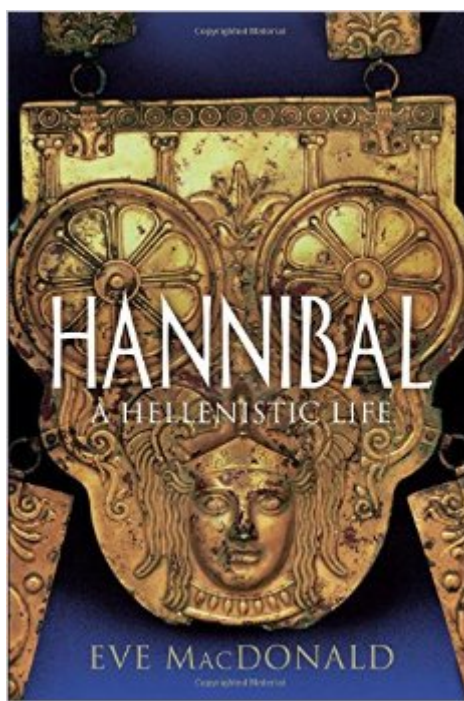


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Hannibal: A Hellenistic Life



Synopsis

If history is written by the victors, can we really know Hannibal, whose portrait we see through the eyes of his Roman conquerors? Hannibal lived a life of incredible feats of daring and survival, massive military engagements, and ultimate defeat. A citizen of Carthage and military commander in Punic Spain, he famously marched his war elephants and huge army over the Alps into Rome's own heartland to fight the Second Punic War. Yet the Romans were the ultimate victors. They eventually captured and destroyed Carthage, and thus it was they who wrote the legend of Hannibal: a brilliant and worthy enemy whose defeat represented military glory for Rome. In this groundbreaking biography Eve MacDonald expands the memory of Hannibal beyond his military feats and tactics. She considers him in the wider context of the society and vibrant culture of Carthage which shaped him and his family, employing archaeological findings and documentary sources not only from Rome but also the wider Mediterranean world of the third century B.C. MacDonald also analyzes Hannibal's legend over the millennia, exploring how statuary, Jacobean tragedy, opera, nineteenth-century fiction, and other depictions illuminate the character of one of the most fascinating military personalities in all of history.

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Customer Reviews

Using the prisms of the Roman perspective and the Hellenistic world (chapter 1), Eve MacDonald crafts a narrative that follows Rome and Carthage through the First Punic War and Carthage's own civil war (chapter 2), the rise of Hannibal Barca's father in Spain (chapter 3), and eventually Hannibal's own rise to power (chapter 4). These chapters provide the reader with the necessary

context for the start of the Second Punic War and the Hellenistic world that heavily influenced commanders of the day. MacDonald, archaeologist and lecturer at the University Reading, points out that the Hellenistic kingdoms "established their legitimacy through military victory" (25) and men such as Alexander, Agathocles, Pyrrhus, and Xanthippus provided perfect examples for the likes of Hannibal. This also meant that armies relied heavily on mercenaries (35) and victors often avoided total annihilation of opponents (134). As for the Roman perspective, MacDonald maintains a critical eye. With the destruction of Carthage, the Romans owned the history of the city and its people. As such, the author points out that the oft told stories of the Barcid hatred for the Romans was likely a "literary construct" to justify later destruction of Carthage (62). As for crossing the Alps (chapter 5), MacDonald heaps the usual praise on Hannibal's "brilliance" for "chang[ing] the paradigm of the war before it had begun" (85). The more interesting aspect of her analysis is on Hannibal's "myth management" or propaganda (88), as he adopted the image of the Phoenician god Melqart whose Greek counterpart "Heracles" trekked a similar path. MacDonald presents another prism utilized throughout the book "Hannibal's relationship with his troops.

Comment upon Eve MacDonald, *Hannibal, A Hellenistic Life* Reading MacDonald's book, I was astonished to find that the author omitted any mention of Sir Gavin de Beer and Sir Dennis Proctor, authors of major source material on Hannibal and the Second Punic War, quite the faux pas if ever there was one. Sir Gavin de Beer, former Director of the British Museum, a polymath, embryonic biologist, philologist, classicist, amongst other professions wrote four books on the Hannibal invasion of Italia and Carthage itself, his share of interpretations unmentioned by MacDonald. Sir Dennis Proctor, classicist, is also absent from the story and it is he who painstakingly threaded together the main facts behind the invasion crafting the brilliant "Hannibal's March in History" (Oxford, 1971), which sorts out the relevance of Livy and Polybius as authorities and weighs their interpretations against historians who followed. MacDonald does mention other key players of the Hannibal saga, major classical authors such as Silius Italicus, Plutarch, and Appian, and modern figures such as Serge Lancel and John Lazenby, the latter arguably the major authority on Hannibal and the Punic Wars from the start in 264 until the end, final destruction of Carthage in 146 BC. Eve MacDonald's book is a standard history of Hannibal, a well written work that relies heavily on translations of Polybius and Livy, perhaps relying too heavily on Livy's interpretations of events than is warranted given that he never left Padua, and his interpretations of events are third hand at best. Writing a biography like this where the protagonist himself is mute, not having left a

single word, and as the author notes his life molded by his adversariesâ "The Romansâ" is extremely interpretive.

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