

# Polyaenus

## Complete Works

DELPHI  CLASSICS

Ancient Classics Series

*The Complete Works of*  
**POLYAENUS**

(fl. 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD)



**Contents**

*The Translation*

Stratagems (c. 163)

*The Greek Text*

Contents of the Greek Text

*The Dual Text*

Dual Greek and English Text

*The Biography*

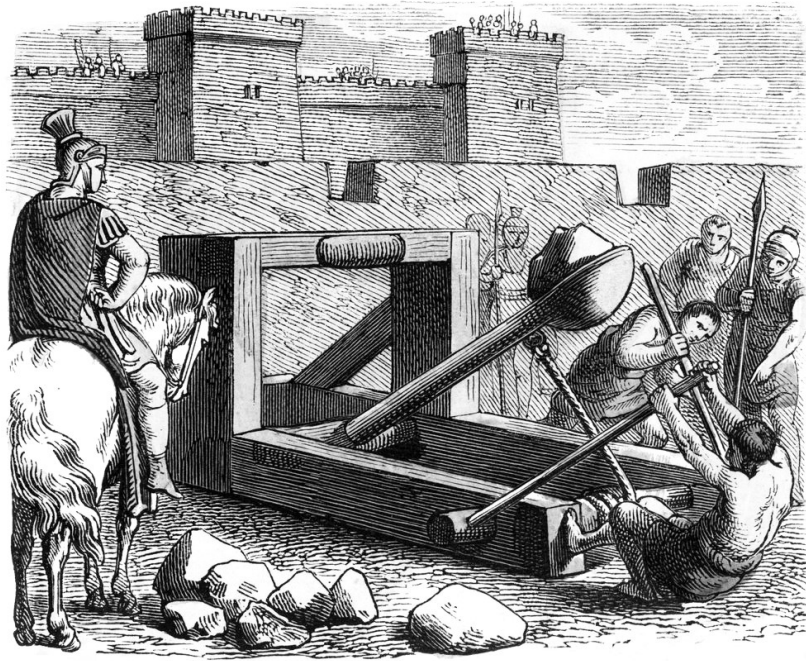
Polyaenus (1911)

*The Delphi Classics Catalogue*



© *Delphi Classics* 2025  
Version 1

*The Complete Works of*  
**POLYAENUS OF BITHYNIA**



*By Delphi Classics, 2025*



# COPYRIGHT

## *Complete Works of Polyaeus*



First published in the United Kingdom in 2025 by Delphi Classics.

© Delphi Classics, 2025.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form other than that in which it is published.

ISBN: 978 1 80170 263 8

Delphi Classics

is an imprint of

Delphi Publishing Ltd

Hastings, East Sussex

United Kingdom

Contact: [sales@delphiclassics.com](mailto:sales@delphiclassics.com)



[www.delphiclassics.com](http://www.delphiclassics.com)

## The Translation



*Ancient ruins at Nicaea, Bithynia, a Roman province in the northwest of Asia Minor — Polyaeus was born in Bithynia.*



*Location of ancient Bithynia within Asia Minor*

## Stratagems (c. 163)



*Translated by R. Shepherd, 1793*

Polyaenus was a second century Roman Macedonian author and rhetorician, who was born in Bithynia, Asia Minor. We know very little about his life, save for what he tells us in his sole surviving work, *Stratagems*. He confides that he was accustomed to plead causes before the Roman emperor. He dedicated his work to the two emperors Lucius Verus and his adoptive brother Marcus Aurelius, while they were engaged in the Roman-Parthian War of 161-166. Verus' succession together with Marcus Aurelius marked the first time that the Roman Empire was ruled by more than one emperor simultaneously, an increasingly common occurrence in its later history. *Stratagems* was likely composed in c. 163, at which time Polyaenus was too old to accompany them in their campaigns.

Polyaenus' intention was to provide the emperors with brief examples of the exploits of famous generals, which they could imitate in the Parthian conflict. The book is in essence a historical collection of stratagems and maxims of military strategy written in Greek and strung together in the form of anecdotes. It also includes examples of wisdom, courage and cunning from civil and political life. The major sources for the anecdotes are the Greek historians and Plutarch. Despite its many errors of judgment and fact, its contents are rich in historical value. Evidently highly esteemed by the Roman emperors, it was handed down by them as an heirloom of sorts and passed to Constantinople, where it was closely studied by the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI, who himself wrote a work on tactics. Some of the material, especially in Book VIII, seems to have been added more for entertainment than for any practical value; it includes hints on such topics as how to woo a tyrant's daughter and how to force your relatives to give you money.

*Stratagems* is divided into eight books, the first six containing accounts of the stratagems of the most celebrated Greek generals and rulers, while the seventh book describes stratagems of non Greeks and Romans; the eighth and final book concerns the stratagems of the Romans and of illustrious women. Parts of the sixth and seventh books are lost, so that of the 900 stratagems which Polyaenus refers to, only 833 have survived in the sole manuscript. This single copy was made in the thirteenth century, although five abridged versions do exist. The full copy once belonged to the noted Byzantine copyist Michel Apostolios. It contains a vast number of anecdotes respecting many of the most celebrated men in antiquity and has uniquely preserved many historical facts.

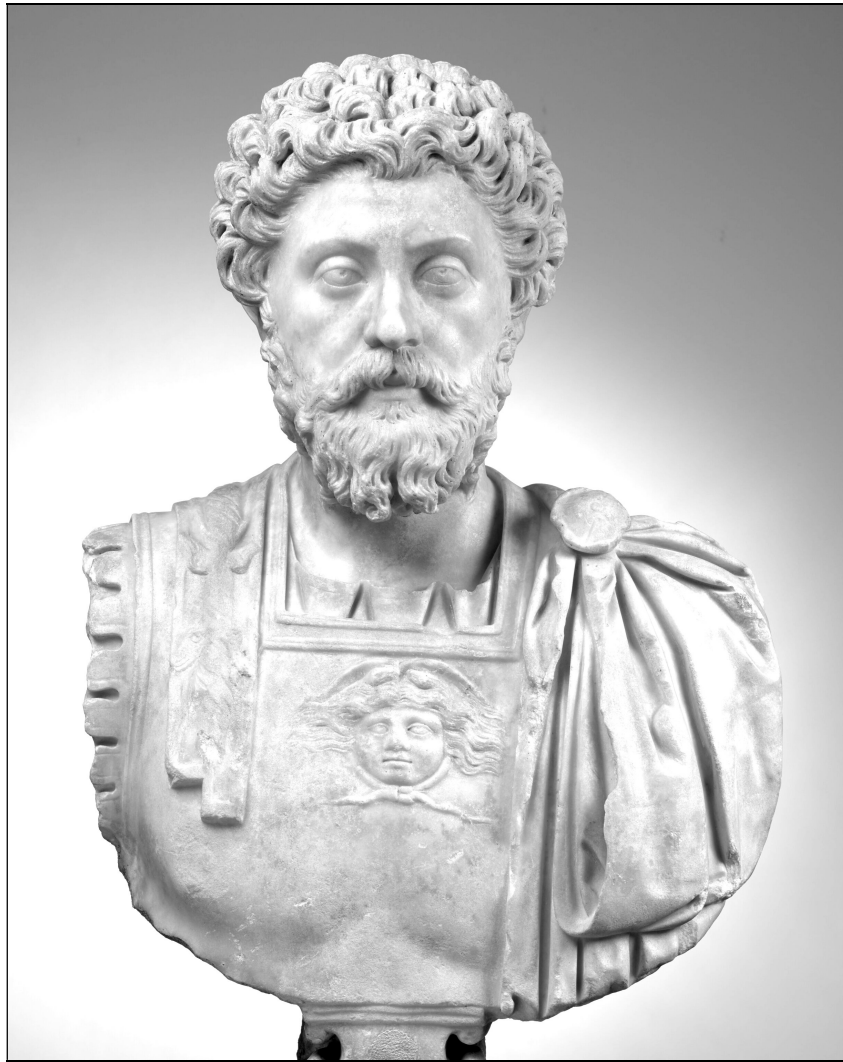
Polyaenus' *Stratagems* was first printed in a Latin translation by Justus Vulteius, at Basel in 1549. The first edition of the Greek text was published by Isaac Casaubon, Lyon, 1589; the next by Pancratius Maasvicius, Leyden, 1690; the third by Samuel Mursinna, Berlin, 1756; the fourth by Adamantios Korais, Paris, 1809. The work has been translated into English by R. Shepherd, London, 1793; into German by Seybold, Frankfurt, 1793–94, and by Blume, Stuttgart, 1834.

Polyaenus' Greek text was translated into English in 1793 by R. Shepherd, who hoped that the *Stratagems* would help the British generals, who were at that time establishing their Empire in India.



*Bust of Lucius Verus as a young man, in the Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Lucius Verus was Roman emperor from 161 until his death in 169, alongside his adoptive brother Marcus Aurelius.*





*Marble bust of Marcus Aurelius, Musée Saint-Raymond. He was a noted Stoic philosopher, who is still widely read today.*

## CONTENTS

*BOOK 1*

PREFACE

BOOK I.

*BOOK 2*

PREFACE

BOOK II.

*BOOK 3*

PREFACE

BOOK III.

*BOOK 4*

PREFACE

BOOK IV.

*BOOK 5*

PREFACE

BOOK V.

*BOOK 6*

PREFACE

BOOK VI.

*BOOK 7*

PREFACE

BOOK VII.

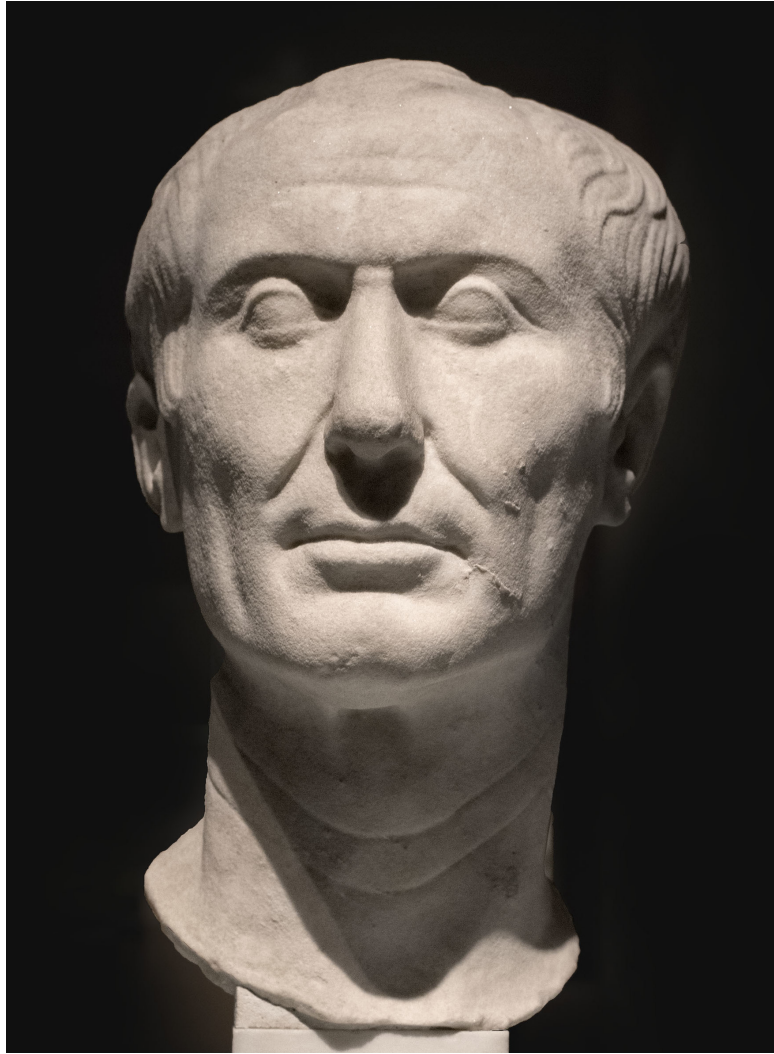
*BOOK 8*

PREFACE

BOOK VIII.



*Nineteenth century lithograph depicting Lysander outside the walls of Athens, ordering their destruction. The stratagems of Lysander (c. 454 BC-395 BC), a revered Spartan military and political leader, are outlined in Book I.*



*Julius Caesar as portrayed in the Tusculum portrait, c. 44 BC. Caesar's exploits are chronicled in the final book of Polyaeus' 'Stratagems'.*





*Wilhelm von Kaulbach's depiction of Artemisia I shooting arrows at the Greek fleet during the Battle of Salamis, 1868. Artemisia I of Caria (fl. 480 BC) was a queen of the ancient Greek city-state of Halicarnassus. She is one of the notable female figures to feature in Book VIII.*

# BOOK 1

## PREFACE



THE GODS, YOUR own virtue, and the Roman bravery, that have always before crowned with victory the arms of your sacred majesties, Antoninus and Verus, will also now attend with success the expedition which you have undertaken against Persia and the Parthians. I, who am by birth a Macedonian, and have therefore, as it were, a national right to victory over the Persians, have determined not to be entirely useless to you in the present circumstances; and if my constitution were as robust and hale as it used to be, you should not lack in me convincing proof of the a Macedonian spirit. Nor, advanced as I am in years, can I bear to be left behind without some efforts of service. Accept therefore, illustrious chiefs, in a collection of stratagems employed by the most distinguished generals, this small aid to military science; which, by exhibiting as in a picture the bravery and experience of former commanders, their conduct and operations, and the various successes that they achieved, may in some instances possibly be of service to yourselves, your polemarchs, your generals, the commanders of troops of ten thousand, or one thousand, or six hundred men, and whoever you may think fit to invest with military command.

Bravery conquers by means of the sword; but superior generalship prevails by skill and stratagem; and the highest level of generalship is displayed in those victories that are obtained with the least danger. It is the most infallible evidence of military ability, in the heat of conflict to hit upon an expedient that will decide the contest in your favour without waiting for the outcome of a regular battle. I have always conceived this to be a favourite sentiment of Homer; for what else can he mean by those frequent expressions, “either by artifice or by valour”, except that we should first employ stratagems and devices against the enemy, and that if these fail, valour and the strongest arm must prevail.

If we admit the authority of Homer, Sisyphus the son of Aeolus was the first of the Greeks who employed stratagems in war:

With happy skill in war’s devices blest,  
Those realms did Sisyphus possess.

The second man who was famous for those tactics, according the same authority, was Autolycus the son of Hermes:

Going to Parnassus, home of Autolycus and his sons —  
Autolycus who was his mother’s excellent father;  
He outdid all men in stealing and in oaths,  
And the divine Hermes granted him...

Nor do I believe that the fabulous account of Proteus, his transformation into animals and trees, signifies anything else than the variety of artifices he practised against the enemy.

As to Odysseus, we know that he particularly valued himself upon his stratagems and devices:

I am Odysseus, Laertes’ son, and in skill to frame  
Deceptive wiles, as far as heaven, unrivalled is my fame.

The Greek heroes attributed the final victory to him:  
Your schemes, your plans effected Ilium's fall,  
And hurled destruction on Priamus' wall.

And others confirmed that Troy was captured:  
By Odysseus' advice and tales,  
And by his sagacious skill.

Homer frequently records the various stratagems that he employed against the enemy. He represents him, "with self-inflicted wounds deformed", deserting to the enemy. The wooden horse, "which Epeius built by the instruction of Athena", was his device. Also *nobody*, *the wine*, *the firebrand*, and *the ram*, may properly be called stratagems, which he employed against the Cyclops. In the same class were the stopping of the ears of his crew with wax, and the lashing of himself to the mast, in order to prevent the baneful influence of the music. And what will you say of the beggar's purse, and the deceptions imposed on Eumaeus and Penelope:

His was the art instruction to detail,  
And facts inculcate, under fiction's veil.

To box with Irus, to remove from the smoke the arms of the drunken young men, and to fix the bow at the door — were they not all military stratagems? But enough of these, and other examples of a similar kind, provided by Homer.

How do the tragedians represent the stratagem which Odysseus used against Palamedes? The Achaeans, in solemn judgement, decided in favour of Odysseus, who had secretly left the barbarian gold in the other's tent; and thus, overcome by artifice and manoeuvre, the accomplished general was falsely convicted of treason. This is what is portrayed in the plays of the tragedians.

But in the following collection of stratagems I have followed the faithful records of history. I have related them succinctly, and arranged them under each general. The whole is comprised in eight books, which contain nine hundred stratagems, beginning with Dionysus.





*End of Sample*