Roman History Reading for Monday 2/20:

On Roman City-Sacking in general (Polybius)

"The Roman troops are sent, as is the Roman custom, against the inhabitants of the city with orders to kill all they encountered, sparing none, and not to start pillaging until the signal was given. They do this, I think, to inspire terror, so that when towns are taken by the Romans one may often see not only the corpses of human beings, but dogs cut in half, and the dismembered limbs of other animals…[When the citadel is surrendered, a signal is given]. Upon the signal being given, the massacre ceases and they begin pillaging. At nightfall such of the Romans as have received orders to that effect, remain in the camp, while others remain in the citadel, and, recalling the rest from the houses, order them to collect the booty in the market and sleep there, keeping guard over it."

The Burning of Carthage (146 BC). By Polybius (eye-witness)—original is lost, but this summary is in Plutarch:

When Hasdrubal, the Carthaginian commander, threw himself as a suppliant at Scipio's knees, the general (Scipio) turning to those round him said, "Look, my friends, how well Fortune knows to make an example of inconsiderate men. This is that very Hasdrubal who lately rejected the many kind offers I made him, and said that his native city and her flames would be the most splendid funeral pyre for him; and here he is with suppliant boughs begging for his life from me and reposing all his hopes on me! Who that witnesses this with his eyes can fail to understand that a mere man should never either act or speak presumptuously?" [The Carthaginians] began to abuse Hasdrubal, some of them for having violated his oath, saying that he had often sworn solemnly that he would not desert them, and others for his cowardice and general baseness of spirit. And this they did with jeers and in the most insulting, coarse, and hostile language.

At this moment his wife, seeing Hasdrubal seated with Scipio in front of the enemy, came out from the crowd, herself dressed like a great lady, but holding her children, who wore nothing but their smocks, by each hand and wrapping them in her cloak. At first she called on Hasdrubal by his name, but when he maintained silence and bent his eyes to the ground, she began by calling on the gods and expressing her deepest thanks to Scipio for sparing as far as he was concerned not only herself but her children. Then, after a short silence, she asked Hasdrubal how without saying a word to her he had deserted them all and betaken himself to the Roman general to secure his own safety; how he had thus shamelessly abandoned the state and the citizens who trusted in him, and gone over secretly to the enemy; and how he had the face to sit now beside the enemy with suppliant boughs in his hands, that enemy to whom he had often boasted that the day would never dawn on which the sun would look on Hasdrubal alive and his city in flames . . . Turning round to me (Polybius) at once and grasping my hand Scipio said, "A glorious moment, Polybius; but I have a dread foreboding that some day the same doom will be pronounced on my own country." It would be difficult to mention an utterance more statesmanlike and more profound. For at the moment of our greatest triumph and of disaster to our enemies to reflect on our own situation and on the possible

reversal of circumstances, and generally to bear in mind at the season of success the mutability of Fortune, is like a great and perfect man, a man in short worthy to be remembered.

Another version of Polybius' account is recorded by another historian, Appian

Scipio, when he looked upon the city as it was utterly perishing and in the last throes of its complete destruction, is said to have shed tears and wept openly for his enemies. After being wrapped in thought for long, and realizing that all cities, nations, and authorities must, like men, meet their doom; that this happened to Troy, once a prosperous city, to the empires of Assyria, Media, and Persia, the greatest of their time, and to Macedonia itself, the brilliance of which was so recent, either deliberately or the verses escaping him, he said:

A day will come when sacred Troy shall perish,
And Priam and his people shall be slain.

And when Polybius, speaking with freedom to him for he was his teacher, asked him what he meant by the words, they say that without any attempt at concealment he named his own country, for which he feared when he reflected on the fate of all things human. Polybius actually heard him and recalls it in his history.

Sallust: Roman historian, 1st cent. BC:

Justice and probity prevailed among the early Roman citizens, not more from the influence of the laws than from natural inclination. They displayed animosity, enmity, and resentment only against the enemy. Citizens contended with citizens in nothing but honor. They were magnificent in their religious services, frugal in their families, and steady in their friendships. By these two virtues, intrepidity in war, and equity in peace, they maintained themselves and their state. Of their exercise of which virtues, I consider these as the greatest proofs; that, in war, punishment was oftener inflicted on those who attacked an enemy contrary to orders, and who, when commanded to retreat, retired too slowly from the contest, than on those who had dared to desert their standards, or, when pressed by the enemy, to abandon their posts; and that, in peace, they governed more by conferring benefits than by exciting terror, and, when they received an injury, chose rather to pardon than to revenge it.

But when, by perseverance and integrity, the republic had increased its power; when mighty princes had been vanquished in war; when barbarous tribes and populous states had been reduced to subjection; when Carthage, the rival of Rome's dominion, had been utterly destroyed, and sea and land lay everywhere open to her sway, Fortune then began to exercise her tyranny, and to introduce universal innovation. To those who had easily endured toils, dangers, and doubtful and difficult circumstances, ease and wealth, the objects of desire to others, became a burden and a trouble. At first the love of money,

and then that of power, began to prevail, and these became, as it were, the sources of every evil. For avarice subverted honesty, integrity, and other honorable principles, and, in their stead, inculcated pride, inhumanity, contempt of religion, and general venality. Ambition prompted many to become deceitful; to keep one thing concealed in the breast, and another ready on the tongue; to estimate friendships and enmities, not by their worth, but according to interest; and to carry rather a specious countenance than an honest heart. These vices at first advanced but slowly, and were sometimes restrained by correction; but afterward, when their infection had spread like a pestilence, the state was entirely changed, and the government, from being the most equitable and praiseworthy, became rapacious and insupportable.

The Roman poet Horace.
<u>Excerpt from *Odes 3.6:* Rome's Increasing Moral Decadence</u>

Romans, though you're guiltless, you'll still expiate
your fathers' sins, till you've restored the temples,
and the tumbling shrines of all the gods,
and their images, soiled with black smoke.

…

Our age, fertile in its wickedness, has first
defiled the marriage bed, our offspring, and homes:
disaster's stream has flowed from this source
through the people and the fatherland.

The young girl early takes delight in learning
Greek dances, in being dressed with all the arts,
and soon meditates sinful affairs,
with every fibre of her new being:

later at her husband's dinners she searches
for younger lovers, doesn't mind to whom she
grants all her swift illicit pleasures
when the lights are far removed, but she rises,

openly, when ordered to do so, and not
without her husband's knowledge, whether it's for
some peddler, or Spanish ship's captain,
an extravagant buyer of her shame.

The young men who stained the Punic Sea with blood
they were not born of such parentage, those who

struck at Pyrrhus, and struck at great
Antiochus, and fearful Hannibal:

they were a virile crowd of rustic soldiers,
taught to turn the furrow with a Sabine hoe,
to bring in the firewood they had cut
at the instruction of their strict mothers.

…

Excerpt from Horace, Odes 4.4, In celebration of the Claudian family:

…

At last that treacherous Hannibal proclaimed:
"The [Roman] race, still strong despite the burning of Troy,
brought their children, sacred icons, and aged
fathers, tossed about on Tuscan seas,
to the towns of Italy, as some oak,
rich in its dark leaves, high on Mount Algidus,
trimmed back by the double-bladed axe, draws strength
and life, despite loss and destruction,
from the very steel itself. The Hydra,
as its body was lopped, grew no mightier,
in grief at being conquered by Hercules,
nor was any greater monster reared
by Colchis or Echionian Thebes.

Drowned in the deep, it emerges lovelier:
it defeats the freshest opponent,
with great glory, and wages wars
that the housewives will tell of in story.
I'll send no more proud messages to Carthage:
every hope of mine is ended, and ended
the fortunes of all my family,
since my brother Hasdrubal's destruction.