistic history which is almost entirely outside the orbit of Roman history but which is recorded at some length and in considerable detail. It is the subject of the first two books of Maccabees and is also dealt with in the writings of Josephus. Yet even the *First Book of Maccabees*, which was probably written by a Palestinian Jew *c.* 100 B.C. and is much the more valuable of the two, covers only the years 175–135, while the later, more derivative *Second Book of Maccabees* confines itself to 176–161. Thus although these works provide coherent and fairly detailed accounts (and also throw some incidental light on other aspects of Seleucid history), their subject-matter is limited in time as well as in place, and is a reflection of the importance of the uprising in the Jewish tradition rather than a more general Hellenistic historical record. Much the same may be said of Josephus' accounts of the episode in the introduction to his *Jewish War* and, at greater length, in his *Antiquities*, both written in the Flavian period and both dependent in considerable measure upon I *Maccabees*.

The fact remains, despite these special cases, that the greater part of the evidence for the Hellenistic world in this period is derived from authors who deal also with Roman history and for whom, even in the context of 'universal history', Rome is the true focus of their interest. That is neither surprising nor wholly misleading, for as the period proceeds this point of view approximates more closely to the actual situation which was developing. The history of the Hellenistic world was becoming steadily less distinct and independent, Rome impinged more and more upon it, and the interaction between the two became one of the major political and historical realities of the time, to be superseded by the reality of unchallengeable Roman domination of the whole. All this was to find early expression in both the person and the writings of Polybius, who played a major role in the collection and transmission of much of the information that has reached us.

## II. HISTORIANS

Polybius of Megalopolis,[3] born *c.* 200, was one of the thousand leading men of Achaea who were deported to Italy after the battle of Pydna in 168; he was released only in 150 – as also were the others who survived so long. Polybius himself, however, had become well acquainted with P. Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus and Q. Fabius Maximus Aemilianus, both of whom were sons of the victorious Roman general at Pydna, L.

[3] Polybius, like all the authors named in this chapter, is the subject of a special article in *PW*. See also Walbank 1972: (B 39), and, for detailed commentary, Walbank 1957–79: (B 38).

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Aemilius Paullus. When the other detainees were assigned to various Italian towns these influential young men arranged that Polybius should remain in Rome itself, and before long his relationship with Scipio in particular developed into a close and enduring friendship (Polyb. XXXI.23.1–25.1). Thus he found himself living in the city, at the heart of the state which within his own lifetime – and he was still only in his thirties – had spectacularly changed the power-structure of the world from which he came; and he was in close touch with men who were likely to be well informed about affairs there and elsewhere. He was stimulated to ask himself how in the short space of time from 220 to 167 Rome had come to dominate the whole Mediterranean world, and he determined to answer this question by writing a history. Although the greater part of that history is now lost, it is, directly and indirectly, a major source of our knowledge and understanding of the period, while for Rome's relations with the Hellenistic states it is the principal source.

The first two books of the history outlined events from 264 to 220 as an introductory background. Sketchy though these are by comparison with the main body of the work, they are invaluable to the modern scholar because of the loss of so much other work dealing with events prior to 220. Polybius' original plan was to write thirty books in all, but some time after he had started he decided to add a further ten books and to take his account down to 146 (Polyb. III.4). The reason given for this change of plan is that he wished to show how the victors used the power they had won, but the surviving passages from the later books do not seem to reflect this intention particularly well and it has often been viewed with a degree of scepticism. There must be a suspicion that he was motivated in part by a desire to include events with which he himself had been closely associated, for in 151 he accompanied Scipio Aemilianus on a campaign in Spain, and shortly after his formal release from detention he was summoned to assist the Romans during the siege of Carthage. Moreover after the disastrous folly of the Achaean war against Rome in 146, which led to the destruction of Corinth, Polybius played a role of great prominence, first as a mediator between the Achaeans and the Romans and then in regulating relationships among the Achaean cities following the withdrawal of Roman troops. Whatever his true motives for the extension, however, the whole history undoubtedly constituted a monumental work which must have taken many years to compile and compose. Indeed the final books were probably published only after his death, the date of which is not known but which may have been as late as 118.

Polybius brought to his history two key concepts, both of which contribute substantially to the value of his work as a source for the period and both of which were facilitated by the circumstances in which he

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found himself. The first is that though history may be entertaining it is above all a practical, utilitarian matter, intended for the instruction and enlightenment of statesmen and men of office. There is thus a bias (not quite totally sustained) against dramatization and towards solid reliability, with information gleaned as directly and as accurately as possible from actual participants in events. The second is that Polybius' principal theme – the unifying of his world through the imposition of Roman power – required 'universal' history, in other words the recording of events at every stage in all the areas which were to have this unity of domination imposed upon them. It is no surprise that fulfilment of this ambitious objective was uneven or that it was applied most extensively to Greece and the major Hellenistic kingdoms. Nevertheless it did mean that Polybius was seeking out and recording a broad range of information much of which would otherwise not have been passed down. Moreover for both these aspects of his task – indeed for the task as a whole – he was peculiarly well situated. His detention placed him close to the centre of world power; he was in touch with men who were exceptionally well informed about current events and who often were leading participants in them, and after his release he maintained these contacts; in some events he himself had participated in a significant way; he had opportunity to talk with many who had played leading roles earlier in his period; he had access to at least some memoirs, treaties, and other documents, in addition to the earliest histories written by Romans – Q. Fabius Pictor and L. Cincius Alimentus (both of whom wrote in Greek) – and monographs devoted to the Punic wars; and he could meet and talk with many of the envoys, including many Greeks, who now streamed to Rome as the ultimate source of authority and assistance.

Polybius thus had both incentive and opportunity to be well informed and reliable over a broad range of material; and in general his reputation in these respects stands high so far as factual matters are concerned, though inevitably a few particulars are questionable or demonstrably incorrect. The reliability of his judgements and assessments, however, has been the subject of greater debate. First, there is unmistakable evidence of partisanship, apparent for example in the obviously favourable view taken of the Achaeans and the equally obvious dislike of the Aetolians. One instance of a glaring distortion induced by partisanship is the absurd assertion that fear and cowardice were the motives which in 152 induced M. Claudius Marcellus to recommend acceptance of a peace settlement with the Celtiberians. Marcellus, thrice a consul and twice a *triumphator*, was one of the ablest generals of the day; but among the many who disapproved of his conciliatory policy towards the Celtiberians was Polybius' friend and patron Scipio Aemilianus (Polyb. xxxv.3.4, xxxv.4.3 and 8). Once it is recognized, however, that at least in

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matters very close to him Polybius' judgement may be affected by vigorous partisanship it is not difficult to exercise the necessary caution. More controversial has been Polybius' pervading view that the expansion of Roman power was the product of a conscious desire on the part of the Romans to extend their domination over other peoples, and that on certain occasions decisions were taken specifically towards that end. By and large, however, what is in dispute is not whether Polybius held that view but whether it is a correct interpretation and accords with factual information which he himself provides; it is a question about the nature of Roman imperialism rather than about the value of Polybius' work as source-material, and as such it is discussed elsewhere in this volume.

In another sense, however, this is but one facet of another question: whether this Greek ever really understood the character, the motivation, the ethos of the Romans. In his sixth book, a substantial portion of which survives, he described and evaluated Roman institutions, including in this his famous analysis of the Roman constitution as a 'mixed' constitution. Many features of this analysis have prompted discussion and argument, but however they may be interpreted it remains evident that the realities of Roman political and constitutional behaviour differed significantly from the models set out by Polybius in this account. Partly because Polybius directs attention to formal powers and institutions rather than to actual behaviour, the highly effective oligarchic manipulation of both executive office and 'popular' organs is lost to sight behind an appealing picture of a neatly balanced combination of monarchic, aristocratic and democratic elements, each contributing their own strengths and checking undesirable tendencies in the others. It is a picture which conveys little of the actualities of Roman aristocratic government. Yet it would be unwise to infer too readily from this constitutional section that Polybius did not understand the nature of Roman politics and government, or that his assessments elsewhere of Romans and Roman motives are to be suspected of having been distorted by Greek preconceptions. He would not be the last writer by a long way to have created a theoretical model in which his own enthusiasm and abstractions were allowed to override realities which in day-to-day life he understood perfectly well. It would be surprising if Polybius were never mistaken, if he always understood Romans correctly; but for very many years he lived not just in Rome but in close touch with aristocratic and political circles. It seems reasonable to treat his judgements with considerable respect.

Only a relatively small part of Polybius' great history has survived. Apart from fragments of lost books, we have much of book VI, with Polybius' discussion of Roman political and military institutions, and the whole of books I–V. The introductory nature and the special value of the

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first two books has been mentioned already; books III–V deal with events from 220 to 216, including a great deal of Greek and Hellenistic material which otherwise would be unknown to us. The breaking-off of this continuous narrative in 216 (approximately with the battle of Cannae) results in a sharp change in the precision and detail of our knowledge thereafter, especially in respect of the Hellenistic world. (The record of Roman affairs is much less seriously affected until Livy's narrative also breaks off with 167.) Nevertheless a significant amount of Polybius' material from book VII onwards has survived. This material takes the form either of fragments – extracts and quotations – directly ascribed to Polybius or of passages, some of them of considerable length, in authors who are known to have drawn heavily upon Polybius for certain sections of their own writings, though these two types of Polybian material are not always sharply distinct from one another. The majority of the fragments are derived from sets of extracts from Polybius (and from other historians) made in the Byzantine period, in several cases in order to illustrate a particular theme, such as 'Virtues and Vices', 'Plots against Kings', and 'Embassies'. Such extracts are by their nature isolated and many of them are deficient in indications of context and chronology; on the other hand within each set they are normally in the order in which they occurred in the original text, and the main substance of each extract tends to preserve the wording of the original more exactly than ancient custom regarding quotation would normally require.[4] These sets are therefore a major source for the recovery of material lost from Polybius – and indeed from many other historians who wrote in Greek.

Other fragments are really quotations from Polybius which survive in the works of subsequent writers. Such quotations tend to be less exact than the Byzantine extracts, but they are often related to a definite context and they are fairly numerous, for later writers drew heavily on Polybius' material, especially those who were writing in Greek or were concerned with Hellenistic affairs. Among the Greek writers were Diodorus of Sicily, who in the first century B.C. wrote a World History, and Dio Cassius, a Roman senator from Bithynia who in the Severan age wrote a vast history of Rome down to his own day. It happens that for the period covered by this volume the text of both these works is lost, so we are dependent upon quotations and Byzantine extracts, mostly very similar to those which we have for Polybius himself. Not surprisingly there is a considerable duplication of material which is found also in fragments of Polybius or in Livy, or in both; but there is some informa-

[4] These points can be demonstrated by an examination of extracts taken from books which are still extant, both of Polybius and of other authors. For the corpus of surviving extracts: Boissevain and others, 1903–10: (B 1).

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tion which has not survived elsewhere, especially for the years after 167, when Livy's text breaks off.

Another Greek writer who preserves quotations from Polybius is Plutarch, who in the late first century A.D. wrote his 'Parallel Lives' of Greeks and Romans. Six of the 'Lives', five Roman and one Greek, are relevant to this volume.[5] Plutarch's principal interest is in the moral characteristics and the personality of each of his famous men. Deeds and sayings are narrated to exemplify these qualities, but he is less concerned with achievements as such, and scarcely at all with policies, political analysis or specific military activity. This is reflected in his choice of material, in the manner in which it is presented, and in the relative importance he assigns to various items. To the frustration of the modern enquirer – especially the political historian – he provides a good deal of minor personal information and anecdote, while other matters are treated with a disappointing vagueness and lack of detail. He usually follows broadly the main sequence of his subject's career but otherwise has no interest in time and date; consequently he provides few chronological indicators and scarcely any which are at all precise. Yet Plutarch is not to be despised. He records a great deal of information, by no means all of which is mere duplication of what can be found elsewhere; and his wide reading enabled him to draw upon many sources. At the same time, in the six 'Lives' presently in question a substantial proportion of his material, including most of that which concerns affairs east of the Adriatic, undoubtedly goes back directly or indirectly to Polybius.

Ancient authors, not sharing the modern horror of plagiarism, by no means always named predecessors upon whom they were drawing, whether for specific statements or for substantial bodies of material. Diodorus, Dio and Plutarch, and others, all have considerable amounts of material which they or intermediaries have taken from Polybius without ascription to him. In some cases this can be established because such a passage has been taken from a section of Polybius which happens to survive, and in this way it is possible to form some idea of the extent of a writer's debt to Polybius and of the manner in which he used Polybian material. By far the most important surviving work which is indebted to Polybius in this way is Livy's history of Rome, surviving books of which include those dealing with the years 219–167. Comparison with passages of Polybius leaves no doubt that the latter was Livy's main source for eastern affairs, that for a very large amount of material concerning Rome's relationships and activities east of the Adriatic he drew directly, extensively, and principally upon Polybius. Moreover, although Livy's

[5] *Fabius Maximus*, *Marcellus*, *Cato the Elder*, *Flamininus*, *Aemilius Paullus*, *Philopoemen*.

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version is not an exact translation of the Greek into Latin, he normally remains close to the content and general structure of his original, despite the touches of vividness and vigour imparted by his own artistry. Thus very substantial amounts of material in Livy dealing with eastern affairs, though not acknowledged to be Polybian, do preserve fairly accurately Polybius' version of events; and, while inevitably there are sections of which the ascription is disputed, the Polybian origin of a great deal of this material can be assumed with considerable confidence. Thus much of Livy's information on these matters goes back to an unusually well-informed writer of the second century B.C. who was a contemporary or near-contemporary of many of the events he describes; and the value of Polybius as a source extends well beyond the actual books and fragments which have survived.[6]

Livy's massive history of Rome from its origins to his own day was almost literally a lifetime's work.[7] So far as is known Livy did not engage in public affairs but devoted himself entirely to literary matters, above all to the writing of his history which is known to have occupied him for virtually the whole of the reign of Augustus. Arranged on a year-by-year, annalistic scheme, it grew in scale as it progressed and ultimately comprised no less than one hundred and forty-two books, of which thirty-five survive. These extant books are I–X, which take the history of 292 B.C., and XXI–XLV, which deal with 219–167 and therefore with a major part of the period covered by this volume. Indeed, since they deal with the Second Punic War and with Rome's major wars against the Hellenistic powers – the very period which Polybius initially took as his subject – they are of exceptional importance, the more so since they are the principal vehicle for much of Polybius' own account. From the lost books (of which XX and XLVI–LVII are relevant to this volume) there are only a small number of fragments, but there are epitomes. One of these epitomes, generally known as 'the *Periochae*', is a very brief summary of the main items (as they seemed to the compiler) in each book; the result is longer but not a great deal longer than a table of contents might be expected to be, and precise chronological indications are usually lacking. Nevertheless these summaries exist for all 142 books except CXXXVI and CXXXVII. Portions of a different epitome, similar in type but somewhat briefer, were found in a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus. Though much damaged, this included summaries of books XXXVII–XL (which are extant) and of books XLVIII–LV. In addition several other short historical works are derived from Livy to such an extent that they are not far

[6] Nissen 1863: (B 23) is the foundation study of this relationship between Polybius and Livy.

[7] Klotz 1940–1: (B 13); Walsh 1961: (B 40); Ogilvie 1965, 1–22: (B 25); Luce 1977: (B 15). Commentaries relevant to this period: Weissenborn-Müller 1880–1911: (B 43); Briscoe 1973: (B 3) and 1981: (B 4) (books XXXI–XXXIII and XXXIV–XXXVII).

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removed themselves from being epitomes. These include the relevant parts of Eutropius' *Breviarium* and of Orosius' *Historiae adversum Paganos*, and the biographical *De Viris Illustribus* attributed to Aurelius Victor.

Livy's principal intention and achievement was artistic – the creation of a grand design and its realization in a lively, polished and often powerful narrative. Only rarely did he engage in the primary research which his modern counterparts regard as an essential function of a historian. His method for any particular episode was to follow one account selected from those available to him, with only occasional mentions of variants found in other accounts. Generally he seems to have followed his chosen account quite closely, but to have re-written it in his own accomplished style and to have given it some vivid and dramatic expression – as he did with Polybius. For the period of this volume he used especially (apart from Polybius) two of the so-called 'Sullan annalists' of the early first century B.C., Valerius Antias and Claudius Quadrigarius, though there are traces of other sources, such as the account of the military campaign of Cato in Spain in 195 which certainly goes back to Cato himself. Since Valerius and Claudius were both prone to exaggeration and elaboration (not to mention cavalier alteration) in the interests of dramatic effect, family glory, or Roman chauvinism, there has been a tendency to treat with scepticism any material in Livy which does not come from Polybius, and in some extreme cases to discount completely all such material. It is more realistic, however, while maintaining a sensible degree of caution about such details as casualty figures and highly dramatic battle scenes, to recognize that Valerius and Claudius were themselves drawing upon a great body of second-century material, much of it well informed and derived from contemporary accounts and records. The broad framework can be taken to be generally sound, and so can much of the detail. Year by year, for example, Livy reports elections, the allocation of provinces, recruitment and assignment of troops, triumphs, donatives, booty, dedications of temples, and prodigies and their expiation. Much of this is probably derived from the *annales maximi*, the public record made by the *Pontifex Maximus*, the archive of which was probably written up and published in the later second century.

Livy's twenty-five books are not, of course, the only source of information for the great age of Roman expansion. Apart from the fragments of Polybius and such authors as Diodorus, Dio and Plutarch, there are other minor historical works and, scattered through a great variety of literature, a substantial number of anecdotes. Nevertheless the role played by Livy's account in the work of the modern historian of that period is central, indeed it is fundamental. Its importance is well brought out by comparing the periods before and after Livy's text breaks off.

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