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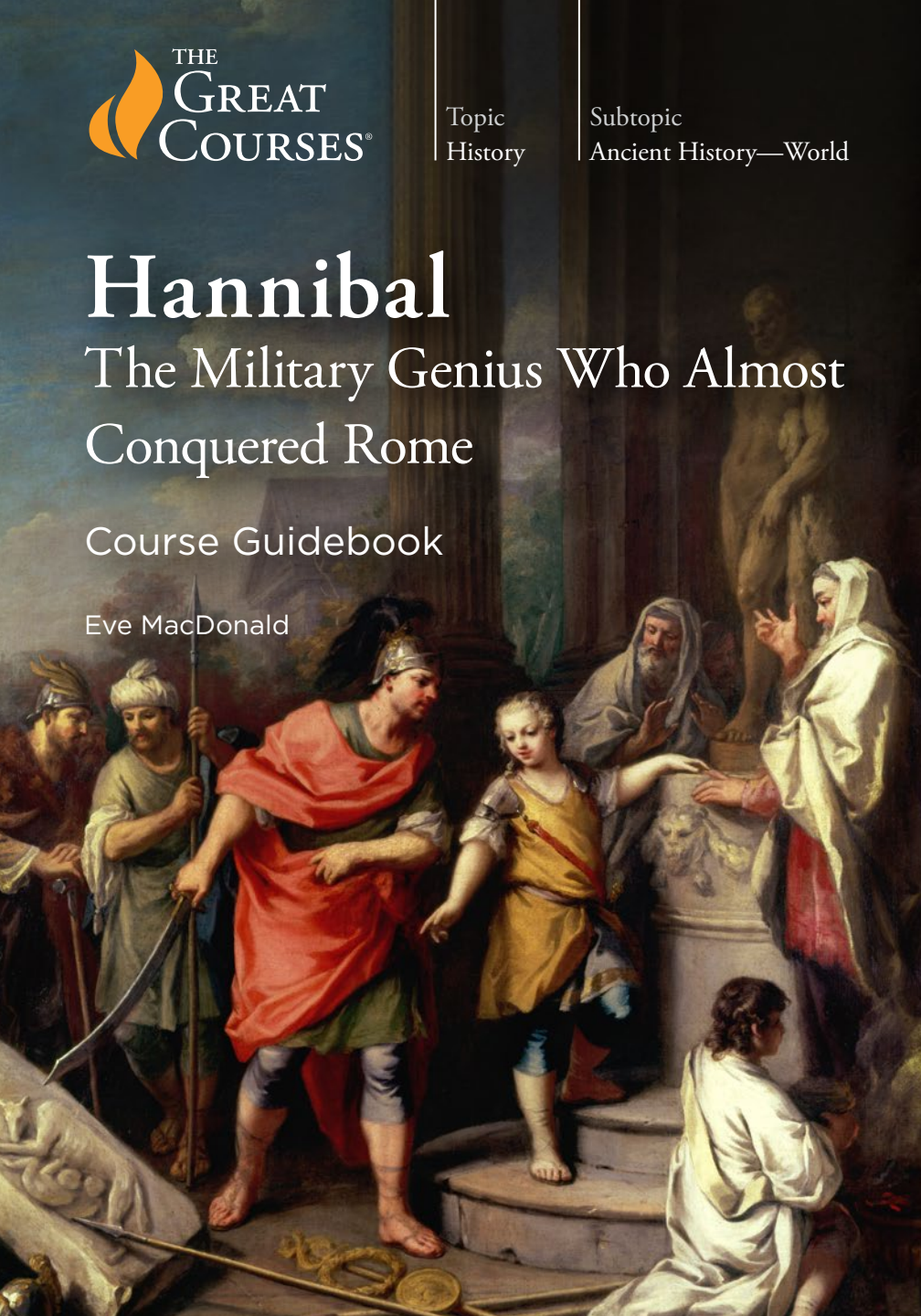
Hannibal

The Military Genius Who Almost Conquered Rome

Course Guidebook

Eve MacDonald



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The Phoenicians and the Rise of Carthage

Hannibal Barca is known as the Carthaginian military genius who nearly brought down the Roman Republic. Roman historians constructed him as an ingenious villain who was terrifying yet intriguing. The Romans had good reason to both admire and demonize Hannibal: Though usually fighting from the position of an underdog, Hannibal was one of the only military commanders in history who consistently defeated Roman armies in the field.

Roman Memories

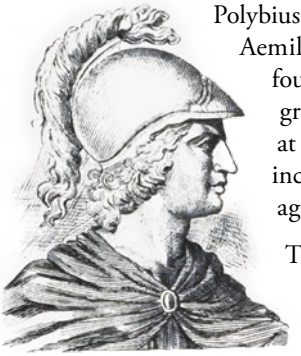
The story of Hannibal that has been passed down to us is essentially the Roman memory of their greatest enemy and war. Memories of war are always shaded by subsequent history. And because the Romans wrote their histories long after Hannibal had died and Carthage had been destroyed, we must always be ready to question their narratives.

The most influential source on the life of Hannibal is Livy, a historian living in the late Roman Republic and early Roman Empire. It is thought that Livy came to Rome in the 30s BCE and began to write his history slightly more than a century after the city of Carthage was destroyed in the Third Punic War. That would have been about 100 years after the total destruction of the city and the culture that created Hannibal.

The memory and commemoration of the great wars with Carthage would have crowded the literary and physical landscape of the city of Rome during Livy's time. The city would have been full of temples, altars, memorials, sculptures, and decorations reminding the population of their great wars and the great enemies they had fought and defeated. Per the Roman historian Pliny the Elder, in the 1st century CE, there were three public sculptures of Hannibal in Rome. This was more than 200 years after Hannibal lived.

That the Romans chose to erect statues of their enemy reveals that the figure of Hannibal and the story of the Second Punic War were something to marvel at. It's fitting, then, that Livy describes the events of the Second Punic War as "an account of the most memorable war ever fought." That war with Hannibal was greater than any other war. And Hannibal himself was more cunning, daring, and terrifying than any other enemy they had faced—capable, in Livy's words, of "a treachery worse than Punic." In Livy's time, the word *Punic* had become a derogatory slur meaning "untrustworthy" and "two-faced."

The other historian we can turn to for an account of this period is a Greek historian named Polybius, who was likely born just after the Second Punic War ended. Polybius was a Greek, and he fought against the Roman invasion of Greece in the 2nd century BCE but was captured in those wars and brought back to Rome a captive.



Polybius was taken under the patronage of a man named Scipio Aemilianus. This man was from the family of the Scipii who fought Hannibal. Scipio Aemilianus was the adopted grandson of Scipio Africanus, who defeated Hannibal at Zama. The other side of this family, the Aemiliani, included Aemilius Paullus, a consul who died in battle against Carthage at Cannae.

Therefore, Polybius's is a fascinating—and in some ways very close—account of the events. He was, in his lifetime, able to interview some of those who participated in the conflict, and the *Histories* he wrote are about as close as we can get to a contemporary account of the war, albeit one very biased by the personal familial history of his patrons. He also wrote his history in Greek for a Greek audience. The Romans were conquering Greece as he wrote. This was a moral tale, written as a warning for the Greeks of what happens to those who resisted Roman power.

Even more problematic, though, only the first 5 books of the *Histories*, taking us to about 216 BCE, have survived intact to the present day. We have only fragments of the remaining 35 books, which leaves us very dependent on Livy for all but the early years of the Second Punic War.

Phoenician Roots

Hannibal was born in the world of Carthage. At its height in the 3rd century BCE, at the time of the wars with Rome, Carthage was one of the most important and beautiful cities in the Mediterranean. It sat on the very tip of Africa, in today's Tunisia, and jutted out into the shipping lanes that crisscrossed the Mediterranean.

Carthage and its influence in the western Mediterranean evolved out of a nexus of settlements and colonies founded by the Phoenicians, a sophisticated trading and seafaring people that emerged in the Levant of the eastern Mediterranean—today's Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine—around 1000 BCE. Although they were ancient history even by the time Hannibal rose to prominence, the legacy of the Phoenicians and the story of their coming to the western Mediterranean is important to understating the cultural and political milieu of Hannibal's world.

The Phoenicians composed a series of powerful city-states, the most important of which were Arwad, Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre. They were perched on a narrow strip of fertile coastal land. As a result of limited agricultural potential and a growing population, these Phoenician-speaking cities eventually sought other methods of economic activity. They turned to the sea and to trade, taking advantage of the growing connectivity of the Mediterranean early in the 1st millennium BCE.

Trade in precious metals probably drove Phoenician expeditions to the western Mediterranean. In particular, it was the need for iron ore, found in the west of the Mediterranean and crucial in the Iron Age, that likely motivated trade and exploration into this area.

A Written Legacy

Because of their far-flung cities, Phoenicians' cultural influence spread across the whole of the Mediterranean, perhaps most clearly seen through our modern alphabet. It was probably in Cyprus that the Greeks adopted the alphabet used by the Phoenician speakers there. The Latin and Cyrillic alphabets in turn are derived from the Greek, so one way or the other, nearly all European scripts hearken back to the ancient Phoenicians.

In time, the Phoenicians began settling down in the western Mediterranean, and this seems to have been driven by a combination of factors. There were population and food pressures at home, plus a growing need for raw materials and a reliance on iron ore. Across their border, the expanding Assyrian empire was threatening the independence of the Phoenician cities, and this also seems to have motivated the Phoenician-speaking people to find safer places to settle abroad.

The location of early Phoenician settlements illustrates their intent to capitalize on this commerce and to control the shipping lanes east to west. That intent led to the urban foundations of Phoenician cities in western Spain, the Balearic Islands, Sardinia, Elba, Malta, and Sicily, plus colonies that extended along the coast of North Africa.

The first great city founded by the Phoenicians in the western Mediterranean was called Gadir, known as Gades to the Romans. We are told by the Roman historian Velleius Paterculus that this happened in 1110 BCE, though archaeological evidence does not go back past the 9th century BCE. Today, this area is the modern city of Cádiz in Spain, making it one of the longest continually occupied cites in Europe.

Carthage's Founding

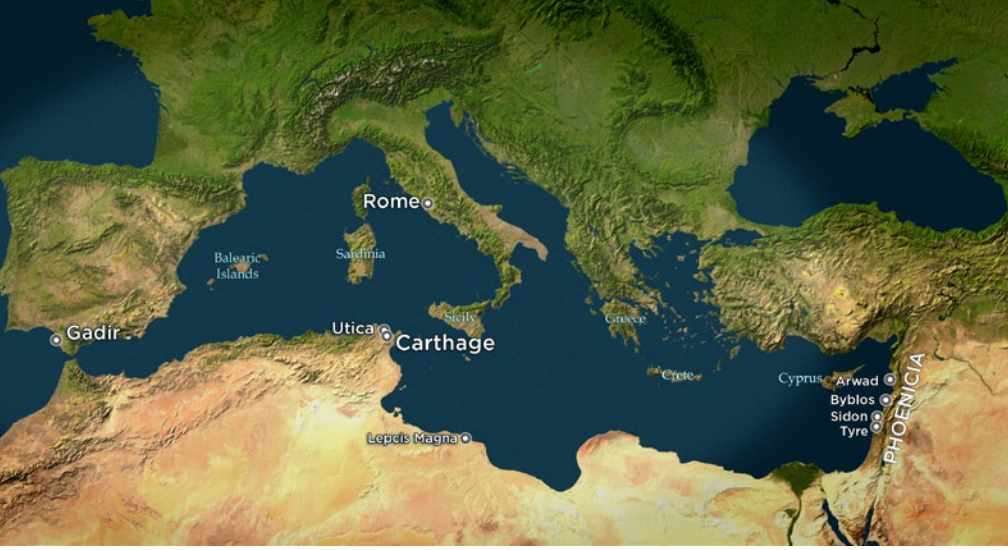
The founding of the city of Carthage occurred in the environment of cultural exchange, exploration, and connectivity the Phoenicians helped create in the western Mediterranean. By legend, Carthage was founded by the Phoenician queen Dido, who left Tyre with a group of nobles and established a new city in the 9th century BCE. The Roman poet Virgil tells the story of Dido in his epic *Aeneid*. She became a romantic figure of interest and is depicted in paintings, plays, poems, and even Tunisian banknotes, but her historicity remains unclear.

Regardless, Dido's city was founded on a site that is classically Phoenician. The harbors of a Phoenician city were its most important aspect, so their colonies needed to be on the coast with good access to the sea. Also desirable were natural features that helped protect the city and its ships, like lagoons, peninsulas, barrier islands, cliffs, and rivers. Polybius observed in the 2nd century BCE that

> Carthage is situated at the inmost point of a gulf into which it protrudes on a strip of land, almost entirely surrounded on one side by the sea and on the other by a lake.

Note how Polybius emphasizes "the inmost point," meaning it was protected from the winds. Overall, it seems likely that the site of Carthage was carefully chosen based on centuries of sea travel through the Mediterranean. Carthage enjoyed a central location along the Mediterranean Sea and proximity to Sicily.

Ocean currents could carry ships eastward from Carthage to Sicily in the best sailing months. The Gulf of Tunis provided natural protection for ships from bad weather. At the same time, the city lay on a small peninsula surrounded by water on most sides, offering Carthage protection if attacked by land. A nearby fertile plain offered agricultural opportunities.



An Evolving Name

Ancient place names can be confusing because the modern name is often an anglicization of the Roman name, which in turn was the Romanization of an indigenous or perhaps a Greek name. For instance, in the Punic language, the name *Carthage* was *Qart Hadasht*, meaning "new city." That became *Karkhēdōn* in Greek, then *Kartago* in Latin, and then *Carthage* to us.

Carthage's Prominence

Carthage eventually became the foremost outpost of Tyre and sent a significant share of its income back to the home city as tithe. However, from the 8th to the 4th centuries BCE, Carthage would grow to become its own state that was linked to, but separate from, its colonial roots. At the same time, the Phoenician Levant came under enormous military and political pressure from its ambitious neighbors. Tyre was forced to become a tributary of the Neo-Assyrian empire, then was violently conquered by the Persians and then Alexander the Great. Centuries of constant warfare and instability naturally triggered a decline of the Phoenician city-states.

Carthage seems to have gradually stepped into the void left by the decline of the mother cities and extended its influence over the web of culturally connected Phoenician cities in the west. By the 6th century BCE, Carthage began to appear on the geopolitical scene acting in its own interests, founding colonies and effectively taking the mantle of leader of the western Phoenician world.

Despite Carthage's Phoenician heritage, the Carthaginians were not simply the Phoenicians by a new name. They were still traders and sailors, but they extensively mixed with indigenous African populations and other peoples of the Mediterranean, and they soon took on their own ambitions. The Phoenicians are not recorded as often engaging in expansionism or territorial conquest, but Carthage took a more assertive stance in this period, usually at the request of other western Phoenician cities in its orbit. Carthage seems to have used its growing influence to coerce strategic neighboring cities into client-state relationships.

As of the 4th century BCE, the Phoenician cities of the Levant had been largely conquered, and Carthage stood as the heir. It engaged in sea battles with various Mediterranean neighbors for dominance and control of ports, particularly with the Greek city-states of Sicily. In time, Carthage became one of the largest cities in the Mediterranean, emerging as a global trade entrepot. At this point, Carthage had started to forge a unique new chapter in their civilization's history—one more Carthaginian than Phoenician.

Two Titans: Rome and Carthage

By the 3rd century BCE, Carthage had allied itself across coastal areas of North Africa, the southern Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal), and the islands of the central Mediterranean. It was one of the superpowers of the western Mediterranean world. It was about the same in size and wealth as the Roman Republic of this period. Thus, the Carthage into which Hannibal Barca was born in 247 BCE was confident and looking outward.

For Rome's part, it had become an important enough city for treaties to be signed with Carthage from the late 6th century BCE onward. Like Carthage, Rome exploded in power in the 4th century BCE, but unlike Carthage, Rome was a land-based power.

By the end of the Pyrrhic War in 272 BCE, Rome had defeated a Greek king and established hegemony over all of southern Italy. This seems to be the moment that the Romans became major players in Mediterranean affairs.

2

The First Punic War

To set the scene of Hannibal's rise, this lecture looks at the origins of the geopolitical conflict that dominated his world. On one side was Carthage, which, by the 5th century BCE, was a major power, with colonies and client states across North Africa, Spain, and the western Mediterranean. Opposing Carthage was Rome, a city-state that had rapidly conquered land across the Italian Peninsula and was perched on its southern Mediterranean shore, ready to leap beyond the confines of Italy. By the 3rd century BCE, Rome and Carthage were eyeing each other warily over control of the central Mediterranean. Their rivalry would culminate in the Punic Wars, which spanned more than a century and the entirety of Hannibal's life.

Arms Races in an Unstable World

Despite their later enmity, Carthage and Rome did enjoy many centuries of peace. From the 6th to 3rd centuries BCE, the Mediterranean world became ever more closely interlinked through trade and cultural exchange, and cities like Rome and Carthage were often allied.

Yet it was an unstable world, with large migrations of people and rises and falls of empires and cities. Perhaps the most destabilizing event was the rise and death of Alexander the Great, who, almost a century before Hannibal's birth, had remade the map of the known world. Divided successor kingdoms were left in his wake, and their competition and rivalries had a knock-on effect.

Archaeological discoveries of sunken ships scattered along the Mediterranean coast provide evidence of a big increase in the sheer number of trade and military vessels sailing the sea. The typical warship of this era was driven by three banks of oars that were each manned by separate oarsmen. This type of vessel was known as a trireme and acted as the primary warship of the Mediterranean until quadriremes took their place in the 4th century.

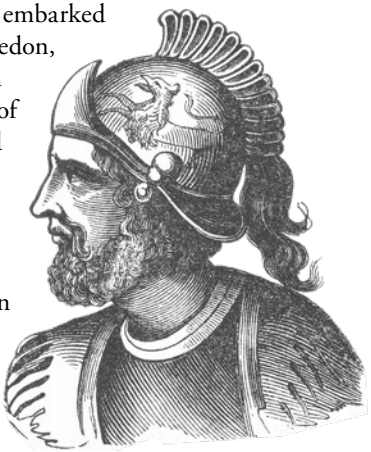
Quadriremes, as described by Aristotle, were a Carthaginian innovation. They had two compartments of oars that were manned by two people per oar, which shifted the power and speed of the vessels. These quadriremes were then followed by quinqueremes.

These ships and their successors were initially the flagships for naval commanders until the mid-3rd century. Ancient sources tell of even bigger ships called hexaremes and septiremes in this period as well. The takeaway point is that the historical and archaeological records depict a naval arms race taking place in Mediterranean, and this had a big impact on both Carthage and Rome.

Following in Alexander's Wake

Alexander the Great was a role model for generations of military and political leaders. One was Pyrrhus, who grew up to become king of the Greek state of Epirus about 50 years before Hannibal's birth.

A brilliant military mind, Pyrrhus eventually embarked on a series of campaigns around Greece, Macedon, and the Eastern Mediterranean. Pyrrhus soon came west, called to the aid of the city-states of Magna Graecia in southern Italy, which faced an increasingly powerful Roman Republic that was threatening their independence. In response to a plea for help from Tarentum, one of the Greek city-states there, Pyrrhus may have seen the opportunity to carve out an Italian empire for himself. He landed on the peninsula with a great army, sparking what would be known as the Pyrrhic War from 280 to 275 BCE.



For a time, Pyrrhus successfully wrested control over southern Italy from the Romans in a series of epic battles, though at great cost to his own limited forces. Pyrrhus then turned his sights on Sicily, following entreaties from another Greek city-state, Syracuse, to help them drive the Carthaginians and their allies from the west of the island.

Finding common cause in a mutual enemy, Rome and Carthage engaged in a strategic alliance to jointly face the threat at this moment. Pyrrhus could not hold what he had gained. He retreated to Epirus in 275 BC. Instead of celebrating the defeat of Pyrrhus as comrades in arms, the Roman historian Cassius Dio notes that in the chaos that was left behind, Rome and Carthage began to see each other not as allies but as rivals for primacy over Sicily.

War between Rome and Carthage

War flared up between Rome and Carthage just nine years after Pyrrhus's departure. The massive conflict that broke out is known today as the First Punic War and endured for 23 years. It's doubtful that Rome and Carthage ever planned to engage in a war of such magnitude when it all started in 264 BCE.

The incident that sparked the conflict took place at the strategic port city of Messana (today's Messina) in northeast Sicily. The faction in control of the city left behind by Pyrrhus was a group of mercenaries called the Mamertines. They were facing an army headed by Syracuse, a powerful independent city-state on the island who wanted them out.

The mercenaries hedged their bets by seeking assistance and protection from both the Carthaginians and Romans. Carthage arrived first. But then the Mamertines, who were of Campanian extraction, decided to shift to Rome when that city later decided to send assistance too. The Mamertines expelled the Carthaginians and sided with the Romans. Snubbed and not willing to accept Roman influence over this key port so close to Lipari, the Carthaginians responded by allying with the Syracusans, and war broke out.

The First Punic War was a massive strategic struggle: There were urban sieges, land battles, and monumental naval battles. The war continued to intensify over time, with great triumphs and crushing defeats for both sides. Several of the most significant battles came at the beginning, though.

The war's second year saw the Senate in Rome coming to the decision to fill Sicily with the combined force of their two consular armies. These armies added up to a total of nearly 40,000 soldiers. The sheer enormity of the Roman army quickly convinced several cities to immediately declare for Rome, including Syracuse, which abandoned its erstwhile Carthaginian allies.

The Romans then set their sights on Acragas, today's Agrigento, a prominent Greek-founded city on Sicily's rugged south coast that the Carthaginians had taken some decades previously. The traditional Carthaginian-allied cities of the west of Sicily were Phoenician-speaking and culturally linked to Carthage. The arrival of both Syracusan and Roman armies left the Carthaginian garrison in the city overwhelmed. Carthage did send an army to reinforce the city, but this moment showed that Carthage had found itself in a war it was not prepared to fight.

Carthage, like most Hellenistic states, often recruited mercenaries for its overseas fighting forces while using their own citizens to defend their home territory and to crew their navies. The bulk of their armies consisted of men from their allies in North Africa and Iberia along with a wide range of

soldiers for hire from across the Mediterranean. Raising an army was a slow process, and this was a quick and unexpected war, so it took time for the Carthaginians to support their garrison in the besieged city.

Agrigento was a big city, and the Roman blockade had trapped up to 50,000 people within the walls. After a five-month-long siege, the Carthaginian commander at Agrigento chanced an evacuation of his garrison. His actions spared his soldiers from capture but left the city's populace without protection. Roman troops stormed and sacked the city, and many of its people were enslaved.

According to Polybius, the Roman people were astonished by the riches that continued to come from Rome's conquest. Seeing the riches on offer in Sicily and confident of their ability to best the Carthaginians now, the Romans wholeheartedly supported the war for the whole island. Rome's ruling class gained wealth and power from conquest, and it was a key part of elite male identity in Rome to be a general who fought and conquered. Moreover, the Roman Senate usually eschewed peace negotiations and settled for nothing less than total victory.

Carthage's Strength at Sea

Much less information is available about the Carthaginian system and traditions, so it is difficult to analyze their intentions. It is clear, though, that they inherited an advanced naval prowess and culture thanks to their location and their seafaring Phoenician ancestors. As a result, Carthage gained a reputation that highlighted their naval superiority. Because it was Carthage's primary strength, a great emphasis was placed on learning any and every naval skill, which ranged from command to construction.

Whether it was the manufacturing of ships, the mechanisms of the port, or the level of seamanship from the sailors, the Carthaginian naval culture touched all levels of the population. And it's likely that the needs of the navy could not be met by citizens alone. Allies, mercenaries, and slaves would have likely been needed to crew their warships as well. That is true of Rome, too.

There are indications that Carthage's navy was enhanced further by privately sponsored naval organizations. This means that citizens would build, outfit, and manage ships for specialized operations.

On the other hand, Polybius tells us the Romans had virtually no experience with naval warfare at the outbreak of the First Punic War. Numerous scholars have challenged the idea that Rome had no naval experience at the outset of the war. But it's a heroic narrative for Polybius and later historians to portray the Romans as underdogs.

Naval Fighting

In 260 BCE, the first big naval battle of the First Punic War occurred off Mylae, which today is Milazzo. The Romans had by then managed to construct a navy and train competent sailors and captains. The Romans, we are told, had based the construction of their navy on a captured Carthaginian ship. They had, however, made an important adaptation. This was something termed the *corvus*, which means "crow" in English. It's a retractable boarding bridge that was attached to the prow of the ships.

This changed the dynamics of the naval warfare, which until this point was about ramming and sinking enemy vessels. But the Romans now had a way to use their superior troops to their advantage at sea. Now even the mightiest Carthaginian ship could be captured if the Roman marines got close enough to board it. It seems to have made all the difference at the Battle of Mylae—despite the Carthaginians' seamanship and naval pedigree, they were thoroughly defeated, with many dozens of their ships captured with this new Roman tactic.

Evidence of Shipbuilding Prowess

Two Punic ships were found off the coast of modern Marsala in the early 1970s. Underwater archaeologist Honor Frost excavated them. One is a liburnian, which was a small galley ship used for raiding and patrols. The incredible find is on display in Marsala today at its maritime museum. The preservation of calligraphy on the wrecks indicates there was prefabrication, with the separate parts of the ship lettered to allow for portable construction.

Meanwhile, the situation in Sicily ground down to a long war of attrition. The island is mountainous and has traditionally favored defenders. Though the Romans had captured Agrigento, further advance through Sicily was difficult.

A Changing Conflict

The war had been dragging on for nearly a decade when the Romans decided in 256 BCE to change their strategy and send a fleet to invade North Africa, striking at the heart of Carthaginian territory and perhaps even the city itself. The Carthaginians responded. The result was possibly the largest naval battle in history at that time, with somewhere between 400 and 700 ships involved. Ultimately, the Carthaginians lost the close battle and now faced a full-scale invasion of their home territory.

The Roman consul in charge of the invasion, Marcus Atilius Regulus, had landed more than 15,000 soldiers and 500 cavalry on Carthaginian soil, and now they were marching toward Carthage itself. Several towns and cities fell to the Romans, including Tunes (modern Tunis), just 10 miles from Carthage.

Facing total annihilation, the Carthaginians turned to a Spartan named Xanthippus to reform and defend their capital against the Romans. The Carthaginian army relevant to Hannibal began here. Xanthippus reorganized the army and sought to better deploy the biggest advantages the Carthaginians had against the Romans. These were their fast and hard-hitting cavalry and their elephants.

Xanthippus put these two elements at the heart of the Carthaginian battle strategy and sought open plains on which to use them to the fullest advantage against the Romans. At the Battle of Tunis in 255 BCE, Xanthippus's reorganized army was put to the test, and the results were devastating. The Roman infantry had no answer to the elephants, now deployed at the front of the Carthaginian lines, stampeding through the Roman ranks and causing confusion across the battlefield. The Carthaginian cavalry was then able to sweep in and outflank the Roman lines, weakening them so the Carthaginian infantry could move in to finish the job.

It was one of the few Carthaginian field victories of the First Punic War, but it was a critical one: Nearly all of the 15,000 Roman troops of Regulus's invasion force were wiped out by this new and terrifying army. A huge Roman fleet was sent back to Africa to evacuate survivors and stabilize the situation, but upon returning to Sicily, it was wrecked by a storm, with a reported 384 ships sunk and tens of thousands of men lost at sea.

Carthage had survived total defeat, but the war was far from over. In the later stages of the war, the Romans abandoned the idea of capturing Carthage outright and shifted their focus back to Sicily. The defense of the west of Sicily, in 247 BCE, would fall to a young commander named Hamilcar Barca. In that very same year, with the fate of Carthage on a knife's edge, Hamilcar's son, Hannibal Barca, was born in Carthage.

3

Hamilcar and the Rise of the Barcids

By 247 BCE, the First Punic War was in its 17th year. Carthage had barely survived an expedition against their capital. The wrecking of the Roman fleet in 255 BCE gave only brief reprieve, and within a year, Rome had rebuilt their forces and had shifted their focus back to Sicily. And as their first major act of this renewed push on the island, they captured the key city of Panormus, today known as Palermo. Panormus was the best-protected deepwater harbor on the north coast of Sicily. At this stage, Hamilcar Barca became prominent.

Hamilcar's Background

Hamilcar was young and enthusiastic. Polybius calls him a "young man," so scholars assume he was around 30. Hamilcar was a scion of the Barcid family, about which little is known. Traditionally, scholars have assumed they were a prominent elite family in Carthage, especially given Hamilcar's receipt of a prestigious military commission at a young age.

Scholars have generally put a lot of stock in a line of poetry from the 1st-century CE poet Silius Italicus that states, "Hamilcar sprung from the Tyrian house of ancient Barcas." It is entirely possible that this is simply a fabricated or exaggerated genealogy to link Barcid descent with the legendary Queen Dido and her companions, the very founders of Carthage.

A more recent theory has proposed that the Barcids were in fact relative newcomers to Carthage, and they instead hailed from city of Barce in Libya, today near Benghazi. The theory goes that the Barcids originated as mercenary or allied soldiers who had been enveloped into Carthaginian society about 50 years prior to the First Punic War. If they were relative outsiders in society, this might explain why the Barcid family seemed to have a strained relationship with some of the Carthaginian elite.

Regardless of his family backstory, Hamilcar was the embodiment of an entire generation that grew up in the shadow of war with Rome, who had witnessed 17 years' worth of fighting and little but defeats and setbacks for their people. The Carthaginians had tried at least twice to reconcile with Rome, but to no avail.

Hamilcar Takes Command

Hamilcar Barca took up command in Sicily in 247 BCE. He left behind in Carthage his wife, three daughters, and soon a newly born son: Hannibal. At this point of the war, Drepana and Lilybaeum were the last two major Carthaginian settlements on Sicily, and the Romans had been besieging both for three years. These cities were very well fortified.

Nevertheless, the situation in Drepana and Lilybaeum was dire, and Hamilcar knew he had to somehow seize back the initiative of the war. To do this, he had taken charge of a contingent of personnel Polybius termed *mix-Hellenes*. Although historians are not quite sure what that means, these were potent troops and are thought to have come from mixed Greco-Phoenician or African Libyan backgrounds—perhaps a background similar to the Barcids themselves.

Hamilcar chose to prey on Roman patrols and raid their supply routes and weaker positions. He did this behind the Roman front lines in northwest Sicily, and he also boldly attacked relatively undefended settlements on the Italian coast, even striking as far as Cumae, near modern Naples.

Hamilcar hoped these attacks would ease the pressure by surprising the Romans, undermining their siege operations, and obliging them to withdraw forces to defend their allies. The tactic worked, and Hannibal would later build on his father's theories in his own war against the Romans.

Hamilcar's small triumphs and steady victories raised the spirits of the Carthaginian people. And Lilybaeum and Drepana were still holding on. But small victories by themselves wouldn't push the Romans off the island.

In 244 BCE, Hamilcar stepped up his campaign and in a night sea operation lands his army at the foot of Mount Eryx, today Erice, near Drepana. Dedicated to the goddess Astarte, Mount Eryx was of enormous significance to the Phoenician-Sicilian population and to the wider Greek and eventually Latin population too.

Retaking Eryx was a powerfully symbolic move by Hamilcar, but it was also strategic, as now his army was sitting just behind the Roman force besieging Drepana. The legions were now pinned down defending against this new threat, and Hamilcar could easily cause havoc to the Roman supply and communication lines from here.

Stretched Forces and Defeat

Hamilcar's string of successes was not enough. By the 240s, Carthage was exhausted and financially strapped from two decades of war. But the Romans had also been stretched to their very limits. Realizing that a massive naval blockade of Drepana and Lilybaeum with a better-designed, faster fleet (this time without the *corvus*) was the best hope of ending the conflict, the Romans turned to private financing as a means of raising the money, promising generous repayments from Carthaginian reparations when the war was won.

In 241 BCE, this new and improved Roman fleet encountered a large Carthaginian fleet—heavily laden with supplies—near the Aegates Islands. It was a hard-fought battle in which hundreds of ships were lost or damaged, but ultimately the Romans prevailed. This fight, known as the Battle of the Aegates, marked the end of any Carthaginian hopes for Sicily.

Hamilcar was charged to seek peace, though notably he refused and wished to fight on, so the task went to Gisco, the commander of Lilybaeum and the next most senior general on the island. The Treaty of Lutatius was signed shortly thereafter. It was a humiliating defeat for Carthage. They ceded much of Sicily to the Romans, and it became their first overseas territory. Additionally, Carthage was charged with paying 2,200 Euboean talents (equivalent to about 63 tons of silver) in reparations. To put that in perspective in that time, the total annual tribute paid to the Persian emperor Darius in the 5th century BCE from all the kingdoms under his control was around 9,000 talents.

Echoes of Loss

Despite Carthage's defeat, Hamilcar Barca returned an undefeated champion. And at this moment, his six-year-old son Hannibal was about to start his education. Some of the things his schooling would have likely contained include military tactics and Greek, which, in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, was considered the language of learning. Hannibal was a fluent Greek speaker.

The loss of Sicily more than likely left a profound impact on Hannibal and his generation. They were taught to take pride in their heritage, but the shadow of their war with Rome continued to loom over them, and a great resentment set in among those who had endured it.

The Truceless War

The violence wasn't over. A devastating civil war soon consumed Carthage. This bitter conflict is now known as the Truceless War, and it would have a profound impact on Carthaginian society. It also paved the way for the Barcid family to become one of the most powerful in the city.

The war was a tragic consequence of the collapse of Carthaginian Sicily and the chaotic withdrawal from the island. Carthage became swamped with refugees, and there was widespread discontent among the Sicilian military forces.

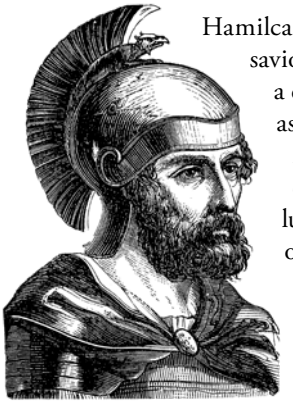
Rather than negotiate peace, Hamilcar had resigned his commission and sailed back to Carthage, leaving his army under the command of Gisco, who was tasked with dissolving the army and returning the troops to their homes. Gisco planned a staggered withdrawal. The army was to be sent back to Carthage in groups to be paid and then promptly sent back to their homelands.

But the civilian leadership in Carthage, no doubt in a desperate financial situation, changed the plan and slowly gathered all the soldiers in the city, hoping to negotiate lower payments to the army en masse. This led to a volatile situation.

Seeking control, Carthaginian leadership moved the troops to Sicca, a Libyphoenician town inland and south of Carthage, on the assumption they could be better supplied there and could await final payment. However, tempers soon boiled over in Sicca, and the soldiers ran out of patience with endless Carthaginian promises.

Around 20,000 soldiers began marching back to the capital to get what they were owed, by force if necessary. They encamped at Tunes, just southwest of the city. Terrified and with a rebellious army on their doorstep, negotiators from the Carthaginian Senate quickly gave in to the soldiers' requests and scrambled to fulfill them.

But the rapidity with which the civilian government folded under pressure emboldened the rebel army, and, sensing they had the upper hand, they now made bigger demands. Gisco was sent out to arbitrate with payment funds to calm matters. Eventually, though, a riot broke out, and a more radical faction of the mutineers took charge. The mutineers imprisoned Gisco, seized his treasury, and dispatched emissaries to towns, asking them to join them in the rebellion against Carthage.



Hamilcar Barca reappeared at this point and became the savior of Carthage's military effort. Allying with Hanno, a commander of the Carthaginian African army, he assembled an army of about 70 elephants and 10,000 men: as many mercenaries as they could find, deserters, horse and foot soldiers, and citizens. He lured the mutineers into a surprise attack, the success of which brought back some of the Carthaginians' courage. The ambush didn't defeat the mutineers, however, and they went on to surround Hamilcar's entire army while he was encamped on a plateau.

Hamilcar's relief came with the appearance of a Massyli prince named Naravas. The Massyli, Masaesyli, and Mauri were Amazigh (or Berber) peoples from Numidia, west and south of the Carthaginian territories all the way to the Atlantic. They were renowned soldiers with famous cavalry.

Polybius emphasizes that Naravas wanted to serve under Hamilcar personally. Given the situation, Hamilcar readily accepted his service and that of his 2,000 troops. Naravas's allegiance proved so significant that Hamilcar also agreed to a formal alliance and married his own daughter to the prince to ensure his loyalty. With Hamilcar at the helm of this new alliance, order was slowly restored to the Carthaginian world.

Those rebels captured were treated with leniency and were given the choice of joining Hamilcar's army, which meant swearing an oath to never attack Carthage, or freedom. This policy was an intelligent one, as it aimed to destabilize the rebels' support. It also reflects the autonomy in the field that a Carthaginian general could practice. The rebellious army did not go down easily, though. They were still powerful and well organized.

Rome's Power Grab

The Truceless War dragged on from 241 to 238 BCE. After a few years, the rebel leaders on the island had become so unpopular that the local population rose up and drove the mutineers out. But right when Carthage was about to return to restore order in Sardinia, the Romans agreed to work with the mutineers and to send an expedition to seize Corsica and Sardinia for themselves. The Carthaginians harbored tremendous resentment at Rome's duplicity, but they had no recourse. They surrendered Corsica and Sardinia to Rome, and they even paid 1,200 talents to avoid a conflict they could ill afford to fight.

Rome's act of opportunism was shameless. They meekly made a false claim that Carthage's army, assembled to retake the islands, was in fact intended for an attack on Rome, and thus their actions were self-defense. Yet even Polybius concludes there was no possible justification for Rome's behavior and that this act of was one of the primary reasons for an eventual Second Punic War.

After the Truceless War finally died down in 238 BCE, Hamilcar was credited for the ultimate victory over the rebels. He even received credit for expanding Carthage's influence through new conquests and alliances in North Africa during the aftermath. Despite the devastation wrought by so many years of war, and the humiliating loss of Corsica and Sardinia, Carthage would quickly rebound, economically and politically, to a preeminent position in the region.

Hamilcar learned crucial lessons about building loyalty and commanding a diverse army of African troops as well as brokering alliances with neighboring peoples. This also marked a new era in Carthage—one dominated by powerful military families rather than the Carthaginian Senate, whose mishandling of the pay issue nearly brought down the state.

The war also shaped Hannibal and his approach to conquests, alliances, and cooperation. Hannibal would never forget the importance of the personal loyalty of soldiers, the fickleness of politics within the Carthaginian Republic, and the untrustworthiness of the Romans.

4

Young Hannibal in Iberia, 237–221 BCE

In 237 BCE, Hannibal was nine years old. Carthage had endured several decades of devastating warfare. Hannibal's father Hamilcar was a hero of two wars, but he had been away on campaign nearly all his son's life. And soon he would be on campaign again, for almost immediately after the end of the Truceless War, Hamilcar prepared to embark on a new and ambitious venture. Shorn of its overseas colonies in Sicily, Corsica, and Sardinia, Carthage now looked to the Iberian Peninsula, with its mineral wealth and trading opportunities, to restore their fortunes. Hannibal, for the first time, would join his father on this new expedition, and it would define his transition into adulthood. Hannibal would not return to Carthage until he was 45 years old.

Setting Out

Historians believe Hamilcar's expedition to Iberia set out from Carthage in the summer of 237 BCE and crossed the pillars of Herakles (known as the Strait of Gibraltar today) to the reaches of the Atlantic coast, where they approached the city of Gades. This ancient city, today Cádiz in Spain, was the western Mediterranean's oldest Phoenician settlement and arguably the oldest city in Europe.

Gades was a thriving city in the 3rd century BCE and had a great deal in common with Carthage. It shared their language and had the same cultural origin. Gades was a city of pilgrimage and held deep ties to the Phoenician god Melqart, whose sanctuary attracted worshippers from all over the Mediterranean. It was also the closest port to an inland area of the Iberian Peninsula rich with minerals: copper and silver particularly, and further afield, tin, which was an essential component of bronze.

When Hamilcar arrived, the inland region was populated by the Turdetani people. The Turdetani, however, lacked political unity and had divided themselves into querulous kingdoms. Because of Carthage's long history of employing Iberian soldiers, it was likely that there were many personal connections between the Barcid army and particular individuals within the area.

Hamilcar's Approach

Hamilcar had a simple attitude toward military conquest. The army gave settlements the choice to surrender, which would result in mercy. But if they resisted, the consequences would be swift and severe.

Hamilcar's army snowballed in size as he took on fresh recruits in areas he conquered. In one passage, the ancient historian Diodorus Siculus states that Hamilcar destroyed the armies of various Celtic and Iberian tribes, and he also claimed the survivors, roughly 3,000 men, for his army.

The original number who went with Hamilcar to Iberia was around 20,000, but as he conquered and crisscrossed the countryside, that number had nearly tripled to 56,000 within a decade. In this fashion, Hamilcar set about bringing the Iberian tribes and settlements under Carthaginian control. Soon most of the Turdetani were subdued, and the captured mineral wealth could be used to pay his army and send funds back to help Carthage pay its war debts and reparation obligations to Rome. Hamilcar ruled over these conquered lands almost as a personal fiefdom. This was similar to the situation in Rome, whose consuls and governors would personally negotiate treaties, organize new settlements, and embark on campaigns of conquest. As they stretched farther from their home cities, the degree of oversight from the capital weakened or effectively vanished.

Over the next six years of Hamilcar's campaign, his armies pushed north and east, reaching as far as the modern region of Valencia in Spain. In 231 BCE, Hamilcar put down roots and founded the city of Akra Leuka, which translates to the "white cliff" or "white fort."

Desires for Expansion

By now, Hamilcar's activities had come to the attention of the Romans, who sent a delegation to investigate what his intentions in Iberia were. By the one available account of this meeting, Hamilcar allegedly explained to the Romans that Carthage's presence stemmed from their desire to pay off their war debt. Acquiring new territories would help them achieve that. This was a debt the Romans wrongly increased after their seizure of Sardinia. For the moment, the Romans accepted this explanation and did not interfere.

But ultimately, the Carthaginian conquest of Iberia set in motion the events that would eventually lead to the Second Punic War and Hannibal invading Italy. Both Rome and Carthage desired expansion and strove to increase their wealth and influence to do so. The influence of Carthage was growing in the western Mediterranean, while Rome took an interest in the territories north and east of them. And soon Iberia would find itself in the crosshairs of both.

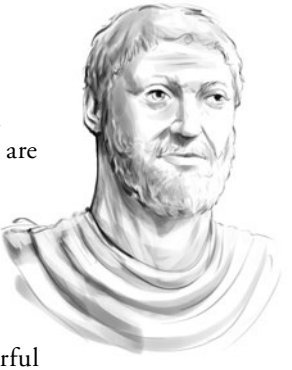
Hannibal Comes of Age

As Hamilcar was building his empire in Iberia, Hannibal was becoming a young man. He remained by his father as he came of age, and he studied alongside his two younger brothers, Mago and Hasdrubal.

The three brothers were raised on the teachings of their father and his lieutenants, and they learned to fight and ride while on horseback. Lessons on command and strategy were also taught to them by tutors, and no doubt they would have seen both firsthand in their father's battles in Iberia.

Hamilcar's ambition likely had a growing effect on his sons—Hannibal in particular—and increased with every victory. He was grooming his sons to one day rule over the territory he established as well as conquer more.

Death of a General



A couple of years after the founding of Akra Leuka, Hamilcar was slain. There are numerous records from ancient authors that recount this event, but the stories are hard to reconcile. Diodorus offered a romanticized description, which tells of Hamilcar falling victim to a trick by a local king while laying siege to the city of Helice.

The only thing Polybius says about the matter was that Hamilcar fought and died bravely against a powerful tribe. Cornelius Nepos claims that he fell to the Vettones, a tribe near modern Toledo. Historians' best estimate is that Hamilcar was somewhere between his mid-40s and 50s when he died.

Hamilcar was undoubtedly among the most effective commanders during the midpoint of the 3rd century. To Hannibal, his father was a hero and figure of immense influence. Hannibal would have learned and fought at his side, observing and comprehending the many political and strategic approaches his father employed during his mission to conquer Iberia. It was undoubtedly an apprenticeship that taught Hannibal and his brothers the many realities of the life they would encounter.

Hasdrubal the Fair

After Hamilcar died, his son-in-law Hasdrubal the Fair was charged with taking command of the Iberian army by the governing assembly at Carthage. Having married off his three daughters, Hamilcar had strong connections with prominent political figures, including the Numidian royalty. Hasdrubal the Fair was among these political figures.

Hasdrubal the Fair's character receives mixed reviews in the Roman histories. He is suspected of having bought a sizable portion of his political leverage in Carthage through bribes and favors within the popular assembly. Livy says that Hasdrubal the Fair's induction into a position of leadership in Iberia went against the Carthaginian establishment's wishes.

Hasdrubal the Fair did not hesitate in pursuing vengeance against those responsible for the death of his father-in-law. He marshaled an army of 50,000, including 6,000 mounted troops and 200 elephants. They overwhelmed the tribe responsible for Hamilcar's death and destroyed 12 of their towns.

Hannibal's Role

At this point, Hannibal's role became more active as a lieutenant in the Iberian army in command of a unit of cavalry. His first appearance in the Roman accounts frames him as a brave captain who served as his brother-in-law's apprentice. Sources say that on campaign, he acted just like the other soldiers and never hesitated to mingle with his men, despite his lineage, which instilled an even deeper sense of camaraderie and loyalty among his peers.

Around this time, it is also likely that Hannibal married an Iberian princess named Imilce. Imilce was the daughter of a powerful chieftain who hailed from the city of Castulo, capital of the Oretani tribe, near the modern city of Linares in Spain. Silius Italicus remains the only ancient source to have provided a name for Hannibal's wife, and it is probable that he made it up for the sake of sounding poetic. Intermarriage was often utilized to ensure Carthaginian authority in Iberia, so it's likely Hannibal's marriage was intended to further that aim.

Hasdrubal the Fair also continued the development of the newly conquered territory by founding cities as Hamilcar had. The most important was New Carthage—or, to the Romans, Carthago Nova. Established around 229 BCE, New Carthage quickly became a landmark city, widely known across the Mediterranean for its two naturally deep harbors enclosed by imposing hills. Today the city is called Cartagena and is currently home to the Spanish navy. Since the 16th century, it has remained one of Spain's most important naval ports.

Portions of the defensive wall at New Carthage have since been unearthed and offer a glimpse of the sheer scale of the city upon its creation. The defenses encompassing the land portion consist of two corresponding walls built from massive sandstone blocks. These walls were likely 10 meters tall upon their initial construction.

Hannibal would be based here from the moment of its creation to the time of his expedition to Italy. It was the ideal capital for the Barcid territories in Iberia. It was fairly central to all their holdings, and it also offered quick access by sea to North Africa and Carthage, while its rivers connected to the region's mining towns.

Peace and a Promotion

The growing territory of the Barcids raised the suspicions of the Romans, who were wary of the Carthaginian revival. The same went for the various tribes and kingdoms left in Iberia who had not been conquered by Carthage. Fearing they would soon be next, some sent emissaries to the Romans, hoping to forge alliances that might protect them from Carthage's ambitions.

Hasdrubal was summoned to meet with representatives of the Roman Senate in 226 BCE. In that meeting, a treaty emerged in which the Carthaginians and Romans established a boundary between their spheres of influence at the Ebro River. The Roman reasoning for the treaty was undoubtedly to keep Carthaginian authority contained within the Iberian Peninsula while Rome engaged in their conflict with the Gauls beyond the Alps and continued conquering and settling in northern Italy. The Ebro River was to be the dividing line between the Carthaginian and Roman powers.

North of the Ebro were the Massalians, at modern Marseille, an important Greek-founded city along the southern coast of today's France. The Massalians had chosen to ally with the Romans to counter the possibility of Carthaginian expansion. This treaty thus also secured the allies of the two city-states in the wider region.

There was peace for the moment, giving Carthage time to consolidate its hold on the peninsula. Carthaginian Iberia flourished in these years, but in 221 BCE, Hasdrubal the Fair was assassinated by a discontented Iberian ally. Hannibal became the new supreme commander of Iberia.

Hannibal was in his mid-twenties at this point. He was initially selected for this role by the troops in Iberia, and the Carthaginians supported that choice. His ascent to leadership at this point suggests he must have greatly distinguished himself as a leader and commander during the preceding years. Perhaps Hasdrubal the Fair had been laying the groundwork for this eventuality as well.

Sentiment seems to have played a role in his ascent, too, as Hannibal most clearly channeled the energy and spirit of his legendary father. As Livy tells it, "the old soldiers fancied they saw Hamilcar in his youth given back to them."

Whatever the case, despite his young age, Hannibal was now the most powerful commander in Carthage, looking out over his domains from his capital in New Carthage. Yet almost as soon as he took command, Hannibal set off on campaign. He was a soldier first, like his father and brother-in-law before him.

5

Hannibal Takes Command, 221–218 BCE

By 221 BCE, Hannibal had come of age, and he was in command of a mighty army and vast Iberian territories built by his father. This lecture looks at the early stages of his command.

Securing Loyalty

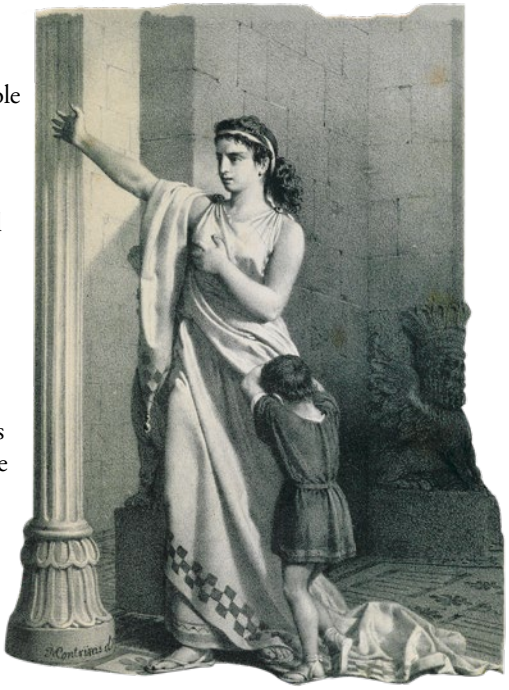
One of Hannibal's first tasks would have been to secure the loyalty of his troops. Good pay was one of the best ways to keep a soldier happy, and Polybius mentions that Hannibal's inherited troops were treated with kindness and had rewards distributed among them, with promises of additional payments later.

Hannibal must also have had some talent for oratory and performative leadership. Some of his men would follow him for decades, through incredible hardships and difficult situations, with sometimes scant hope of riches or reward at the end. That means Hannibal's personal magnetism was exceptional.

Loyalty was critical to Hannibal's style of command. Hannibal was a master of bold tactics and risky strategies that could outwit his opponents or break their nerve. But to execute his plans, he needed men loyal enough to walk through fire or worse.

Marriage

Hannibal wintered that first year of his command in New Carthage. It is possible that he spent it with his wife Imilce. The married pair would have served as the public face of an important alliance between the Barcid family and the local ruling class in Iberia.



There is a single, less than reputable reference in the Roman sources to a child—a firstborn son. If the account is to be believed, that son was named for Hannibal's father, Hamilcar, as was the Carthaginian tradition. Despite the long histories later written by Roman historians of Hannibal's campaigns and the Punic Wars, the trail of what became of his wife and possible son goes cold, and there's virtually no mention of them beyond these early years.

Winter and Early Successes

In the early going of Hannibal's command, colleagues and commanders alike who associated with him would have passed the time making plans for the next campaign season. Winter in the Mediterranean world caused a variety of activities to cease. Navigation at sea became difficult and dangerous, and the weather became poor for sailing, so nearly all boats moored over the winter months. Armies also had to encamp themselves. People needed large amounts of stored food to survive.

All of this meant that it was standard practice for a commander in the autumn to start making preparations for his army to winter. Complicated as it was, the long months of winter also provided much-needed respite for soldiers, plus time for equipment repairs. And commanders used the time to gather intelligence and plan their moves for the next year.

In the spring of 220 BCE, Hannibal emerged from his first winter as a commander with plans to push deeper into Iberia. His first targets were the Olcades, whose main stronghold he promptly stormed. Soon after, they surrendered, and Carthaginian influence had reached as far as the Tagus River. Next, he attacked the Vaccaei to the west and soon captured their key town of Hermandica, possibly the modern city of Salamanca. Their subjugation followed soon after. These rapid victories in his first season made Hannibal's abilities self-evident to his army.

According to Polybius, after just a year in command, Hannibal had proven himself a force impossible to withstand. There were no challengers left to Barcid rule among the tribes south of the Ebro River—except for Saguntum. About 150 miles from New Carthage, Saguntum was the last major settlement south of the Ebro that was resisting Carthage's primacy. And in 220 BCE, when Hannibal returned from campaign, a delegation from Rome was waiting for him in New Carthage. The status of Saguntum was on the agenda.

Rome had sent a delegation of high-ranking representatives of its senate, including a former consul and an ex-praetor, as an indication both of the seriousness of their intent and their respect for their dealings with the new Carthaginian general. Their delegates awaiting Hannibal's audience would have enjoyed the impressive hospitalities of New Carthage.

Upon meeting the Romans, however, Hannibal is alleged to have treated them with the brash impetuousness of youth and failed to leave a good impression. The ambassadors' main mission, though, according to Livy, was to warn Hannibal to keep away from the people of Saguntum, who were to be considered Roman allies.

In 226 BCE, the Ebro River had been established as the boundary between Rome and Carthage. Saguntum was more than eight miles south of the Ebro River, so it was well within Carthage's sphere of influence. The Romans seem to have no case for warning the Carthaginians here. But the true point of contention seemed to revolve around the existence of a friendship between Rome and the Saguntines.

Sometime between 223 and 220 BCE, the Romans involved themselves in the mediation of an internal quarrel within the city. This resulted in some of the most important men in Saguntum, who had been in favor of an alliance with Carthage, being put to death. This likely provoked reactions from New Carthage, possibly giving the Saguntines a reason to request Roman protection, though any alliance between the two seems to date back no later than 223 BCE.

Under the Treaty of Lutatius, which both Carthage and Rome signed at the First Punic War's conclusion, both sides had agreed not to attack each other's allies. The Romans evidently felt they could argue that this alliance with Saguntum now superseded the terms of the Ebro agreement.

Hannibal sent away the delegates with disdain, deeming them as hypocrites and accusing them of interfering in Saguntine politics. He even went so far as to charge the Romans as responsible for the deaths of the pro-Carthaginian citizens within the city. Roman historians have typically deemed Hannibal's reaction here as intemperate and a direct result of his youth.

When the talks broke down, the Roman delegation departed for Carthage to relay the same message there: Stay away from Saguntum. Hannibal, though, was confident he could stare down this new Roman threat and eliminate their supposed ally in the Carthaginian midst. As he wintered in New Carthage, he made plans for the 219 BCE campaign to seize Saguntum.

Attacking Saguntum

Saguntum was well protected, based atop a steep hill with extensive fortifications and with enough supplies to withstand a protracted siege. Hannibal laid siege to the city for nearly eight months. It was during this siege that Hannibal learned many cruel lessons about the difficulty and costliness of sieges, and he consciously avoided them in his subsequent campaigns. Despite all their warnings the previous year, Rome did not raise a finger to assist their supposed allies.

The Carthaginians attacked the city in three separate places, making use of ballistae, assault towers, catapults, and siege platforms. Despite their enemy's advances, the Saguntines remained robust in their defense and made clever use of a weapon of their own design. Livy named this device the *phalarica*, and it apparently resembled a flaming iron javelin.

This novel weapon was not enough to hold off the Carthaginians, who slowly but surely ground down the city's defenses. Hannibal was a hands-on commander and led from the front during the siege, throwing himself into battle numerous times—a trait that doubtlessly inspired loyalty in his men and fear in his enemy, but it was always a risky affair.

By late 219 BCE, with their supplies and fortifications exhausted, the Saguntum garrison had little choice but to surrender. The city, a pawn in the great game between Rome and Carthage, was mercilessly sacked, and its population slaughtered, dispersed, or sold off as slaves.

Carthage is given a particularly bad reputation in the pro-Roman sources for the sack of this city, but Hannibal faced the same strategic choices of any commander in this period when conquering a city and is likely to have acted little different from his contemporaries. On the one hand, sacking a city and slaughtering its inhabitants would satisfy the pent-up need for vengeance and riches as a reward for a long and hard siege. But it won't win friends or influence.

Hannibal faced this choice at many points of the Second Punic War, attracting allies and defections from Rome. He rarely chose the sacking of a city again unless he absolutely had no choice. In the case of Saguntum, though, the punishment for resistance was severe, surely as an example to any other Iberian cities who might think of joining with the Roman cause.

Cloudy Motivations

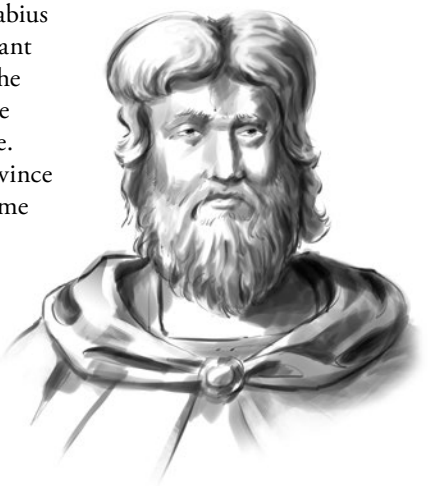
The inconsistency between the Roman account of their meeting with Hannibal and the later lack of Roman interest in actually defending Saguntum means that perhaps there was really no formal alliance in the first place. Perhaps the friendship was just a story later invented by Rome to justify war with Carthage. Roman accounts and documents from this period might have been manipulated to later show a contrived alliance, which would help explain why later Roman historians struggled to reconcile the evidence of this period with a plausible narrative.

This would also help explain the confusing timeline, because in 219 BCE, the Romans had other problems keeping them occupied in Illyria. It's entirely possible that Hannibal knew of this and chose to take Saguntum while Rome's focus was elsewhere.

The Roman Response

When word of Saguntum's sacking reached the Roman Senate, several members called for an aggressive response and immediate war, proclaiming that there could be no hesitation in response to such provocation.

Others were not so eager to start a war. Fabius Maximus, who would later play a significant role in the conflict to come, was among the hesitant, instead suggesting an embassy be sent to talk the matter over with Carthage. Should the Carthaginians manage to convince this embassy that they were innocent, Rome would remain silent. And should they fail, Rome would have a more solid justification for going to war.



Polybius, however, insists that Rome's immediate response was to dispatch an embassy to Carthage, with a remit, it seems, to force Carthage into a declaration of war. When the embassy was received by the Carthaginian Senate, the meeting quickly devolved into arguing about which side had most egregiously violated their treaty obligations. But the Roman envoys presented a clear ultimatum: Carthage had to disavow Hannibal's actions and surrender him to Rome.

This was an impossible request to accede to, and the Romans would have known it. To hand Hannibal over to the Romans would be tantamount to surrendering Iberia. And if the Carthaginians could not hold their own against the Romans and maintain their sphere of influence now, they certainly would not be able to do so once deprived of their overseas territories. Moreover, all of this assumes that the Barcids and their loyal troops could be convinced to hand their popular commander to their enemy without sparking another civil war.

Roman accounts indicate nonetheless that there were some in Carthage who spoke out against war and wanted to negotiate with Rome. Livy records that Hanno, the great opponent of the Barcids, made a passionate speech against Hannibal as a warmonger and advocated his exile, but this cannot be verified. Carthage, like Rome, was an oligarchy dominated by competing familial interests, and in the end, most within the Carthaginian Senate evidently remained loyal to Hannibal.

Inevitable War

In the broader scheme of ancient geopolitics, the Second Punic War was probably inevitable. Saguntum may have been the catalyst, but it was not the true cause. The rise of Carthage's power in Iberia was what ultimately piqued Rome's concern as the new frontier in the war for Mediterranean supremacy, which both sides aspired to win.

Hamilcar and Hannibal had conquered fierce Iberia with amazing speed, and Carthage had recovered from its bruising wars very quickly. In Rome, some believed they might even find themselves dwarfed by the rapidly expanding Carthaginians if they did not act now to check their expansion. By the spring of 218 BCE, Carthage was at war with Rome once more, and the Second Punic War had officially begun.

In Rome, war preparations had already begun at the time of the embassy's departure. Livy describes the declaration of war against Carthage as being enthusiastically approved by the Roman public assembly. Saguntum's sacking served as the perfect excuse for Rome to start a war they already had in the works, and they had probably been laying the groundwork for several years. However, they never anticipated that Italy, the very root of their power, would be the site of this war.

6

A New Hercules Prepares to Fight Rome

As of the spring of 218 BCE, Saguntum had fallen, and Carthage and Rome were at war again. The Roman Senate was preparing to send two armies to strike at Carthaginian territory in North Africa and in Iberia. Hannibal knew there was little time to lose and looked to seize the initiative.

Hannibal's Approach

To beat Rome, Hannibal believed Carthage would have to strike hard and fast before the Roman war machine shifted into top gear. To that end, Hannibal devised one of the most daring plans in military history: He would send his army to Italy itself to fight the Romans on their own soil.

The most famous military decision of Hannibal's career comes into view here, for he quickly concluded that the only choice he had was to lead his armies to Italy via a land route. The more obvious choice of a naval invasion was out. Despite their traditional prowess at sea, the First Punic War had dealt a blow to the Carthaginian navy from which it hadn't recovered, and Rome now dominated large swaths of water.

A land approach would be no easy feat. It was more than 1,200 miles from New Carthage to Italy, crossing several major mountain ranges and rivers, including the Pyrenees and the Alps. Long stretches of the journey would lack decent roads or major settlements and would have unfeasibly long supply lines.

Hannibal's Preparations

The success of Hannibal's strategy would hinge on careful preparations, and no area was more crucial than gathering intelligence. Travelers were the mainstay of intelligence gathering in the ancient world. Merchants, ambassadors, mariners, and other traveling professionals traded in gossip and information, and it was they who could be co-opted as spies.

Among Hannibal's best talents was his ability to consistently surprise his enemy. He was a master of intelligence and seems to have amassed a wide network of agents who communicated, scholars believe, with special hand signals. Some of these agents might have even been embedded among Rome's troops, likely disguised as deserters or in the auxiliary forces.

Diplomacy was also a critical element of Hannibal's strategy. The success of his plan to cross the Alps into Italy would depend in no small part on the welcome they received as they went. Should his army be forced to scrounge for food and fight every step of the way, it would be sapped of its strength before it even reached the Romans. Therefore, Hannibal sent out envoys ahead on the route to Italy to lay the groundwork for a warm reception.

There was a major opportunity to find common cause with the Gauls of northern Italy, an area known as Cisalpine Gaul. The Gauls there were already warring with the Romans, who had been sending settlers to colonize this region. Gallic tribes there would eventually serve as crucial guides and sources of recruits and supplies for the Carthaginian army.

Hannibal's Army

Examining the legendary army Hannibal would take with him to Italy is tricky. The later Romans tell a propaganda-like tale about Carthage and Hannibal: Their army was made up of foreigners and was disorganized, and by contrast, the Romans were the organized and civilized ones.

Still, it's safe to say Hannibal's army was an extremely diverse force, counting among its number Carthaginians, Numidians, Libyans and other African people, Iberians, Ligurians, Greeks, Italians, and Celts. Their command structures varied depending on the relationships to Carthage, so some served directly under Carthaginian commanders while others acted more like independent units with their own leadership. Troops in armies of the day generally wore their own traditional colors and uniforms of their homes rather than a standard uniform. It was a multicultural and multilingual force.

Every group within the army had a duty to fulfill during battle. The mounted Numidians were particularly prized for their ability to strike hard and fast on the battlefield, and Hannibal's cavalry would turn the tide in many battles. His foot soldiers hailing from North Africa, including the Libyphoenicians, Gaetulians, Mauretanians, and Libyans, often served as the reliable core of Hannibal's infantry.

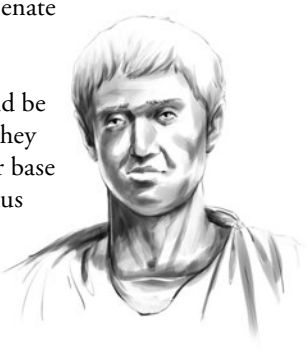
The Iberians, Ligurians, and Celts also hailed from chieftain societies, which meant their loyalties and incentives depended on the support of a specific leader. They were maneuverable, proficient with short swords, and energetic in hand-to-hand combat. His troops from the Balearic Islands were small in number but legendary with slings.

We can gain some insight into the specific makeup of the Carthaginian army from Polybius, who lists in detail the composition of a smaller force that was entrusted at this time to Hasdrubal, Hannibal's younger brother, for the defense of Iberia. There were 2,550 mounted North African troops, 11,850 Libyan foot soldiers, 500 Balearian slingers, 300 Ligurian footmen, and 21 elephants. In addition, he commanded ships numbering 50 quinqueremes, 2 quadriremes, and 5 triremes.

The army Hannibal set out with likely had a similar ethnic breakdown. It was much larger at 90,000 foot soldiers, 12,000 horse troops, and roughly 37 elephants when it departed. However, the composition of Hannibal's army would change significantly over time, as casualties mounted and new recruits were acquired on campaign.

Rome's Forces

On the other side of the Mediterranean, Rome's Senate began raising two consular armies to carry out their plan of a dual attack on Africa and Iberia. It apparently never occurred to them that Italy would be the true location of the war, and because of this, they made plans to retake Saguntum and use it as their base of operations for the coming war. Publius Cornelius Scipio, one of the two consuls of 218 BCE, was offered command over the Iberian theater of operations, while Tiberius Sempronius Longus was to oversee the North African expedition.



That year, the Romans levied six legions consisting of 64,000 foot soldiers and 6,200 cavalry. Even more impressively, they launched a fleet of 220 quinqueremes. These large numbers make it clear the Romans were out to crush Carthage, and quickly.

The Romans devised a two-pronged plan of attack intended for the spring of 218 BCE. Sempronius, who traveled to Sicily to ready an attack on Carthage, received most of the fleet as well as a pair of legions with allied soldiers. Meanwhile, Scipio traveled to Spain with 2 legions, 60 ships, and allied troops. Two legions remained in Italy and were commanded by Lucius Manlius Vulso, a praetor who planned to travel to northern Italy to continue pushing back the Gauls of the Po valley.

Early Moves

Likely encouraged by the information they received concerning the Carthaginians' progress, the Boii, a Gallic tribe, began to revolt. In spite of the trouble this caused in the north, the Romans retained high levels of confidence that they would quickly win.

Back at New Carthage, Hannibal's envoys who had been dispatched to investigate the desired route to Italy returned. They reported that most Gallic chiefs on their side of the Alps and throughout the mountains were supportive of Hannibal's invasion.

There was some way to go before they reached the Alps, though. First, they had to traverse along the Iberian coast, over the Pyrenees, along the coast of southern Gaul, and then finally across the Alps to reach Italy. In the ancient Mediterranean world, this route was known as the Road of Herakles (or Hercules in Latin) because this was the route taken by the hero Hercules in the tale of his 10th labor.

Ancient sources believed that this island was the same place where Phoenician settlers founded Gades, and the modern city of Cádiz still bears Hercules on its flag. However, it was not Hercules who the Phoenicians worshipped there. Rather, it was their god Melqart, and at Cádiz, on what is now the modern island of Sancti Petri, there was a temple dedicated to him. This is a deity that later Romans and Greeks equated to the figure of Hercules/Herakles. The temple was famous across the ancient Mediterranean—first under the Phoenician guise, and then later, once the Romans took over, under the name of Hercules.

Mythmaking

Given that this Melqart/Hercules was one of the important gods in the Phoenician pantheon, Gades was a city of special religious significance to the Carthaginians. The Barcid family particularly believed Melqart to be their patron and defender. Therefore, as part of his preparations against Rome, Hannibal made a pilgrimage to Gades and its temple, where he offered gifts and prayers.

In the west of the Mediterranean, there were a multitude of cultures and peoples: Iberians, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Etruscans, Greeks, and Numidians, to name just a few. And the figure of Melqart/Hercules had been adopted into many cultures. Therefore, Hannibal's visit to the temple at Gades was not just about paying homage to his god.

He would have known the journey he was about to take mirrored the myths that circulated about the great hero Hercules. And he would have wanted to channel that symbolism very explicitly because the idea of Hercules—a hero of mythic strength and divine birth—cut across many Mediterranean cultures.

Moreover, Hercules was not only a great warrior and commander; he was also a hero who liberated towns and cities from villains, monsters, and tyranny. The Celts, Celtiberians, and Gauls along the route to Italy all revered Hercules in various guises. Hannibal would be assured of a far friendlier and more supportive reception as he traveled if a divine reputation preceded him. Hercules had significance to Greeks, Samnites, Etruscans, and Ligurians too—all peoples in Italy whom Hannibal was hoping could be persuaded to abandon the Romans and join his cause.

For his troops, too, this other aspect of the Hercules legend would have helped cement their identities and commitment to the cause. They were not just soldiers of Carthage fighting for a distant city-state; they were liberators fighting for freedom against Rome, a much more powerful and enduring motivation for their service.

The mythmaking didn't end with the gods' blessing at Gades. Hannibal returned to New Carthage, and around the end of May in 218 BCE, he took his enormous army and set out to the Ebro River, the edge of the Carthaginian world. Per Livy, Hannibal soon had a dream in which he witnessed a youth bearing a godlike face and exclaiming that he was sent by Jupiter to guide him to Italy. This guide then instructed Hannibal to follow his lead.

A commander's dreams, as well as the retelling of them, were vital for keeping morale high. Hannibal's men, despite their cultural and ethnic differences, could all connect to the Hercules myth and the idea of reviving his journey. Hannibal's dream acted as a means for him to be seen by his men as guided by a divine force.

The Journey Begins

Emboldened by his dream, Hannibal took his army across the Ebro, leading them beyond their Carthaginian territories. The Pyrenees, which separated the Iberians from the Celts, would be the first physical barrier as they moved forward. Before they reached it, though, they would have to pass through what is modern Catalonia, the northeast corner of Spain. Populated by Greeks on the coast and Celtiberians inland, this region was largely allied with Rome, so Hannibal was going to face resistance immediately.

Hannibal opted to split his large army into three columns after crossing the Ebro and to sweep through the region quickly and subdue it as he went. According to Polybius, there were numerous battles, all of which came with heavy losses. Hannibal was successful, though, conquering the region and depriving the Romans of a bridgehead in Iberia. He left 11,000 troops under the command of Hanno, an officer, to defend the area. He also dispatched the same amount of troops home as a gesture of goodwill.

Roman sources don't reveal much about Hannibal's crossing of the Pyrenees and if there was any difficulty in doing so. The lack of significant discussion may mean that Roman chroniclers just did not know, and perhaps Hannibal's historians did not want to tell. How many troops he had at this time is also unclear. However, by the time he moved to cross the Pyrenees, he said he had 50,000 foot soldiers and 9,000 horses—still a huge army.

Once Hannibal's forces were beyond the Pyrenees, Hannibal set out into what the Romans called Transalpine Gaul but today is France's southern coast. Again, there is little written on the first part of this journey through this region, and its tribes were mostly neutral toward Carthage and Rome. At the very least, no fighting is recorded as they passed through this region. The next great challenge instead would come when Hannibal's army found itself at the great tributary of the Alps, the Rhône River.

7

Hannibal Crosses the Alps, 218 BCE

In the summer of 218 BCE, Hannibal and his army emerged from the Pyrenees and began their march across Gaul to the Alps. Their next great physical barrier was the Rhône River, and they aimed to bypass the city of Massalia (modern Marseilles), one of Rome's key allies in the region. Coming from the other direction, from Italy, were two legions under the command of Consul Publius Scipio with the mission to take Iberia from the Barcids. By September he had sailed his troops down the Ligurian coast and landed at Massalia, so the two armies were now in close proximity, though they did not yet know it.

Crossing the Rhône

The Romans were aware that a Carthaginian army was on the move. Publius Scipio halted at Massalia to intercept this new threat. But the last piece of intelligence he'd received was that Hannibal was preoccupied trying to cross the Pyrenees. Scipio erroneously assumed that Hannibal would face significant resistance from the tribes in southern Gaul, slowing him further.

When Scipio discovered that Hannibal and his army had appeared at the crossing of the Rhône well ahead of anyone's estimate, the consul was certainly in shock. He immediately sent out mounted scouts to verify Hannibal's position. The Roman army stationed in Massalia now assumed they would fight the Carthaginian army in Gaul, so Scipio set about planning a battle.

Meanwhile, Hannibal and his army reached the western banks of the Rhône. According to sources, the Roman consular army was approximately a four-day march away. Hannibal was likely aware that the consular force was in the vicinity but had not confirmed its landing at Massalia. He immediately began the massive logistical exercise of getting his army across the mighty river.

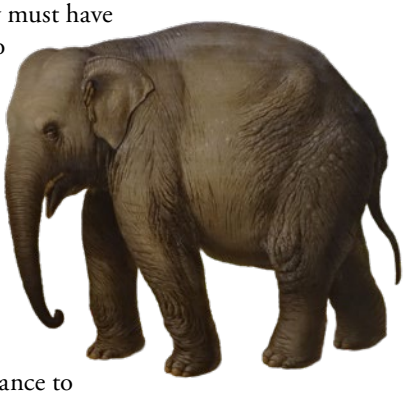
Polybius depicts the crossing here in great detail, including the meticulous preparations required for an army of 50,000 foot soldiers, in addition to his mounted troops and elephants, to cross such a large river. Hannibal made use of every possible resource he had to befriend the local people who lived on either side of the river and to purchase their boats and canoes.

Still, it took roughly two days to gather sufficient rivercraft to transport the army. And in these two days, opposing forces had gathered on the opposite banks of the river—not the Romans, who were still some ways off, but various Celtic tribes who were intent on preventing the Carthaginians from crossing.

To deal with this new challenge, Hannibal sent part of the army north under the command of one of his chief lieutenants: Hanno, son of Bomilcar. The plan was for this cohort to cross the river north of their position and then turn back to surprise the enemy that awaited them on the east bank. This worked. Hannibal's forces defeated the Celtic forces, and his army crossed the river.

Hannibal's Elephants

Despite Hannibal's successes thus far, the elephants and their minders remained on the west side of the Rhône, and this was an intriguing challenge. Elephants were terrifying war tools that wreaked havoc both physically and psychologically. Logistically, however, they must have presented an enormous challenge, owing to their size, unpredictable nature, and food and water needs.



The most common belief is that the Carthaginians used Asian elephants in war. But there are other possibilities. One is that a subspecies known as the African bush elephant was what the Carthaginians used. They held a great resemblance to the African savannah elephant but stood slightly smaller in height.

They no longer exist, though, having been hunted to extinction later by the Romans. Some scholars believe that the elephants were sub-Saharan African savannah elephants, more familiar to us today, though this has yet to be proven.

New Allies, New Threats

As they looked to complete their crossing, Celtic chieftains from northern Italy formally presented themselves to the Carthaginians. A chieftain addressed Hannibal's army and guaranteed the support of his people on the other side of the Alps.

But now Hannibal had another pressing problem: the Romans. After his own crossing, he had confirmed that the consular army had arrived in Massalia. He dispatched 500 of his Numidian mounted troops south to watch their movements, but after just a few miles the party ran into the contingent of Scipio's own scouts. There was a skirmish, with several hundred casualties on each side before the Numidians withdrew. The Romans gave chase and soon located the rest of the Carthaginian army, so they returned to the coast to inform their commander of their findings.

Hannibal now faced a critical strategic choice: He could fight Scipio here, but the Romans had the Massalians on their side, which put him at a serious disadvantage. Ultimately, he decided against it. He needed to cross the Alps before the heavy snows of winter trapped them all in Gaul. Fighting the Romans would undermine his bigger mission.

The following morning at sunrise, Hannibal then started moving his army north, while the final preparations were made to ferry the elephants and his last soldiers across the river. Livy tells us the Carthaginians crafted large pontoons, around 200 feet in length. The elephants could be persuaded to walk onto them from the banks.

These pontoons could be split in two, so that when an elephant was guided to the end of one, that end would detach and be towed across the river by boats to the other side. According to reports, some elephants panicked and jumped off the pontoons, swimming the rest of the way, while a number of those tending to the elephants drowned or were caught in the current of the river. Elephant experts have challenged the account by Livy as pure fiction. Whatever the case, we are told that every one of the 37 elephants ultimately crossed, and they joined the rest of the army marching north.

Three days later, Publius Scipio and the consular army reached Hannibal's crossing point, but to his surprise, the Carthaginians had slipped through his fingers and were some days' ride to the north now. He was unlikely to catch

them this way, so instead, Scipio turned back to Massalia and made a new plan. He put his army under command of his brother Gnaeus and sent them all on to Iberia as originally planned.

Meanwhile, Publius Scipio himself would head back to Italy to obtain more legions and march north to fight Hannibal. The significance of this plan was that they could defend against the Carthaginian threat in Italy while still tying them up in Iberia, cutting Hannibal off from any supplies or reinforcements from there.

Preparing to Cross the Alps

Up until this point, Hannibal was faithfully adhering to what was once known as the Road of Hercules. However, if he stayed true to this route, it would have taken him through the Durance valley and just north of what is today the French Riviera, then across the Ligurian Alps and right into Italy. But with Roman armies and allies in the area, this really wasn't an option, so instead, he would have to go a more northerly route.

The ancient sources state that Hannibal traveled north for four days until reaching a place known only as "the island," and most historians agree this is the island sits at the confluence of the Rhône and Isere Rivers. But beyond this point, the Roman accounts become inconclusive. We are told that around this time Hannibal interfered with a conflict between two brothers in the nearby region of the Allobroges tribes, gaining an ally in the winning chieftain.

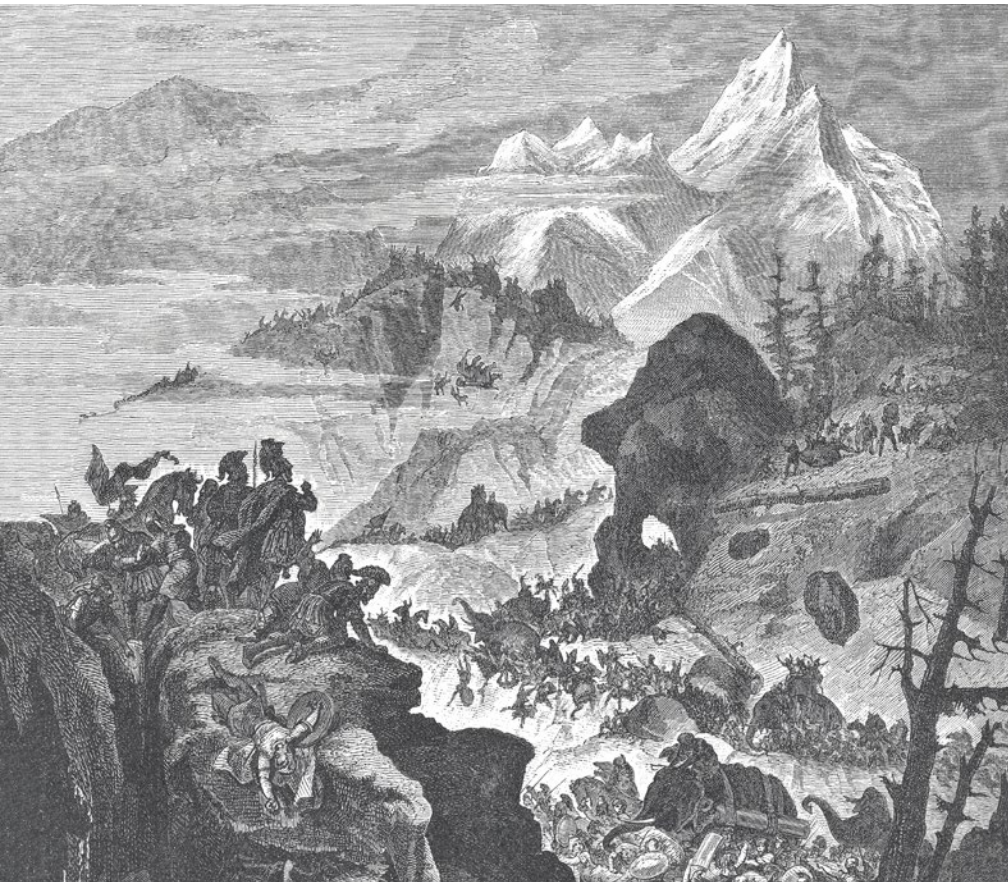
The actual mountain pass Hannibal's forces took across the Alps is one of the great mysteries of ancient history. Whichever pass he did arrive at, though, he got there in October, and while the weather remained relatively warm, winter would soon be upon them. It was imperative, then, to complete the crossing before snows began to fall and the mountains became impassable. They began a 10-day trek to the Alps, after which point their Allobroges escorts would depart.

Hostile Terrain

Antagonistic tribesmen began taking up tactical positions to ambush and harass the Carthaginian army as they marched during the day. In response, Hannibal during the nights would send his troops ahead to positions that lay above these tribesmen and tried to ambush the would-be attackers in turn.

But this was still incredibly difficult and dangerous. To make matters worse, the ground they walked on was slippery and uneven, making progress slow and the supply wagons, horses, and baggage carriers easy targets.

After a nine-day climb, Hannibal and his men finally arrived at the summit of the pass. Upon reaching it, he then let his army rest for two days. Sources at this point indicate it was already late in the year. Every one of the passes Hannibal could have taken over the Alps ascends beyond 6,500 feet in altitude, which means freezing temperatures and even early snows would have started to appear by this time.



The descent down the other side of the mountain proved to be more treacherous than the climb. Due to the newly fallen snow covering the previous year's hardened snow, it was close to impossible for man or beast to know what they were treading on. The wrong step onto slippery or unsecure ground could see them sliding over a precipice. Eventually, keeping enough food on hand for the soldiers and animals became a challenge. Strict rationing would have been a necessity yet potentially fatal for those already suffering from the cold.

It took several days for the men to forge a route out of the snowy peaks. By the time they finally arrived at the foothills with pastures on the other side of the Alps, the troops took a much-needed reprieve and left their animals to eat. It would be another three days before the men were prepared to march down toward the plains.

The entire venture to the Po valley from New Carthage lasted a total of five months and left the remaining army a fraction of what it was when it departed from Iberia. By the time he descended into Italy, Hannibal's army, according to his own inscription, consisted of 20,000 foot soldiers and 6,000 mounted troops—less than half of what he had after crossing the Pyrenees.

There's no way to be sure about numbers, but it is easy to imagine the many ways Hannibal's army may have been whittled down over that time. These could include departures by deserters, disease, malnutrition, hypothermia, and perhaps even accidental elephant trampling. Though the sacrifice was steep, Hannibal deemed it worthwhile—especially because bringing his army to Italy left the Romans completely outmaneuvered. This would remain the case for another five years.

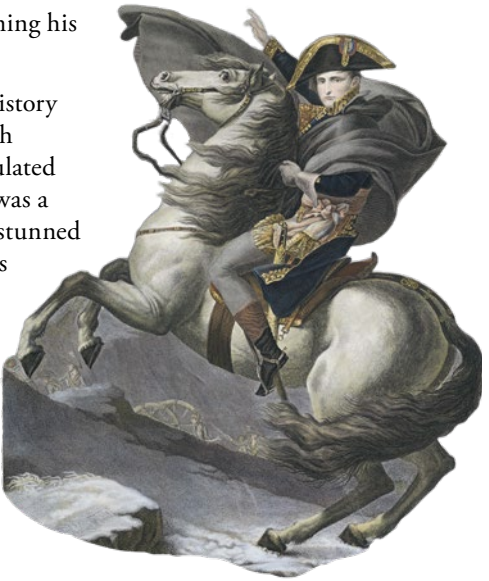
After the Crossing

A hostile army within striking distance of Rome raised great alarm in the Roman Senate. Aside from that, the crossing had symbolic impact. To locals, the feat must have been beyond belief. News would have traveled fast. If Hannibal could get an enormous army through the seemingly impassable Alps, maybe he really was Hercules reborn.

However, the men who descended the mountains had suffered a tremendous ordeal to reach their destination. One can wonder how much of a hero Hannibal might have looked to his own men at this point as they staggered out of the Alps, cold, hungry, and mourning those who hadn't made it.

After descending the mountains, Hannibal's army joined up with the Insubres, a Celtic people long antagonistic to Rome. Hannibal stopped and took care of his men and animals. They seemingly recovered quickly, to such a point that they later went on to triumph in two battles in the following month. This chapter of the Hannibal story is considered one of the great events of the ancient world, made all the greater for the generations retelling it, and it has been endlessly depicted in literature, art, and historical accounts.

In 1800, during his campaign against the Austrians in the north of Italy, Napoleon Bonaparte decided to pull off the same maneuver and took his army across the Alps. Soon after, he soundly defeated the Habsburgs at the Battle of Marengo, adding greatly to his military reputation and strengthening his hold as first consul of France.



Napoleon was a great student of history and of Hannibal, and just like with Hannibal, the crossing was a calculated act of mythmaking as much as it was a military maneuver. Yet news of it stunned Europe, and subsequent depictions of the event are some of the most memorable and lasting of Napoleon. If this was the impact of a copycat act in 1800, one can only imagine the astonishment across the whole of the Mediterranean world upon hearing of such a feat more than two millennia earlier.

8

First Victories: Ticinus and Trebbia

After Hannibal brought the Carthaginian army over the Alps and into Italy itself, the Roman Senate was surprised and alarmed. However, Hannibal had thus far only fought Iberian, Gallic, and Celtic tribes. The Roman's forces outclassed those enemies. And at sea, the Carthaginians had moved to block the Roman invasion of Africa and possibly reclaim their old foothold at the port of Lilybaeum. However, those Carthaginians had been fighting and losing against Romans under the command of Tiberius Longus. The Romans captured the island of Malta from Carthage soon after.

Hannibal's Goal

Though Hannibal's surprise appearance compelled the Senate to recall Tiberius to Italy and to temporarily shelve any plans to invade North Africa, thus far Carthage did not appear a great threat. And indeed, Hannibal's army couldn't single-handedly take down the Romans. His hopes for success depended instead on the disruption of Rome's complex system of alliances within the Italian Peninsula.

The Roman Republic was a confederation of cities and peoples that were bound to Rome through political, economic, and diplomatic ties. For instance, Celtic tribes in the north, Greek cities of the south, and Lucanian and Samnite peoples of central Italy had all been subjugated by Rome, by negotiation or conquest, and co-opted as allies. These allies were known as *socii* or *foederati*. They were obligated to provide troops to serve in the Roman army. These allied units, known as *alae*, made up about half of all of Rome's forces as well as most of its cavalry.

If Hannibal was to prevail, he had to present himself as an opportunity and peel off Rome's allies to his own cause. His bold crossing of the Alps was a good start. Several Celtic tribes in northern Italy, most notably the Boii and the Insubres, were already in rebellion and deeply resentful of Roman colonization in their lands, and both tribes would become important early allies for Hannibal upon his arrival.

Hannibal looked to bring the rest of the northern tribes into the fold. His first target was the Taurini, who were enemies of his new ally, the Insubres. He first offered the Taurini an alliance, and when this was rejected, he laid siege to their main settlement—possibly modern Turin—and took the town in three days.

Hannibal was ruthless with those who had opposed him. The Taurini defenders were slaughtered upon defeat, while the women and children of the town were sold into slavery. It had the intended effect, however: The other Celtic tribes north of the Po River soon flocked to Hannibal's side, fearing him now just as much as they feared Rome.

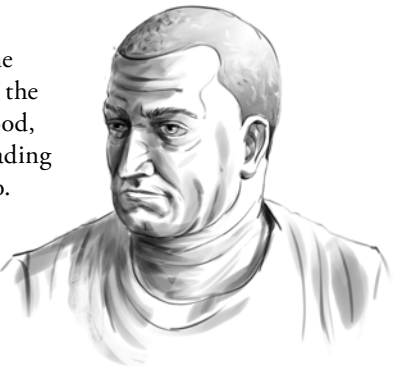
An Early Clash

Consul Publius Scipio, who previously was on Rhône River, by now had made his way via Pisa to Etruria and rendezvoused with the two legions under Praetor Lucius Manlius Vulso. Taking command, he began marching them up the Po valley to confront Hannibal.

Both Hannibal and Scipio decided to lead out their cavalry in large detachments to reconnoiter the enemy forces. These mini armies soon ran into each other near the Ticino River, a tributary of the Po. Finally, Hannibal and the Romans would meet in battle.

In melee, the two sides were evenly matched for some time, but eventually, Hannibal used his Numidian cavalry to flank and envelop the Romans, a successful maneuver that tipped the battle in Hannibal's favor. The conclusion of the conflict saw most of the Roman cavalry breaking their line to flee or dying in the attempt. Publius Scipio was wounded in this skirmish and fled with his remaining men to Placenta, a Roman colony known today as Piacenza.

Hannibal's Moves after Ticinus



Following Ticinus, the Carthaginians were shown more support from Celtic tribes in the valley, who sent recruits of their own to join the army. Emboldened at having drawn first blood, Hannibal now pursued Publius Scipio by leading his army on a two-day march to cross the Po.

Hannibal was smarting for a bigger battle. He positioned his army where the Romans could plainly see it while they were camped at Placentia. The Romans did not take the bait. However, that same night, the Celtic support troops within the Roman army were so inspired by the presence of Hannibal's army that they rebelled against the Romans and attacked them inside their own camp. Afterward, the Celts departed the Roman camp to join Hannibal.

Scipio understood that doing battle here would be a grim prospect. Under the cover of night, the Roman consul evacuated his army to a new camp in the hills around the nearby Trebbia River. There, Scipio would dig in and wait for support from the south—in particular, the legions of fellow consul Sempronius Longus, which were making their way up from Sicily to join in the defense of the north.

However, several more tribes and cities pledged for Hannibal. Most dramatically, Clastidium, a major supply depot and grain store, defected. The Romans received a boost to their cause, though, when Consul Sempronius arrived a few weeks later with his legions from Sicily and joined Scipio's encampment.

The Roman Commanders' Mindset

Hannibal was spoiling for a major battle. Likewise, Sempronius was eager to deliver a crushing blow, having prevailed in a minor skirmish against the Carthaginians shortly after arriving.

To understand the mindset of why the Roman commanders were so eager to fight, the intertwined Roman political and military system is relevant. In this period of the Roman Republic, two consuls were elected in January and took up office in March, and they served for a fixed term of 12 months. In this system, the consuls had only a year to win glory and triumphs for themselves back in Rome before having to leave office.

At this point, there were only a few months for Sempronius or Scipio to win a victory over Hannibal and receive the glory, the wealth and spoils of his captured treasury, and future political prospects. If they waited until spring, they would be replaced by their successors.

Hannibal had no such pressure and was more than willing to allow the rivalries born from Rome's system to play to his benefit, hoping to use it to draw out the Romans into an engagement they were not prepared for. And late in December, around the winter solstice, Hannibal believed the time was right and made ready to provoke the Romans onto the field. He called up the reliable Numidian cavalry in his army and dispatched them early in the morning toward the enemy camp.

Preparing for the Battle of Trebbia

At the outset of the battle of Trebbia, the conditions were wintry and snowy, something rarely seen in ancient warfare. However, Hannibal did prepare his troops for winter conditions. His troops were well fed, and their skin was coated with oils that helped them resist the freezing conditions.

Sempronius was feeling bullish, so upon seeing the approach of Hannibal's troops, he sent his own men to pursue. It is recorded that the day was exceedingly cold, and Polybius again gives us some intriguing detail when he writes about the way the Romans, as well as their horses, left their encampment in a flurry without their morning meals, then crossed the Trebbia, its waters chest-high and bitterly cold.

When he saw the Romans cross the river, Hannibal summoned his foot soldiers, pikemen, and slingers. In addition to the 20,000 foot soldiers in his army, consisting of Celts, Africans, and Iberians, Hannibal had 10,000 mounted troops, which included Celtic allies. Sources inform us that his mounted troops were all stationed at the wings, while the elephants stood on either side of the infantry.

Sempronius brought his troops up to confront Hannibal in turn. His army consisted of 16,000 Roman and 20,000 allied foot soldiers, plus 4,000 mounted troops. While the Romans had a significant advantage in terms of foot soldiers, they were at a disadvantage in terms of cavalry. It took several hours for the Romans to cross the Trebbia River and form up in lines to face Hannibal's own. The Romans, now standing in snow, were hungry as well as soaked and freezing from crossing the icy river.

Before dawn arrived, Hannibal had dispatched his younger brother Mago, along with 2,000 cavalry and infantry, to a dry riverbed a little south of the battlefield that was obscured by brush. There, hidden in the fog of a cold day, they waited.

The core of the Roman army and their greatest strength was the legionary—heavy infantry whose proficiency with sword and shield were legendary. And the legionaries here formed the powerful center of the Roman formation. The smaller Carthaginian infantry, made up mostly of Iberians, Libyans, and Gallic allies, had to be stretched into a thin line to prevent the Roman forces from outflanking their lines.

However, Hannibal placed his elephants on the ends of his infantry lines, which would have discouraged the Roman soldiers from getting too close and trying to outflank the Carthaginian lines. Beyond the infantry, Hannibal formed up his strong suit: the cavalry.

The Battle of Trebbia

After crossing and forming up, Sempronius sent his troops to charge Hannibal's lines. As the battle progressed, the Roman foot soldiers in the center succeeded in breaking through the Carthaginian line entirely.

While the Romans were winning in the center, the Carthaginian calvary on the wings defeated their Roman counterparts and then charged into the infantry from the sides. Roman foot soldiers were at a severe disadvantage against charging cavalry even at the best of times, much less when frozen and hungry. The cavalry attack threw the whole of the Roman line into confusion. Sempronius realized much of his army was encircled, and the battle was lost. Staying in close formation, his remaining soldiers fought their way out and retreated to their camp.

It had been a hard-fought battle, and the Carthaginians had lost a few thousand soldiers. Meanwhile, the Romans had lost far more, perhaps 20,000 or 30,000 by some estimates. These were mostly auxiliary personnel. The core of their most valuable troops—the citizen foot soldiers—made it back largely intact.

The Aftermath

Trebbia was a chance for Hannibal to showcase the sheer scope of his strategic ability and intellect. He had managed to lure the Romans into a fight he controlled, and he was able to properly ready his soldiers for the less-than-favorable conditions they were fighting in. And the psychological impact of the victory at Trebbia was crucial for Hannibal. He had defeated a full consular army in battle. But the winter was harsh, and steeper losses came about in the battle's aftermath due to the cold. All of the elephants except one perished over that winter.

Over the course of this winter, Hannibal was very harsh in his treatment of Roman citizen prisoners of war, though prisoners from Roman-allied tribes were shown the greatest kindness. He reportedly called a meeting and suggested to the allies of Rome that it was in their best interest to accept his friendship, as his initial reason for this invasion was to reestablish the liberty of Italy's population.

Upon concluding this meeting, Hannibal sent these Roman allies back to their homes without any kind of expectation or ransom. He hoped by doing so, they would report back to their towns and cities both that Hannibal could beat the Romans and that he bore no enmity toward Rome's allies. This strategy would prove to be extremely successful over the course of the next few years in encouraging further defections.

When news of the defeat at Trebbia reached Rome, alarm and panic began to break out, though calm was restored somewhat when Sempronius returned to the city to supervise the consular elections for the upcoming year. The newly elected consuls, Gnaeus Servilius and Gaius Flaminius, laid out a new plan to raise troops and crush Hannibal in 217 BCE. They busied themselves enrolling new legions, as well as delivering supplies to Etruria and Ariminum, which they intended to establish as their bases for the spring campaign.

Meanwhile, the remnants of the consular army in the north had no peace over winter. Hannibal's cavalry roamed far and wide, blocking all Roman supplies from every location, with the one exception being cargo shipped down the Po River itself.

9

The Romans Panic: Lake Trasimene, 217 BCE

The situation in the spring of 217 BCE was a relatively good one for Hannibal. He had crossed the Alps, bested the Romans in two battles, built alliances with the Celts, and established a foothold in northern Italy. The winter had been harsh, but he had brought the army through that too. The big question was: Where would he go next?

Rome Organizes a Response

Caught off guard by Hannibal's appearance, the Romans had wasted no time organizing their allies and soldiers to contain the threat. They recruited several new legions and thousands of allied auxiliaries to defend their territory in Italy, and they had called up their allies from as far as Syracuse. Immediately after the defeat at Trebbia, Rome dispatched legions to defend the islands of Sardinia and Sicily. They also constructed military facilities in southern cities with questionable loyalties, such as Tarentum (modern Taranto). These places had not long been conquered by Rome, and they were not taking any chances.

New consuls were elected, and they prepared to defend Rome by blocking the major routes south that Hannibal might take. They had a geographical advantage in the Apennine Mountains, which form the spine of Italy, and only a handful of major roads led through them into central Italy. Consul Gnaeus Servilius took over the remnants of Publius Scipio's army and took up position in Ariminum—modern Rimini. From here he could guard the Via Flaminia, the main road that ran from Rome across the mountains, as well as the southbound roads along the Adriatic. The other consul, Gaius Flaminius, inherited Sempronius's legions and moved them to Arretium, modern Arezzo, to prevent Hannibal from entering Etruria.

As always, rather than play into the Romans' hands, Hannibal decided to take an unlikely route across the Apennines that his enemies hadn't anticipated. He drove the army over the mountains and entered a mud-filled marshland that is believed to have been the flooded Arno River valley.

A Tough March

Hannibal's marsh route was unguarded and avoided the major Roman garrisons and cities. However, Hannibal and his men endured great hardships over the course of four days. With virtually no dry land, there was little opportunity to make camp or properly rest. The Iberian and African soldiers who had accompanied Hannibal during his march across the Alps fared far better than their newly acquired Celtic allies, whose interest in the journey began to fade.

The Iberians and the Africans were placed at the front of the marching formation, while the Celts were placed behind them, and the mounted troops covered the army's rear. Hannibal's brother Mago commanded the rear guard. Hannibal, in the meantime, was riding on the back of the last elephant in his army. Such showmanship probably helped maintain the army's spirits, as some men and animals undoubtedly succumbed to disease, drowning, and exhaustion in these marshes.

Loss of an Eye

During his forces' marsh slog, one of Hannibal's eyes became infected, and eventually he lost sight in it. This loss only seemed to strengthen Hannibal's legend, though. The Roman writer Plutarch would note centuries later that many of the most warlike and remarkable commanders of history only had one eye, including Sertorius, Antigonus, and Hannibal.

Baiting Flaminius

As Hannibal advanced through the Arno valley, he stopped to camp close to Faesulae, which was 40 miles from Arretium (modern Arrezo). Here it seems Hannibal's army finally had the chance to properly rest. Hannibal's troops likely numbered somewhere within the range of 40,000 to 50,000. After everything the army had gone through, it was still twice as large as the one Hannibal had descended the Alps with. This gives some indication of how successful Hannibal must have been in recruiting from the Italians in the north.

Hannibal then dispatched his spies to investigate the Roman positions, and they returned with some encouraging information: There was just one army stationed so far at Arretium, and it was led by consul Gaius Flaminius, who was seasoned but overconfident.

Seeking to draw Flaminius out, Hannibal passed his army right by the Roman position at Arretium, flaunting his troops, and then went south, through the rich Val di Chiana in modern Tuscany. As they marched, the Carthaginians burned crops and ravaged the countryside. This was a significant provocation. Hannibal then turned to the east. He took a path between the town of Cortona and Lake Trasimene, one of the larger lakes of Italy.

Flaminius seemingly took the bait and followed in pursuit, eventually chasing Hannibal along Lake Trasimene's northern shore. Flaminius had two legions and allied troops at his command, but they only numbered about 25,000, while Hannibal's army, if the sources are accurate, was nearly double that number.

Trapping Flaminius

On June 20, Hannibal marched his soldiers through a tight gap between the northern hills and the lake. This long defile ended in a small plain that was surrounded by hills and closed off by the lake. It was here that Hannibal and his army camped for the night. Flaminius camped farther back on the lake shore that same night, and the fires of the two camps were probably visible around the lake shore to the other.

With the Romans so close, Hannibal decided to set a trap. His preparations began during the nearly moonless night. At the end of the small plain in front of his camp, he placed his Iberian and African forces—his top infantry options. Then he placed his Balearic slingers and pikemen in an extended line on the slopes of the hills overlooking the defile to his camp. His cavalry and Celts lined up beyond them, with the cavalry stationed at the mouth of the defile.

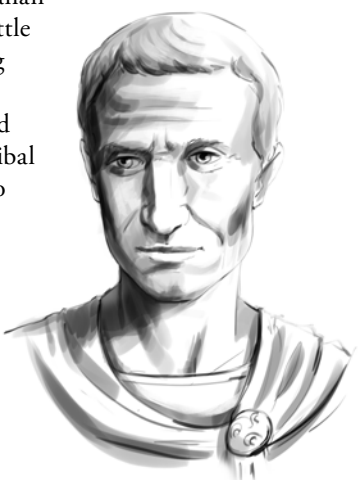
Flaminius marched his legions into the gap at dawn. He did not send scouts ahead to gather information on his opponent. As Flaminius's legions marched through the gap and down the defile, there was apparently little visibility due to misty, foggy conditions. The Carthaginians watched the Romans pass below them and waited. Once the Roman column was almost surrounded, Hannibal, with his vanguard, rode up to meet the front of the Roman column and signaled for the rest of the army to engage.

At this moment the Carthaginian army swooped down from their high positions, with each man utilizing the quickest route to meet their enemy in the defile below. The Roman commanders had virtually no time to get their troops out of marching formations and into defensive positions before the fighting commenced.

The Carthaginian army bore down full speed into the flanks of the long column of surprised Romans. During the chaotic fighting, some of the more experienced Roman troops managed to form up and mount a valiant but doomed defense. Most had to fight where they stood or attempt to seek refuge in the lake, where they either drowned or were cut down by the Carthaginian cavalry as they waded.

Even Hannibal was surely surprised at how well his ambush had worked. His forces took out a staggering 15,000 Romans, and their commander, Flaminius, was among them. A few thousand at the front of the column were far enough ahead that they were able to escape the defile and the trap, but they were later chased down by the cavalry and made prisoners. Meanwhile, the Carthaginian army lost only between 1,500 and 2,500 of its soldiers. Historically, there are few comparisons for the lopsidedness of the encounter at Trasimene.

Once again, Hannibal showed grace to the Italian allied prisoners, setting them free after the battle and maintaining the mantra of his fight being with Rome rather than with Italy, which he only wanted to liberate. The newly imprisoned Roman soldiers were so big in number, Hannibal was forced to disperse them among his men to guard them.



After Trasimene

Days after the battle, Hannibal learned that the surviving consul, Servilius, was approaching. In response, Hannibal sent his Numidian forces led by his close friend Maharbal to meet with any advanced guard.

Servilius had begun heading south the moment he learned of Hannibal's presence in Etruria. A contingent of 4,000 cavalry went ahead to scout the situation, but Maharbal's party of Numidian cavalry and spearmen eliminated half of them in a surprise action and captured the rest. The victory was complete, and without cavalry, Servilius's forces would be extremely vulnerable to Hannibal's cavalry-heavy army. He had little choice but to hold back.

Virtually unchallenged in the region now, Hannibal had an interesting move to make. If his intent had ever been to march on Rome, he would have done so at this very moment. He was close to Rome, and their consular forces were in total disarray. But he left Etruria and traveled south through Umbria. Upon doing so, he then ventured east to Picenum, which took him a total of 10 days.

Now, on the Adriatic coast, there was the opportunity to communicate with Carthage. Hannibal dispatched messengers by way of sea to report what had taken place in Italy. He now had direct access to Carthage for the first time in a year and a half. Carthage vowed to send aid to Hannibal as well as increase their contributions overall.

It is somewhat unclear what form this aid took and what Hannibal's goals were. Around this time, a Carthaginian fleet appeared at the Etruscan harbor of Cosa. This might hint that perhaps there was a plan to revive an old alliance between Etruscans and Carthaginians. It may also be that perhaps Hannibal had initially planned to meet with this fleet as part of a combined land and sea assault on Rome.

Hannibal's Recuperation, Rome's Alarm

Whatever his plans were, one of Hannibal's chief challenges at this point was securing supplies. Hannibal traveled east, where Picenum's fertile and rich lands were more than enough to ensure all of the men were fed. The Picentes were one of the least reliable of Rome's nominal allies and could be expected to be friendly to the Carthaginians.

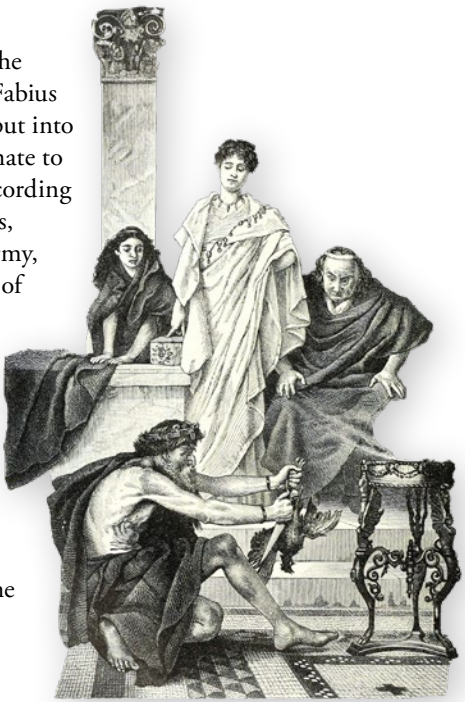
At this point, the overall state of Hannibal's soldiers was likely one that warranted great concern. Over the course of 14 months, his men had done little else but march or fight. The animals, too, suffered greatly. Just as it had been in the north, Hannibal was heavily reliant on new allies and partnerships as he traveled down Italy, as he could not expect fresh troops from Carthage anytime soon.

While Hannibal tended to his forces, across the Apennines in Rome, the disaster at Trasimene caused an uproar of alarm. Servilius's cavalry's defeat added to the situation's seriousness. One of their consuls was dead, an entire army had been destroyed, and the other consular army was unable to engage. It is possible they had lost more than 20,000 soldiers, and nearly every Roman family would have been affected by the losses.

During times of crisis, Rome's political system was such that a dictator could be appointed and given supreme authority in military and civil affairs. Under normal circumstances, the consuls would select a dictator, but this time, the Senate appointed one. The people's assembly (also known as the Comitia Centuriata) elected Quintus Fabius Maximus, who had prior experience both as a dictator and twice as consul. Marcus Minucius was then selected to be Fabius Maximus's second-in-command and *magister equitum*, or "master of the horse."

The Roman Religious Angle

In Rome, it was impossible to separate the religious from the political. Therefore, Fabius Maximus, during the same day he was put into office, organized a meeting with the Senate to discuss matters concerning religion. According to the historical record, Gaius Flaminius, the late consul who fell to Hannibal's army, received blame primarily for his neglect of adhering to religious rituals rather than his recklessness on the battlefield.



Much of the Roman populace, and it seems even the ancient sources, subsequently determined that the wrath of the gods was the true reason for their defeat at Trasimene. The gods required appeasement now, so Maximus decided to turn to the Sibylline Books, a series of ancient scrolls, to uncover what was needed.

From these sacred books it was determined that games and celebrations needed to be held to honor Jupiter, and two new cults should be established, with temples especially constructed for their worship. Among these newly established temples was one dedicated to Venus Erycina. This goddess was meant to serve as a counter to Hannibal and the threat he posed. Sicily's Mount Eryx was her cult's primary base, a mountain that may have also been associated with the Punic god Melqart.

In the Roman mythical tradition, Venus/Aphrodite was the mother of the Trojan prince Aeneas, who in a convoluted way was alleged to be an ancestor of Romulus and Remus, and thus in turn the Roman people. These links between Roman and Greek lore and myth were of great significance to Rome's Greek allies and cities in southern Italy and Sicily. At the very moment when Hannibal had appeared, a new cult to Venus could have been a poignant reminder of a common heritage and ancestry of Rome and her allies. It could also have been a way to emphasize their differences from the Carthaginians.

Fabius, too, had personal reasons to embrace the Venus Erycina cult. In 295 BCE, during his grandfather's consulship, there had been a major conflict between Rome and the Samnites, and another temple had been dedicated to Venus. Therefore, in addition to signaling that the gods were being appeased, Maximus used this cult to tie the victories of his ancestors with his own dictatorship.

The second cult that was started around the same time was dedicated to Mens, who was a goddess of good sense. Mens was the polar opposite, perhaps, of what Flaminius showcased at Trasimeno, so this cult was a very pragmatic announcement that from now on, Roman forces would take a more sensible road.

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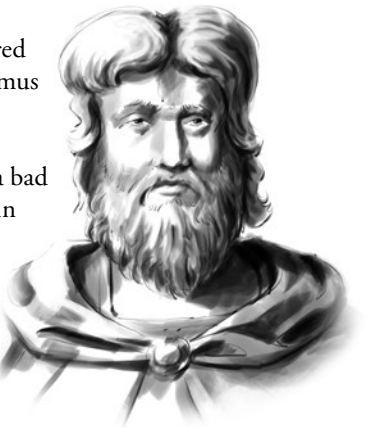
Cannae: Hannibal's Great Victory, 216 BCE

After Trasimene, Hannibal did not march on Rome but instead moved southeast through Etruria and Umbria, then across the Apennines toward the Adriatic coast, down through Picenum and then Apulia. He sacked the countryside and gathered recruits as he went. Later in the summer, he turned his army back toward the west and moved into Campania, one of Italy's richest and most fertile regions. Eventually, he focused on the Ager Falernus, a particularly wealthy area of farms, wineries, and villas that roughly conforms to the modern Italian province of Caserta. Here Hannibal's army set about pillaging and collecting all the cattle, grain, and supplies they could possibly need.

Fabius Maximus's Approach



Hannibal's movements were virtually unhindered by the Romans. The new dictator Fabius Maximus had adopted what would become known as the Fabian strategy. Trebbia and Trasimene amply demonstrated that taking Hannibal's bait was a bad idea. Fabius's new strategy was to merely contain rather than confront. His armies shadowed the Carthaginians but kept their distance.

Meanwhile, though, Campania was ablaze. Rome's colonies and allied cities in the region were beseeching the capital for help, but Fabius wouldn't move in. Some of Rome's most powerful elites knew their country manors were being sacked while the legions stood by, so a furious debate broke out in Rome over the Fabian strategy. One of the bitterest opponents of the approach was Marcus Minucius, Fabius's nominal deputy. Fabius, though, was unmoved. He would not risk another Trasimene.

Hannibal Outmaneuvers the Romans

By the autumn of 217 BCE, having successfully plundered the Ager Falernus, Hannibal was looking to where he could establish winter quarters. Over the mountains in Apulia, the Carthaginians had friends, and the terrain was easier to defend, so Hannibal prepared his army to move there. But Fabius had anticipated Hannibal's logic, and throughout the summer, he had moved his forces to block all river crossings and mountain passes leading out of the region.

Hannibal's scouts reported that all the mountain passes and river crossings out of the valley were blocked by Romans. Four thousand Roman soldiers were in the narrowest section of the pass leading to Apulia, impeding Hannibal's most desired escape route. Hannibal headed his army there regardless, and as he approached, Fabius and Minucius were present, waiting with their own armies close to the pass. Hannibal had no choice but to encamp below them to assess.

Hannibal formed a plan to break through Fabius's cordon. He ordered his key lieutenant Hasdrubal to gather as much dry wood as possible. Then he assembled 2,000 of their strongest oxen, most of which would have been plundered from Campania that summer. They then mixed the dry wood with twigs and vine shoots and wrapped them around the oxen's horns.

Hannibal's personnel waited until night. Then they set the torches on the oxen's horns aflame, and a small force of light infantry drove the terrified cattle out of camp. Sitting between the Roman camps, the pass to Apulia, and Hannibal's camp there was a cluster of hills, which Hannibal's forces drove the oxen toward. It was a ruse. From a distance, all the torches and activity made it look as if Hannibal's army was trying a daring night maneuver to run over the hills and get to the pass before the Romans could catch them.

Minucius and his legions at the main Roman camp made ready to charge and stop Hannibal's army from escaping. Fabius, though, refused to give the order, worrying that it was a trap. Meanwhile, the smaller Roman garrison stationed at the pass saw the commotion too, and without Fabius to restrain them, they rushed out to meet what they thought was a Carthaginian attempt to outflank them.

The garrison's personnel were likely beyond confused when they got close enough to their supposed foe and realized they were oxen. They thought this might be a prelude to a more elaborate attack, and so they continued rather than going back. It wasn't until much later, at dawn, that the Roman forces on the ridge realized the true extent of their mistake.

With the garrison distracted, Hannibal had rushed his army en masse to the now-undefended pass. Fabius could hear the army's movements but still refused to risk his troops in a night battle with so much confusion about. The Carthaginian army escaped the Ager Falernus virtually unopposed. The dejected Roman army could do little but follow Hannibal into Apulia.

Higher Roman Aggression

News of Hannibal's escape was not received well back in Rome, and the political fallout was severe. Fabius Maximus was soon recalled to Rome. Fabius's deputy and most vocal opponent, Minucius, assumed command of

the legions. Hannibal's hunt for a suitable winter quarter led him to the town of Geronium in modern Molise. The Carthaginians set about encamping themselves for the winter.

In a marked change of tactics, Minucius aggressively attacked the Carthaginian forward camp while most of Hannibal's men were out foraging. The Romans prevailed, forcing the Carthaginians to withdraw and forage more cautiously. Though a minor skirmish at best, the engagement was seized upon in Rome as a major victory.

Since Fabius could not be removed as dictator until his term expired, in an unprecedented move, Minucius was elevated to equal status, making him co-dictator of Rome. Fabius rejoined the legions near Hannibal but now had to split command with Minucius.

The Battle of Geronium

Believing Minucius to be belligerent and overconfident, Hannibal now sought to lure him into a battle. On the ground between the Carthaginians' camp and where Minucius had stationed his forces, there was a low ridgeline. Hannibal sent about 5,500 of his best men to hide themselves around this ridge. Then at dawn the next day, he sent a small contingent of light infantry to take position very visibly on the ridge, as if spying on the Roman forces.

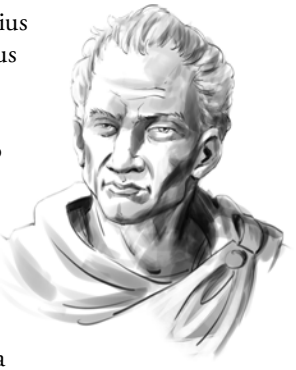
At first, Minucius sent light forces in to brush the contingent away, but Hannibal gradually sent in more forces of his own, making Minucius respond in turn. This went on until Hannibal had drawn many of Minucius's personnel out where Hannibal's hidden troops were waiting to strike. When Hannibal ordered them into battle, the result was a debacle for Rome.

Fabius Maximus had been watching the chaos unfold from his own camp, and he eventually brought down his own soldiers to provide cover for the Roman retreat. Hannibal initially pursued them, but eventually halted his chase upon Fabius's arrival, ending the Battle of Geronium. Humiliated, Minucius demoted himself back down to serve under Fabius, loyally this time. The campaigning year was now over—neither side would engage the other until spring.

Hannibal's camp likely became a hive of activity, with drilling, training, repairs, and preparations for the new year. Hannibal would have used the winter to familiarize himself with the countryside and scope out potentially strategic locations. He had time to plan his opening move of 216, which was to travel about 60 miles southeast from Geronium to seize Cannae, a small, walled town near the river Aufidus. It was an important supply depot for the Roman army, and its citadel was in a commanding position over the surrounding area.

Moving toward Battle

Hannibal's maneuver was a provocative way to open the season that the Romans quickly noticed. And now he waited. Both Livy and Polybius think at this point Hannibal had about 40,000 in his infantry and 10,000 in his cavalry.



At the beginning of 216, the dictatorship of Minucius and Fabius had ended, and two new consuls—Gaius Terentius Varro and Lucius Aemilius Paullus—had been elected. And Polybius tells us that the Senate ordered an unprecedented eight legions be raised to fight Hannibal in the new year. If true, that put around 70,000 men and 6,000 cavalry at the Senate's disposal.

From the high point of Cannae, Hannibal would have seen the approach of the Romans by summer. The stakes were very high, and he was at a significant numerical disadvantage. Winning this battle would require a precise, well-crafted strategy that left nothing to chance.

A rule within the Roman system dictated that when two consular armies were fighting together in the field, command of the army would be switched daily. When consul Aemilius Paullus was due to take command, he would argue against engaging the Carthaginians, noting how flat and empty the area around their camp was, and knowing how superior Hannibal's cavalry was. Consul Terentius Varro, on the other hand, was eager and impatient to take on Hannibal.

Hannibal had his men set up camp in front of Cannae on the southern side of the river, while the Romans built camps on either side of the Aufidus a few miles away. Tensions were high for a few days, and there were a few opportunistic skirmishes.

On August 2, 216 BCE, the consul Varro was in command and decided it was time to fight. Varro deployed his forces on the south side of the Aufidius, facing Hannibal's camp and Cannae. This made for a fairly narrow field of battle, and his troops had to form several dense lines to march down.

Testifying to the stakes of the battle, four Roman consuls took to the field. Aemelius Paullus commanded Roman cavalry on the right wing, Terentius Varro the allied cavalry on the left. In the center, the previous year's consuls, Marcus Atilius Regulus and Gnaeus Servilius, commanded the dense lines of Roman and allied foot soldiers.

Hannibal's Plan Unfolds

Staring at this huge approaching army, Hannibal took his greatest gamble yet and decided to stand and fight. He sent his skirmishers, pikemen, and slingers to form his first line of defense. The Iberian and Celtic infantry lined up behind them to form the main line. On their left sat the Iberian and Celtic cavalry, led by Hasdrubal. And the most experienced Numidian cavalry sat on the right wing, likely under Hanno. At the rear of the Carthaginian formation were the African infantry.

Hannibal knew the battle all hinged on maneuvering and timing. The only way to overcome the numerical advantage of the Romans was to catch these legions at a huge disadvantage by outflanking or surrounding them before Hannibal's own lines broke.

Around midday, the forces were in range of each other, and the skirmishers started engaging. And almost immediately, the Iberian and Celtic cavalry under Hasdrubal made a fast dash up the left side of the field to engage the Roman citizen cavalry. In the center of the battlefield, Hannibal played for time. His skirmishers and slingers were the first nuisance, slowing down Roman troops as they dealt with them. On the right flank, the Numidian cavalry tied down Varro's cavalry, too, in a series of delaying actions. Hasdrubal's cavalry, meanwhile, far up the field on the left, fought Paullus's cavalry in a brutal engagement, slowly wiping them out.

Eventually the skirmishers retreated, and the Roman infantry reached the Carthaginian lines. Hannibal had maneuvered the troops, many of them concealed by the dust of the battle, into a crescent by this time, so that the tightly packed Roman lines first engaged just the tip of the Iberian and Celtic infantry. His troops in the center took a brutal assault, but most of the Carthaginian troops remained unengaged.

The infantry kept pushing gradually forward, flattening the crescent, and more of the Carthaginian line started engaging. Far up the field of the battle, Hasdrubal's cavalry eventually routed the Roman citizen cavalry. He reorganized his riders, then wheeled around to the other side of the field, then charged down the right flank to engage the allied cavalry contingent led by Varro that had been sparring with the Numidians. Varro fled the field. The Numidians gave chase.

Back in the center of the field, the middle of the Carthaginian lines had begun to break up. The dwindling number of Celtic and Iberian infantry there had been pushed back, creating a pocket in the battle lines, which the Romans poured through.

This was all according to Hannibal's strategy. He intended to make full use of his central line's weakness as a means of luring the Romans into a trap. He had kept his best infantry, the Africans, in a reserve formation at the rear.

When the Celtic and Iberian lines started to collapse, the already tightly packed lines of legions rushed forward into the breach, but now the African reserves, all heavily armed, charged into the sides of the breaching legions.

The battlefield would have been incredibly hard to discern as tens of thousands of troops hacked at each other. The legions at the front of the breach tried to reform their lines and defend against the newly discovered enemy. But the ranks behind them were still trying to run in from behind, so the personnel nearly crushed each other in the middle.

Finally, Hasdrubal's cavalry, having dispatched all the other enemy cavalry, came around and charged into the rear of the seething mass of Roman soldiers. They were now completely enveloped by the Carthaginians.

The remaining Roman commanders, Servilius and Regulus, valiantly attempted to reorganize the legions into some sort of defensive formation, but it was to no avail. Panic and exhaustion set in among the Roman center trying to fight on all sides, and as the hours passed, the battle turned into a pitiless massacre from which the Romans had no way to escape.

The Aftermath of the Battle of Cannae

According to Livy, the Romans lost 45,500 of their infantry and 2,700 of their cavalry at the Battle of Cannae. Another 19,300 were taken prisoner. Livy made a list of the more memorable among the casualties. This list includes the sitting consul Aemilius Paullus, the former consuls Servilius and Regulus, and the former dictator Minucius, along with 2 quaestors and 29 of the military tribunes.

Varro was the only consul to survive, and he escaped to Venusia with the few men who hadn't been killed or captured, about 14,000 in total. Polybius claims even higher casualty figures.

Rome had gone in with eight legions, its largest army yet assembled, and in one battle it had been obliterated. Hannibal had achieved an incredible victory against seemingly impossible odds. But his army had suffered nearly 8,000 losses, and Livy claims some of his best and most experienced soldiers were lost in the battle. Still, the Battle of Cannae cemented Hannibal's reputation as one of the greatest commanders of all time.

11

Southern Italy Rebels against Rome

After the stunning victory at Cannae, Hannibal had secured his reputation as one of history's greatest commanders. Maharbal, who was one of Hannibal's chief lieutenants, believed the time had come to march on the capital and bring the Romans to heel. Yet Hannibal resisted taking this step, just as he had refused to do so after the victory at Trasimene.

Hannibal's Thinking

Historians have long debated the wisdom of Hannibal's decision, but there were many good reasons to avoid attacking the capital. Sieging Rome would mean traveling to a city 250 miles away and sieging a difficult, walled, and well-manned target. Those factors would play against Hannibal's strength of maneuverability.

All this aside, Hannibal probably didn't think he needed to take Rome anyway. The sheer magnitude of the defeat Rome had suffered at Cannae was unprecedented. War in the Hellenistic period rarely resulted in the outright destruction or annexation of the enemy. Much more commonly, the victors would have seized a few cities, ravaged some countryside, and won the key battles to prove their dominance.

By the summer of 216 BCE, Hannibal had achieved those steps. The convention now would be for the Romans to sue for peace and for the Carthaginians to impose their conditions on the defeated, then return home victorious. The decisions Hannibal made after Cannae suggest that he followed such thinking. He immediately sent envoys to Rome to negotiate peace.

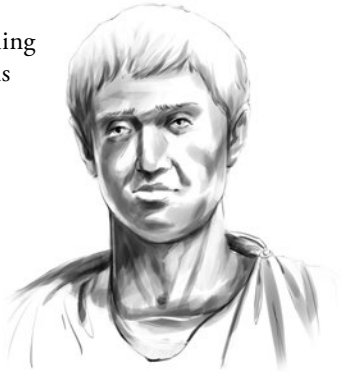
And uniquely, in the battle's aftermath, he gathered the Roman prisoners together and addressed them. Per Livy's account, Hannibal told the prisoners he sought power and honor rather than a fight to the death, and that he wanted others to bow before his accomplishments. It seems the prisoners picked from among themselves 10 spokesmen who would go to the Senate in Rome, accompanied by a Carthaginian envoy named Carthalo, to discuss the terms of a potential peace settlement.

The Situation in Rome

Meanwhile, in Rome, it would have been an agonizing wait after Cannae. The city's leadership passed restrictive laws to try to prevent a collapse in morale, and guards were stationed at the gates of the city to prevent the population from fleeing the city.

Rome's leaders also looked for religious scapegoats to provide an explanation for the latest disaster. Two Vestal Virgins—priestesses of the goddess Vesta—named Opimia and Floronia were among the first sacrifices.

The Roman Senate did not rely solely on religious sacrifices. With one consul dead and the other reeling from defeat, they appointed a new dictator, Marcus Junius Pera, to take command of Rome's armies. Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus was appointed his master of the horse. They immediately set about rebuilding Rome's forces, conscripting boys from the age of 17 or perhaps even younger. Manpower shortages also led to the buying and arming of 8,000 slaves. All told, the Romans were able to muster together four new legions—about 18,000 new troops—along with 1,000 cavalry through these measures.



At the same time, peace was not on the table for the Romans, who turned away Carthalo. The Roman prisoners were allowed to proceed, and these 10 did address the Senate, but a lengthy debate led to the conclusion that there would be no peace or negotiation with Rome's enemy. Moreover, they would not even allow the citizens of Rome to ransom back the husbands, sons, and brothers whom Hannibal had taken captive and offered in exchange for ransom, as was customary.

Hannibal Consolidates

In the months after Cannae, Hannibal was busy consolidating his victory. Some of the cities in the south began to peel away from their alliance to Rome and side with Hannibal, who was increasingly looking like the winning side in the war. Meanwhile, Hannibal's brother Mago had gone himself to Carthage with the news of the great victory.

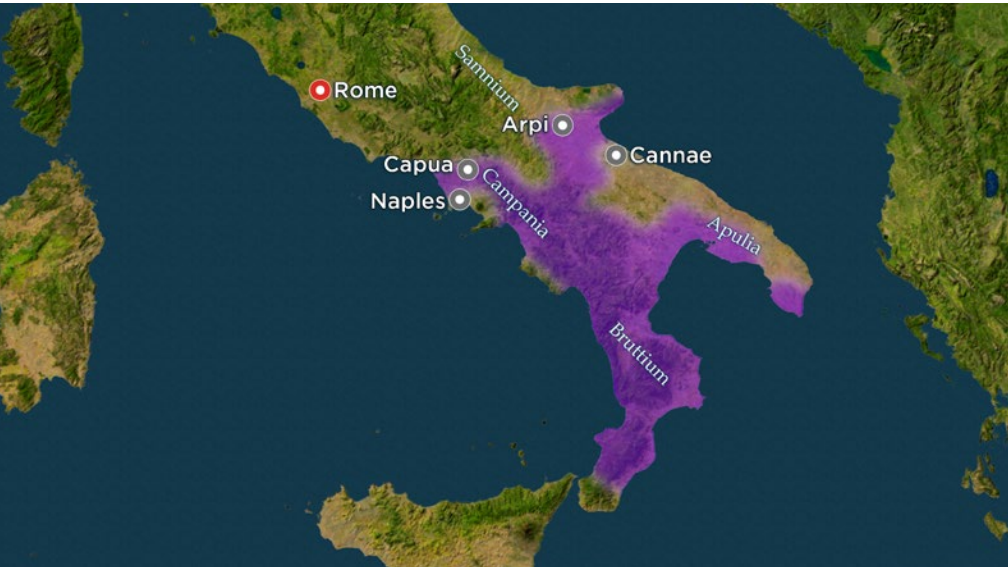
When Mago came before the Carthaginian Senate, the retelling of the fantastic exploits of his brother must have been incredible to have received firsthand. He told them how Hannibal had defeated four Roman consuls and two dictators, and the cream of the Roman army had been crushed and captured.

But Mago's big goal was not to shower Hannibal with praise but to press for vital support from home to continue the campaign. Hannibal needed money and grain to pay and feed his troops and keep them in the field.

Victories at Trasimene and Cannae were impressive, but Hannibal's men would not have been able to plunder the battlefield for riches or food as they might in victory over a city.

The only resistance to this proposition in Carthage, according to Livy, came from Hanno, a veteran of the Truceless War and longtime enemy of the Barcid family in the Senate. Livy describes nothing else but "hearts filled with joy" among the other members of the Senate. By a huge majority, they authorized the sending of 4,000 Numidian cavalry and 40 elephants, to be supplemented by a large sum of silver talents. Mago and another unnamed Carthaginian general were furthermore dispatched to Iberia to raise another 20,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry to serve as reinforcements for the campaign in Italy.

Back in Italy, Hannibal was moving to secure the allies who were defecting to him from Rome, particularly in the Apulian and Samnite territories, plus Bruttium in the south. When Arpi, the most important town in Apulia, defected, so too did many other towns in the region shortly after. Soon, Hannibal could boast much of the lower third of the Italian Peninsula as loyal to him—but not all of it.



Hannibal's Paradox, Capua's Defection

As Hannibal gained more allies, the territory he had to defend grew as well. His army had to spread thinner. Hannibal desperately needed money and food but also weapons, armor, horses, and men from Carthage to scale up the campaign quickly. To this end, Hannibal returned to Campania, which had partially declared for him, and advanced toward the port of Naples.

Securing a port on Italy's west coast would provide Hannibal with much easier access to Carthage and Iberia for critical supplies. But Naples was not cowed by Hannibal's appearance at their walls, and after a standoff, Hannibal declined to besiege the city. He instead turned toward nearby Capua. Although not a port, Capua was the largest city in Campania, and it was a prosperous and longtime ally of the Romans from the 4th century.

In Capua, the population possessed a form of limited Roman citizenship called *civitas sine suffragio*, or "citizens without voting rights." By the late 3rd century, this limited citizenship was a source of increasing tension—a timeless example of taxation without representation. Disparities like this led to exactly the kind of tensions with Rome that Hannibal could exploit.

When Hannibal crossed into Campania after Cannae, a delegation of Capuans made contact. Capua eventually defected, which was a great political blow to Rome. An Italic city like Capua was considered close kin to the Romans. To defect after a century of amity was considered a betrayal of the highest order.

Shortly after its defection, Hannibal announced with great fanfare his intention to personally appear in the city, which he did in September of 216 BCE. Such was his legend, according to accounts, the whole population of the city turned out to see him.

However, in practical terms, Hannibal received very little of actual use from his new arrangement with the Capuans. Enforced military service had been part of why Capua had rebelled against Rome, so Capua was hardly going to defect to Carthage only to do the same. By and large, they were mostly given their independence and had only weak obligations of fealty to Carthage. Moreover, the new arrangement was far from universally supported by the Capuan population. And Hannibal had to leave a garrison in the city to protect it against Roman reprisals too.

Preparing for 215 BCE

More than ever, Hannibal must have hoped for the return of Mago and reinforcements from Carthage, which realistically he might have expected in the spring of 215. But he still needed a port. Hannibal maneuvered around the countryside, trying to gain more defections, for what remained of the autumn. But nothing came of his activities on that front, so he returned with his army to winter in Capua. The land here was rich and fertile, so Hannibal could at least be assured of supply and comfort over the months of preparation for 215.

Winter quarters for the Carthaginians seem likely to have been established on the slopes just outside the city at Monte Tifata. Higher-ranked soldiers probably stayed in the city and were better looked after, while other parts of the army would have been billeted in other cities now allied to Carthage. This winter, like any other for the army, would have been long and boring.

Hannibal now had months again to ponder his next move. His situation seemed to be becoming ever more unsustainable. He simply did not have the manpower to sustain any drawn-out engagements, and the voluntary defections were drying up. He was desperate for a port city, but none had come over, and he didn't have the men, time, or equipment to besiege one.

One of the great challenges he discovered with his new ally Capua was that interurban rivalries ran deep in southern Italy. Rome formed a narrative about Capua using Hannibal to eliminate Rome so Capua could dominate the region. This was fanciful on one level, but it clearly struck a nerve among the other cities of the region, who resented the prospect of Capuan domination even more than their treaties with Rome. Naples, Nola, and Cumae, other key cities in Campania, had their own temptations to defect, but Rome quickly exploited Capua's preferential treatment by Hannibal for its own gain, and regional rivalries kept Campania from defecting as a whole.

Moreover, the specific terms under which he assembled his new allies were based on a much looser Carthaginian model rather than what the Romans had in place. New allies were not necessarily obliged to provide troops to Hannibal to join the struggle. Such terms were critical to gaining the trust and allegiance of Greek, Samnite, Piceni, and other Italic cities to a non-Italian power, but Hannibal was gaining territory without gaining troops.

Though these new allies did provide a trickle of volunteers and would fight when their own territories were threatened, in general, Hannibal had more to defend and less to defend it with. Meanwhile, Rome continued to recruit more legions and rebuild its forces. Hannibal had won unprecedented victories, yet in many ways, he was becoming stuck.

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Macedon and the Fall of Syracuse, 212 BCE

In 215 BCE, Rome was in turmoil as it scrambled to contain the Carthaginian threat. Fabius Maximus, whose tactics against Hannibal had been controversial a couple of years prior, was returned to the consulship that year. He was joined as consul by Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, a survivor of Cannae. Marcus Claudius Marcellus, a tough veteran, received a prominent command, so these three men would now be in charge of once again trying to find a way to contain the Carthaginian threat and retake the initiative of the war.

The Status of Rome and Hannibal

Economically, the Roman state was reaching its breaking point. Roman citizens saw their taxes doubled, and the coinage was debased as more money was minted. And the state racked up debts from private sources. These extraordinary measures were working, though, and Rome could find the men and money to stay afloat.

Hannibal's forces were probably at their height in 215 BCE, in the year after Cannae and Capua. He had around four armies, though only three could feasibly be fielded at any one time. Scholars' best guess is that his forces numbered about 40,000 men in total.

He had hardened veterans from Iberia and North Africa who have been with him from the start, the Gallic recruits he picked up while in the Alps and northern Italy, and the Italic and Greek recruits he'd been able to attract as he moved into southern Italy. Despite the promises of Carthage, the only recorded outside reinforcements are some elephants that arrived that year.

By contrast, the Roman forces active in Italy that year were probably double that. In just a few years, by 212 BCE, they were able to raise a staggering 25 legions—at least 200,000 men.

Courting Macedon

The Second Punic War had become a war of attrition, one Carthage was bound to lose. Hannibal now looked to friends and allies for help. He found one in Philip V, the king of Macedonia. The Macedonian court had been considering the prospect of a Carthaginian alliance for some time.

The Hellenistic world had been enthralled by the news of Hannibal's victories against the Romans, and some were no doubt itching for a chance to help. After all, the Romans had subjugated Magna Graecia and Sicily, and they had imposed a client state in Illyria, today part of the Balkans, which had been a direct

challenge to Macedonian interests in the Adriatic. The former Illyrian king Demetrius had joined Philip's court as a refugee from Roman conflict and was undoubtedly a forceful anti-Roman voice there.

In the summer of 215, Philip sent a formal embassy to Italy, and direct negotiations with Hannibal and Carthage began. The terms of an alliance resulted, and Carthaginian and Macedonian representatives embarked to take the deal back to Philip for ratification. Their vessel, though, was intercepted by the Romans during the voyage.

The discovery of a potential alliance between Hannibal and Philip had quite an effect on the Romans. They were barely capable of holding off trouble at home; another front in Illyria would be disastrous. But Macedonia and Carthage had lost the element of surprise now, and Rome wasted little time in expanding their naval presence in the Adriatic to thwart any potential joining of forces between Hannibal and Philip.

Courting Syracuse

Macedon was not the only ally Hannibal was courting, though. Given the hostilities in Italy, it was only a matter of time before the epicenter of the First Punic War, Sicily, was drawn into the struggle. And Syracuse, the wealthiest and most powerful city in Sicily, would play an epic role in the outcome of the war.

Syracuse was still ruled by King Hiero II, now in his nineties. His switching allegiance from Carthage to Rome all the way back in the 260s had triggered Carthage's eventual downfall in Sicily in the First Punic War, but it had been a good call for his city. The Roman alliance had revitalized its fortunes and somewhat preserved Syracuse's autonomy on the island.

Hannibal's military victory at Cannae exposed a latent hostility among Syracusans to the Roman alliance, particularly among the younger generations. Hiero's influence was waning, and his son, heir, and co-regent Gelo began preparing to declare allegiance to Carthaginians, triggering a political crisis. Gelo then suddenly died under mysterious circumstances.

A power vacuum followed, and Hiero's 15-year-old grandson Hieronymus took the throne. But the real power lay in the hands of Hieronymus's uncles and guardians, Adranodorus and Zoippus, along with 13 Syracusan elites. Syracuse's governing council was divided, but ultimately the pro-Hannibal faction prevailed, and a Syracusan mission went to negotiate terms with him. Hieronymus was easily swayed from his position by whoever got into his ear, and he kept changing the terms of a potential alliance.

His first deal stipulated that Carthage would supply forces against the Romans in Sicily, and once expelled, the two powers would split the isle in two along the Himera River. But soon he insisted that the whole of Sicily was his birthright, and Carthaginian assistance to them on the island wouldn't be for any ultimate territorial gains.

This rapid change of heart obviously revealed to Hannibal that Syracuse would hardly be a reliable ally, but he desperately needed access to ports, supplies, and recruits in Sicily to maintain and expand his campaign. Moreover, Syracuse was one of Rome's most important allies. Cutting off Sicily would be a huge, perhaps even fatal, blow to Rome.

In 214 BCE, as Syracuse prepared for war, their young king Hieronymus was ambushed and murdered while moving with his army. The Romans had the most to gain from the king's death and thus have always been the prime suspects, but the king had no shortage of enemies in Syracuse. The chaotic aftermath saw Hippocrates and Epicydes, Hannibal's envoys at Syracuse, seizing power for themselves, no doubt on direct orders from Hannibal.

The Carthaginians acted swiftly to shore up their fragile hold in the city, sending in an army with naval support to supplement Syracusan forces loyal to them. Meanwhile, another Carthaginian army under the command of Himilco landed at Heraclea and recaptured the city of Agrigentum, almost 50 years after it had fallen in the First Punic War. Himilco now hoped to spark a wider rebellion among the cities on the island, many of which had become tired of Roman dominance.

Rome's Move against Syracuse

Rome knew that a collapse of their position in Sicily could be a game changer in the wider war. They sent more troops to join those of Appius Claudius Pulcher, the Roman commander in Sicily. They also sent Marcellus to help command the forces. At Lilybaeum, they stationed a fleet of more than 100 vessels and mustered an army of three legions, with another soon to join. And in the spring of 213 BCE, the two Roman commanders made a joint land and sea attack on Syracuse.

Syracuse was one of the largest cities in the Mediterranean, with a major urban center and large ports. It was well defended both by nature and by construction. The center of the city was the island of Ortygia, which sat between the city's two harbors and was the focus of civic life, with the neighborhoods of Achradine, Tyche, and Neapolis spread out on the mainland. An elaborate system of walls enclosed the island of Ortygia and the outlying suburbs.

To capture Syracuse, then, would require an almighty siege. The Romans launched a two-pronged attack, with the land forces assaulting the wall at the Hexapylon gate, and the navy focusing on Achradine. Marcellus led a fleet of 60 quinqueremes equipped with the most up-to-date weaponry and even a floating siege engine that Polybius calls a *sambuca*. Marcellus seems to have assumed that his reputation and the sight of the mighty Roman fleet would be enough to trigger the city's surrender.

It soon became clear that, mighty as they were, the Romans' fleet and siege equipment were no match for the defenses at Syracuse. The initial Roman attack on the city was repulsed, and all credit for this was given to Archimedes, a scientist and engineer whose counter-siege engines included

catapults. Another reported device was a claw that seems to have been able to grab on to enemy ships and partially lift them out of the water, causing them to capsize or break up when dropped back into the seas.

With these machines, the Syracusan and Carthaginian defenders sank Roman ships, knocked out their lines of infantry, and caused general mayhem among the troops. The Romans decided to establish a blockade to starve Syracuse into submission.

More Defections

Himilco arrived with Carthaginian forces from their success at Agrigentum to try and relieve their new ally. But seeing the strength of the Roman forces there, and wagering that Syracuse was fairly safe, he decided instead to focus on inciting further rebellion on the island while the Romans were tied down. Hannibal no doubt was furiously engaged with his agents and representatives to achieve this as well. They were having some success. Morgantina, about 60 miles to the northwest of Syracuse, now betrayed the Roman garrison and switched sides.

Morgantina's defection soon encouraged others. The Romans desperately tried to maintain their grip. At the strategically crucial inland town of Henna, modern Enna, ancient sources describe the gruesome slaughter of "an unarmed crowd" who were trapped and massacred in the theater by the Roman garrison. This only sparked further outrage on the island.

The Fighting Turns

Early 212 BCE saw Marcellus seemingly in a stalemate at Syracuse. But a breakthrough came in spring when a Syracusan deserter informed the Romans that the population was celebrating the annual festival to Artemis with excessive drinking. Marcellus took advantage of the distraction to seize the Epipolae plateau, which overlooked Syracuse to the north. His men scaled the walls by night while the population was distracted at the festival.

As his troops advanced toward Achradine, they faced fierce resistance. Amidst this chaos, a Carthaginian admiral stationed in the city broke out of the Roman blockade to get help, and he brought back with him within days more

than 100 Carthaginian ships. The Carthaginians did everything they could to relieve Syracuse, ferrying supplies where they could and landing troops to assault the Roman besiegers. But months of stalemate dragged on.

Only in late 212 BCE, when a plague ravaged the city, did the end come into view. Pestilence ran rampant through both the armies, but it seems to have had a greater impact on the Carthaginians. The Carthaginian general, Himilco, and the Syracusan-Carthaginian leader of the city, Hippocrates, both fell victim. The Syracusan defense collapsed. The Romans killed the resisting Syracusans who had not been downed by plague.

Aftermath of the Siege

The Romans were in awe at the wealth they discovered in their conquest. Syracuse was a sophisticated Hellenistic city adorned with statuary, paintings, and temple offerings. Ancient sources also speak of great quantities of silver and bronze artifacts, furniture, fine clothes, and tapestries. The legions soon set about looting every treasure they could find from the ruins of Syracuse and carting them back to Rome. The sack of Syracuse was a turning point that marked the beginning of almost a century of the looting of cities across the Hellenistic world by the Romans.

In taking Syracuse, Marcellus was explicitly contravening the cautious approach advocated by Fabius Maximus and his faction in the Roman Senate. It had been a costly and risky venture that could have turned to disaster for Rome. But whatever the risks, Marcellus's gamble in Syracuse was a crucial one for the entire war.

For four years now, Hannibal had been holed up in southern Italy. The Fabian strategy used there meant the Romans had denied the Carthaginians any chance to engage their forces in open battle. It was a slow but steady war of attrition. Hannibal's operations were limited to minor engagements and roaming around southern Italy to try to keep his coalition of allies together.

Hannibal's hope had been that the dynamic of the war could be changed with the entrance of new allies from abroad. The Macedonian alliance, however, had been rendered moot by the quick action of the Romans. Rome was now at war with Macedonia, but Philip could not send his armies anywhere that could help Hannibal.

Macedonia did have some successes in Illyria, and by 212 BCE, it had wrested control of some ports on the Adriatic from Rome. But by the time this was achieved, Rome, fresh from victory over Syracuse, had struck alliances with other Greek states eager to settle old scores with Macedonia, so now Philip faced a much closer threat to defend against.

Sicily had been the other hope, but Syracuse's fall at the hand of Marcellus brought those hopes to an abrupt end. Though Carthage would send more troops to Sicily, by 210 BCE, Agrigentum, the Carthaginian base on Sicily, had been recaptured, and the rest of the island fell back into Roman hands not long after.

13

The Scipii and the 10-Year War for Iberia

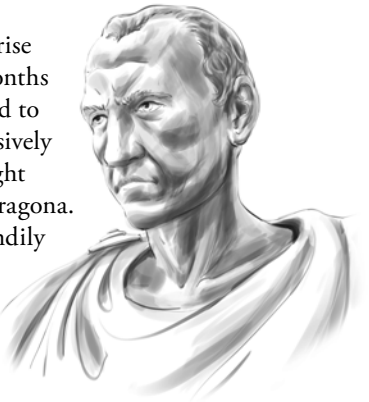
The Second Punic War spread beyond Italy to encompass much of the western Mediterranean. The other theaters deserve attention because it was there, many would argue, that the Romans won the war.

Background on the Situation

In late 218 BCE, the Roman officer Publius Scipio was on his way to Iberia with some 25,000 troops to wrest it from the Barcids. He discovered Hannibal's army near Massalia and went back to Italy to raise the defense. The army went on under his brother Gnaeus Scipio. Publius Scipio had not been successful in stopping Hannibal on his descent from the Alps. He had been wounded at Ticinus and watched the other consular army crushed at Trebbia.

But another fight between the Barcids and the Scipii was in the officing. Gnaeus sailed his forces from Massalia to Emporium, modern Ampurias. This was a colony of the Massalians, also Roman allies.

This region of Iberia north of the Ebro had previously been considered part of the Roman sphere of influence, but Hannibal had taken control of it on the way to Italy, leaving behind 11,000 troops under his lieutenant Hanno to consolidate the new conquest. Also present was Hannibal's younger brother Hasdrubal, who had been left with his own troops and the general purview of defending Carthaginian Spain.



Both Hanno and Hasdrubal were taken by surprise at the sudden appearance of the Romans just months after Hannibal had departed, and they scrambled to organize a defense. Gnaeus Scipio set out aggressively down the coast of Catalonia and eventually caught Hanno and his forces at Cissa, near modern Tarragona. With more than twice the men, the Romans handily defeated Hanno's forces and captured Hanno himself, along with a valuable baggage train that Hannibal had left behind there.

In the following spring, Hasdrubal went on the offensive, launching naval and land assaults on the Romans. But his main fleet was defeated at the mouth of the Ebro by a combined force of Romans and Massalians. Hasdrubal was forced to withdraw to rebuild his forces. Gnaeus Scipio, too, waited for more reinforcements before mounting a full-fledged invasion across Ebro, but his forces were not idle and conducted raids deep into enemy territory to sow dissent among Carthage's allies.

Hasdrubal spent much of 217 and 216 BCE subduing rebellions that broke out in Carthaginian Iberia. Critically, the Romans stationed forces in Catalonia, which now meant that the route to Italy was cut, and Hasdrubal was tied down. Moreover, the Roman force was growing. Publius Scipio was named proconsul in Iberia and joined his brother there with more ships and men.

In the spring of 215 BCE, the Scipios made ready to push across the Ebro for an outright invasion. Hasdrubal, with rebuilt forces and having subdued the rebellions for a time, moved at the same time to confront the Romans again. They met in battle at Dertosa. Though not well described by any sources, it was a loss for Carthage, although casualties were heavy on both sides.

The third Barcid brother, Mago, had journeyed to Carthage the previous year. His mission was to secure fresh recruits and supplies for the Italian campaign. Just as Mago was making ready to return with his new force of 12,000 infantry, 1,500 cavalry, 20 elephants, and 60 warships, news of the disaster at Dertosa reached the capital. Mago would have to be diverted to prevent a collapse in Carthaginian Iberia.

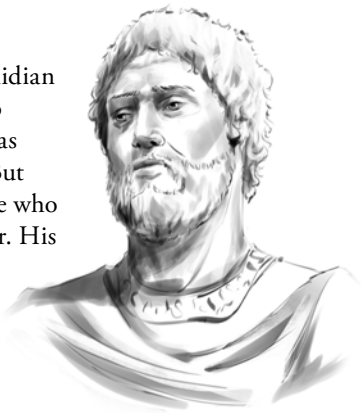
Developments in Africa

There were developments in Africa unfolding, too, that would also prove critical to the outcome of the war. A flurry of diplomatic activity occurred between the major powers and Numidian kingdoms that bordered Carthaginian territory. One of the most critical battles for influence concerned Syphax, the king of the Masaesyli people, whose capital was just west of the modern city of Oran in western Algeria.

Rome in particular showered Syphax with gifts to try and tempt him away from his Carthaginian alliance. This flattery had the intended effect. In 214 BCE, Syphax was wooed by the Romans into ordering his troops currently serving in the Barcid armies to defect, then to organize a rebellion in North Africa.

Trouble so close to home only further hamstrung Carthage from sending reinforcements abroad. It's possible that troops were even recalled from Iberia to put down this new threat. Livy notes several Roman victories in Iberia in the aftermath. Mostly notably, Saguntum, the alleged catalyst for the war, was captured in 214 BCE.

Masinissa's Impact



By 211 BCE, defections from Carthage were mounting. About 20,000 Celtiberian and Numidian troops were now fighting under the elder Scipio brothers, alongside their own forces of perhaps as many as 30,000 Roman and auxiliary troops. But that year also saw the emergence of a new figure who became a key player in the final years of the war. His name was Masinissa, and he was a Numidian prince from the Massylii kingdom, in what is today eastern Algeria. They bordered both Carthage and the now pro-Roman Masaesyli, and their royal family was linked through marriage to the Barcids.

Masinissa was a young and very promising commander who had been educated in Carthage. He was now in Iberia at the head of an elite Numidian cavalry force, which was wreaking havoc on Roman camps and supply lines.

For the 211 BCE campaign season, the Scipio brothers were deep within Carthaginian Iberia, and they had split their sizable army into two, setting up for an ambitious double blow against the Barcid armies. They were deployed separately in the region. Publius was to pursue Mago, while Gnaeus would attack Hasdrubal.

Yet nothing seemed to go according to plan. Publius's forces encountered Celtiberian forces allied with the Barcids, and then Masinissa ambushed him. Mago's soldiers eventually arrived as well. Combined, the pro-Barcid forces surrounded and wiped out the Romans, including Publius, who perished.

The remaining Roman forces under Gnaeus were now in a very vulnerable position. The Celtiberian allies serving Rome would have been acutely aware that the balance of power in the region had changed. Hasdrubal Barca was now able to convince many of the Celtiberians to return to the Carthaginian fold. Gnaeus attempted to withdraw north toward the Ebro and friendlier territory, but Hasdrubal and Masinissa were in hot pursuit, and their cavalry quickly caught up.

In a desperate last-ditch stand, the Romans tried to create a defensive position on a stony hillock called Illorca. However, Mago's forces, emboldened from defeating Publius, entered the fighting, too, and the recombined Carthaginian army completely overwhelmed the Romans. Gnaeus did not survive the encounter.

Roman Pressure

The fall of the Scipio brothers was dramatic and a setback for Rome, but the situation in Iberia had critically tied down both Mago and Hasdrubal. It had now been five years since Mago went to Carthage from Italy for reinforcements, and he had not returned. Meanwhile, in Italy, attempts to draw in foreign powers, like Macedon and Syracuse, had also been thwarted. Though still not strong enough to knock out Hannibal in Italy, the Romans had done just enough to keep him contained there.

By this time, the Romans were starting to put enormous pressure on their former allies. The situation in Capua, the largest and most powerful city that had defected to Carthage, was particularly difficult for Hannibal. His control in Campania (Capua's region) was only partial. Capua's supply lines were tenuous, and in 212 BCE, the Romans cut supplies off completely while Hannibal was campaigning in the south.

Facing starvation, the Capuans sent a desperate message to Hannibal for food and relief from the siege. He sent a contingent under Hanno back north, but the Romans made a surprise attack and devastated the relief force, forcing Hanno and the survivors back south, while the Romans now made ready to besiege Capua with six legions.

As Capua faced oblivion, he was engaged in completing a siege of the major port city of Tarentum, some 200 miles away. Abandoning the Capuans wasn't an option, though, so Hannibal rushed to Campania and attempted to draw the Romans into battle. But Rome's consuls were still wary of meeting the Carthaginians on the field, and for good reason.

Hannibal pursued one of the retreating Roman armies as it headed south to Lucania, and, in a battle on the Silarius River, crushed the Romans, inflicting 15,000 casualties. Wheeling over to Apulia next, Hannibal smashed Roman forces again at Herdonia, killing or capturing another 16,000 Roman soldiers. If Livy's figures are to be believed, Hannibal had wiped out some 31,000 Roman soldiers.

When Syracuse fell to Marcellus near the end of 212 BCE, more Roman troops returned, and Capua was encircled again, then completely blockaded. This time Hannibal had no solution. The Romans wouldn't abandon their position to fight him, and they were too well dug in for Hannibal to risk directly assaulting their fortifications.

Hannibal's Attempt to Save Capua

True to his style, Hannibal decided on a risky move to save Capua: He'd start out on the 120-mile journey to Rome itself, with the hope that the threat would draw the Romans out. However, Rome had extensive fortifications, which were impossible for Hannibal's armies to breach. Proconsul Fulvius Flaccus had a large army stationed there, and Polybius states that another legion was present as well.

Nevertheless, Hannibal moved as far as the river Anio, just three miles away from the city walls, and encamped his army there. And audaciously, he even took a contingent of 2,000 cavalry and rode as far as the Porta Collina on the north side of the city, where there was a temple to Hercules that Hannibal prayed at, keen to draw the comparison.

Eventually the proconsul Flaccus sent out his cavalry to drive Hannibal away. The expedition to Rome had failed in its primary purpose. The Romans held their nerve and did not break off the siege of Capua to give chase. In another dramatic move, Hannibal now decamped and made an unexpected march down to Rhegium on the tip of Italy, a Roman-allied town that was nearly captured during his surprise appearance.

Capua Falls

Despite Hannibal's moves, by 211 BCE, it had become clear that there would be no relief in Capua. Eventually, the Capuan Senate sent a delegation to the Romans to negotiate surrender and bargain for mercy. Twenty-seven pro-Carthage senators, perhaps standing on principle or perhaps knowing their fate was sealed anyway, withdrew to a comrade's house for a final feast before poisoning themselves.

Roman retribution was swift and merciless. When they retook the city, the rest of the Capuan Senate and political elite were rounded up and executed without exception. Hundreds more nobles were sent in chains to Rome. The Romans also parceled out the city's properties and lands amongst themselves. Capua would now be a Roman colony, with its former citizens serving as slaves and servants to the new masters or dispersed to be peasants in the countryside.

A New Scipio

Buoyed by success in Italy, the Roman Senate looked to reinvigorate their Iberian efforts and appointed a new commander. This was the 25-year-old Publius Cornelius Scipio, the son of his fallen father of the same name. The senators were taking a risk by appointing such a young commander to so much power so quickly. However, by now, Rome had lost so many adult men in the war that extraordinary measures, such as the speedy advancement of precocious military talent, were permitted.

In 210 BCE, fresh with his new commission, Scipio set out to Iberia with a fleet of 30 ships. That first year he stationed himself at Tarraco, modern Tarragona, on the Ebro River. He set about winning over allies and gathering intelligence. His plan for the next year's campaign season was audacious: He would launch an assault on New Carthage, the capital of Barcid Iberia.

New Carthage was extensively fortified, and its excellent port and coastal access made it hard to blockade in a siege. But Scipio knew the impact an attack on New Carthage would have on Carthaginian morale and confidence. And there was a chance that a quick and hard strike there would turn the war in Rome's favor. He wanted to use surprise to the maximum effect, and so no one but Gaius Laelius, his most trusted lieutenant, knew of his plans.

Scipio Marches

When the campaign season began in 209 BCE, Scipio marched swiftly with his army to New Carthage, arriving with an army of around 27,000 men. Meanwhile, Laelius sailed the Roman fleet into the harbor and mounted a naval blockade. The element of surprise was definitively achieved: Barely 1,000 Carthaginian soldiers manned the garrison.

Nonetheless, the garrison dug in behind the walls of the city for a valiant defense. Ancient accounts comment on the ferocity with which the New Carthage garrison fought, raining down missiles on any approaching troops and conducting sorties beyond the gates to attempt to disrupt the Roman siege.

Scipio, however, ultimately prevailed using a beloved Hannibal tactic: the feint. He sent forces to attack the Carthaginian walls at the east and west gates. A smaller third force of elite troops secretly crossed the lagoon north of the city at low tide and scaled the walls. Once the Roman soldiers were inside, the Carthaginian garrison had no chance and were quickly subdued. The gates to the city opened. Incredibly, this all took place in a single day.

Once inside, Scipio let loose the majority of his troops against the inhabitants. According to Roman custom, their orders were to exterminate everyone they encountered. The large population inside the city meant, in Polybius's words, that the "carnage was especially frightful." Looting and pillaging continued all night. Livy reported that the Roman forces captured 10,000 male citizens. New Carthage, the capital city of Punic Iberia, had fallen to the Romans.

14

The Tide Turns against Carthage, 209–205 BCE

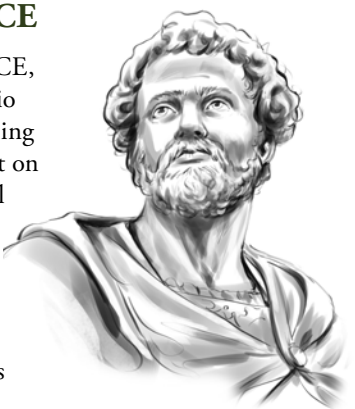
By the end of 209 BCE, the war had turned against Carthage. Its strongest ally in Italy, Capua, had fallen to the Romans. The same went for Syracuse and also New Carthage, while Barcid Iberia was facing annihilation. Hannibal was still a force to be reckoned with, though. That year, proconsul Marcus Claudius Marcellus, the victor of Syracuse, had taken two legions—about 20,000 men—into Apulia to challenge Carthaginian influence there. The two met in battle at Canusium, and evidence suggests Marcellus was defeated and took significant casualties. Again, though, Hannibal couldn't be everywhere. While he was fighting at Canusium, a Roman army elsewhere took Manduria. While he was rushing to defend his ally Caulonia, the Romans took back Tarentum.

Toll of the Reconquest

The reconquest of southern Italy changed the dynamic of the peninsula forever and unleashed the true potential of Roman hegemony. Once retaken, most of the Carthaginian allies were not restored to their former status as *socii*, which had a level of autonomy. Instead, many were directly annexed. Rome executed their leadership, reorganized their lands into Roman hands, and expropriated their wealth, helping reboot the struggling Roman economy.

Still, Rome's remaining alliances were under extreme strain. By 209 BCE, several major partners, including the powerful Etruscans, were starting to rebel against Roman authority as the war dragged. In that year, evidence indicates that 12 of the 30 Latin allies informed Rome they would not be supplying men to meet the latest recruitment quotas. Meanwhile, in Spain, Mago Barca and Hasdrubal were reeling from the loss of New Carthage, and their allies in Iberia were deserting them in droves.

The Campaigning Season of 208 BCE



At the start of the campaigning season of 208 BCE, Hasdrubal's army encountered the younger Scipio at Baecula. Accounts tell us that during the ensuing battle, the Romans pulled off a pincer movement on three sides against the Carthaginians. Hasdrubal was able to escape, though, with two-thirds of his soldiers as well as his treasury and elephants. Scipio did not pursue.

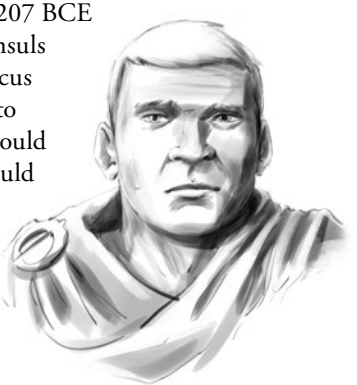
Hasdrubal seems to have deliberately not committed fully to the battle at Baecula, perhaps to preserve his army for a bigger plan. Next, he headed north to the Pyrenees. He would pass over into Gaul and eventually on to Italy to meet up with Hannibal. An expedition such as this must have been planned carefully beforehand, and the best evidence for this was that a new army and commander were sent from Carthage to Iberia to replace Hasdrubal.

By the summer of 208 BCE, Hasdrubal was on his way across Gaul with the reinforcements that Hannibal had been asking for since Cannae in 216 BCE—eight years late. By this time, Roman armies seemed to

block every route and were constantly harassing his remaining allies. That year Marcus Marcellus had returned to the consulship, along with Titus Quinctius Crispinus, and both were stalking Hannibal's army, spoiling for a final showdown.

Countermoves

Despite Roman successes, news of his brother's coming must have given Hannibal some glimmer of hope, and there was still no match for his tactical brilliance. As a case in point, a contingent of Hannibal's Numidian cavalry discovered both consuls while they were out on reconnaissance maneuvers near Venusia. Crispinus was gravely wounded, while Marcellus took a spear to his side and died on the spot.



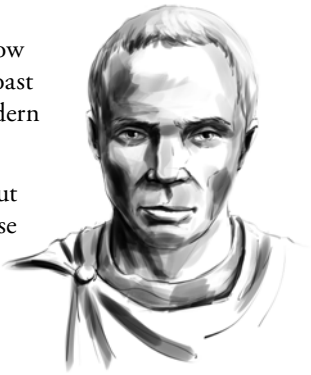
The arrival of a second Carthaginian army in 207 BCE turned the tables on Rome once more. The consuls elected for 207, Gaius Claudius Nero and Marcus Livius Salinator, responded to this new threat to Italy by dividing the peninsula in two. Nero would head south to face Hannibal, and Salinator would take the north to deal with Hasdrubal.

At all costs, the consuls had to prevent the two Carthaginian armies from linking up. They had plenty of men at their disposal to do that. Incredibly, there were 23 legions in the field that year, and 15 of those were in Italy. This was four times the men they had when Hannibal had arrived a decade earlier. And they had Hannibal surrounded. On top of the army under Nero now heading toward him, there were two legions in Bruttium, two more near Tarentum, and one in Capua.

Crucially, despite years of trying, the Carthaginians still did not have any real sway in central Italy, which prevented Hannibal from moving north or Gallic and Celtic allies from coming down to join him south. The Etruscans and Umbrians, who dominated either side of the central Apennines, had kept their alliances with Rome.

Hannibal's movements in this critical period are confusing and difficult to clearly reconstruct. Eventually, he established camp at Casunium. Nero camped his army near Hannibal's and kept an eye on his movements. Up in the Po valley, Hasdrubal sent south a small party with a letter to his brother. The messengers were intercepted by the Romans near Tarentum, where, under interrogation, their identities and intent were revealed.

The Romans now uncovered that the Carthaginian plan was for Hannibal to move north and meet Hasdrubal in Umbria. But Hannibal waited in vain at Canusium for word that would now not come. Hannibal was no longer the master of intelligence and spies that he was 10 years prior. The Romans were now ahead of the curve.



Not knowing the fate of his messengers, Hasdrubal now marched down the Via Aemilia toward the Adriatic coast and into Picenum, making camp at Sena Gallica, modern Senigallia. Consul Marcus Salinator camped nearby.

Modern estimates indicate Hasdrubal's army was about 30,000 men. And like Hannibal's army, it was a diverse bunch, including Carthaginians, Numidians, Iberians, Ligurians, Gauls, Greeks, and northern Italians as well as cavalry, slingers, foot soldiers, and 10 elephants to boot.

The Romans were determined at any cost not to let the brothers link up and to instead take them on and defeat them separately. To this end, consul Claudius Nero, possibly in defiance of his Senate orders, stealthily assembled his best men and immediately marched north, leaving just enough men at his camp in Canusium to fool Hannibal into thinking nothing was awry. After a forced march of more than 250 miles with 7,000 troops, Nero surprised even his consular colleague with his swift appearance by cover of night.

Hasdrubal in Trouble

The next day, the two sides began lining up for a showdown. But while the armies were getting into formation, Hasdrubal noticed unfamiliar shields among the enemy ranks. His battlefield scouts soon reported back much larger numbers of troops than expected.

Hasdrubal now realized the enormous trouble he was in. Two consular armies with around 40,000 troops meant he was now heavily outnumbered. At nightfall, Hasdrubal and his troops started retreating back to the north. Evidence indicates they traveled about 10 miles before they hit the Metaurus River, where their local guides abandoned them. The Romans caught up to Hasdrubal's tired, disoriented forces there.

In the ensuing fighting, the Carthaginians and Romans were evenly matched for a time. The elephants sowed confusion and broke the Roman lines in some places. But the larger Roman cavalry eventually routed their Carthaginian counterparts, which left Hasdrubal's flanks exposed. Claudius Nero brought most of his troops around to the back and then down into the flanks of the now-exposed Carthaginian lines.

Pandemonium broke out. The elephants, trapped and terrified amidst the crush of the armies, began running berserk. To prevent them stampeding back through their own ranks, six of the elephants were killed by their drivers, by means of hammer and chisel to their skulls. The Romans cut down as many as 10,000 of Hasdrubal's men, while the rest broke out into a chaotic retreat. Rome, too, lost thousands of casualties in the battle, but the loss was much more devastating for the Carthaginians.

Hasdrubal Barca did not survive the battle. Nero reportedly cut off his head and had it catapulted toward the advance guards of the Carthaginian positions. This, we are told, was how Hannibal found out about the death of his brother. Nero also set free two African prisoners to Hannibal's camp so they could provide an account of the disaster at the Metaurus, no doubt in hopes of demoralizing the Carthaginians.

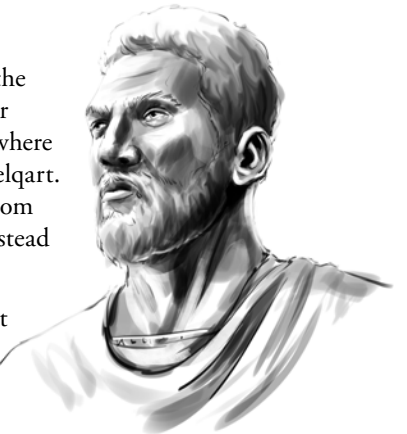
Matters in Iberia

In Iberia, too, the situation was rapidly falling apart. In the campaign season of 206 BCE, Scipio the younger pushed forward toward the resource-rich regions around the Baetis River. Mago had been significantly reinforced by Carthage, desperate to hold on to the rich silver mines and prosperous ports around Gades. The two sides met at Ilipa, just outside modern Seville, for the showdown for Iberia.

Though estimates vary wildly, it seems likely Scipio was somewhat outnumbered at Ilipa. But the ancient sources construct the narrative of the battle to construe Scipio as the great foil to Hannibal and a tactical match who turned the tables on the Carthaginians. We are told, for example, that he foiled a Carthaginian attempt at a cavalry raid before the battle.

During the battle itself, Scipio's personnel outmaneuvered the Carthaginian forces and crushed them. Though local resistance and mopping-up operations continued, so complete was the Roman victory at Ilipa that it effectively spelled the end of Barcid Iberia.

Mago Flees



The last stand of the Barcids was at Gades, the ancient Phoenician port city where Hamilcar Barca landed some 33 years previously and where Hannibal had made pilgrimage to honor Melqart. Mago holed up here after Ilipa, but orders from Carthage directed him to abandon it and instead attempt to land in Italy with his forces.

As he sailed, Mago made a desperate attempt to attack New Carthage, perhaps holding some hope of reclaiming the old capital. When his attack on the city was repulsed, Mago and his fleet were forced back westward and attempted to take refuge again in Gades.

But at this point, the longtime ally and the last pro-Carthaginian city on the Iberian Peninsula refused him entry. With nowhere to turn to, Mago retreated to the island of Minorca before sailing on to Genua in northern Italy, reaching it in 205 BCE.

Eventually, Mago had some minor successes in and around northern Italy. He was close to the Gauls and Celts who were still friendly to the Carthaginian cause. But the Romans penned him in there with seven legions, and he never succeeded in joining up with Hannibal.

The Final Stretch Begins

In these years in Italy, one of the most illustrative aspects of Hannibal's remarkable leadership was the loyalty of his army. Despite being often short of money for pay and short of provisions as well, according to Livy, his army did not abandon him or rebel.

During these years of isolation and hardship, much of Hannibal's time and energy was devoted to maintaining and feeding his army in a devastated countryside. Hannibal spent a substantial part of 205 BCE in and around the beautiful city of Crotona. He became a spectator to the final years of the war as it unfolded in Africa.

The alliances of the Numidians had shifted over the course of the war, and the Romans made overtures to their rulers to isolate Carthage in North Africa. It was a similar strategy to that which Hannibal had tried in Italy, and the logic was the same: With Iberia now lost, Carthage would not have the resources to keep fighting if deprived of its allies.

The final stages of the war were closely connected to the dynastic struggle and inter-kingdom rivalries between the key allies: the Masaesyli king Syphax and the Massylian king Masinissa. These men used their positions as allies of Carthage and then Rome to gain advantage over each other.

Right after the fighting at Ilipa, Masinissa entered discussions with the Romans about abandoning his alliance with Carthage. Masinissa concluded that Carthage didn't have much time left, especially now that the successful Scipio was in command. He gained the post of consul in 205 BCE. Scipio now turned to an invasion of Africa as a natural continuation of his success in Iberia, reviving the original Roman plan of 14 years prior.

There was opposition in the Senate to the plan, but eventually, Scipio was given some leave to prepare an invasion. He gained command over Sicily as a staging ground for a campaign, and he could go to Africa if he felt it was in Rome's interest. But he was not granted either a war chest or a troop levy to support his preparations. He already had a significant army, though, and such was his popularity with the public that 7,000 volunteers signed up to serve under him.

Throughout 205 BCE, Scipio prepared for a massive invasion of Africa from Sicily, and raiding parties went to North Africa to observe the situation and disrupt their farms and settlements. Roman coastal raids were nothing new for Carthage, but the news spread quickly of Scipio's arrival in Sicily, and it was soon obvious what was coming.

The Carthaginians did their best now to prepare for the inevitable. The Carthaginians dispatched envoys to Hannibal and Mago in Italy, encouraging them to do as much as possible to divert Scipio's attention. In the city of Carthage, personnel repaired fortifications and massed supplies. The city also levied more troops for defense.

The Carthaginians needed allies again and worked hard to bring Syphax back to their side, which eventually worked. His marriage to Sophonisba, the beautiful daughter of Hasdrubal Gisgo, sealed the deal. Sadly, she is one of the only women historians know of by name from any of the sources on the entire war, despite the fact than untold numbers of women lived, sacrificed, and suffered through the war.

With Syphax allied now with Carthage and Masinissa with Rome, a proxy war broke out between the two Numidian kingdoms. Livy reports that a particularly heated battle took place in 204 BCE somewhere between Cirta and Hippo Regius in modern Algeria, with Syphax prevailing and temporarily sending Masinissa into exile. Masinissa wouldn't have to wait long for his revenge. His powerful ally in Sicily was imminently bound for Africa.

15

Hannibal's Defeat, Escape, and Final Years

In 204 BCE, Publius Scipio set sail with his invasion force from Sicily, headed toward Carthage. With him were a reported 35,000 soldiers on hundreds of transport ships. Scipio landed somewhat near the capital, and the Romans started terrorizing the countryside. Scipio was joined by Masinissa and his Numidian followers, and both proceeded to Utica, a medium-sized city north of Carthage that they intended to use as a base of operations for the invasion of North Africa.

Encampment and False Negotiations

The Romans were soon met by Hasdrubal Gisgo and Syphax, who managed to prevent the Romans from taking Utica, and instead Scipio withdrew to a nearby peninsula to set up an encampment for the winter. The Carthaginians and Syphax camped nearby.

Negotiations between the camps were constant as the 203 BCE campaign season began. At one point, Scipio seemed close to agreeing to a mutual withdrawal: The Romans would leave Africa and the Carthaginians Italy.

Sources indicate, however, that these negotiations were a ruse by Scipio, and the tactic was to delay while gaining access to and intelligence on the enemy camps. Sometime in the spring of 203 BCE, Scipio ordered his armies to approach the enemy camps at night and set fire to them while the Carthaginian forces were sleeping. It was a ruthless attack, and reportedly, tens of thousands of Carthaginians and Numidians perished.

Hasdrubal Gisgo and Syphax, having escaped the disaster, soon rallied more forces and met Scipio again later in 203 BCE on the Medjerda River, but again, Carthage's forces fell swiftly. In the aftermath, Syphax and his surviving men fled back to Numidia. Scipio sent Masinissa and a contingent of Romans after him. They defeated Syphax's forces and captured him. Syphax's kingdom quickly surrendered to Masinissa, who then became the undisputed ruler of Numidia. Now a prisoner, Syphax died soon after.

The Last Barcid Brother

Back at Carthage, with Scipio triumphant and their most powerful Numidian ally deposed, the Senate began making overtures again for peace with Rome. Meanwhile, all Carthaginian commanders, the Barcids included, were recalled to participate in the defense of Africa. In 203 BCE, Hannibal at last returned from Italy, where he had now spent some 15 years fighting Rome.

Hannibal did not return to Carthage, though; he landed instead at Hadrumetum, today modern Sousse, in Tunisia. With Scipio in control of Utica now, the waters around Carthage may have simply become too risky to sail through. But Hannibal may also have avoided Carthage because he was functioning more as a free agent at this point.

Hannibal was meant to be joined back in Carthage by his brother Mago. However, in 203 BCE, Mago's army had been soundly defeated at Insubria, and Mago had been wounded. Mago eventually boarded a ship for Africa with some of his remaining troops, but according to Livy, he died of his injuries on the voyage.

Now the last of the surviving Barcid brothers, Hannibal spent the winter of 203 to 202 BCE building up his forces and waiting to see who took the next step. Peace negotiations had continued during this time, but it seems opinion among the Carthaginian Senate was finely balanced between those seeking peace and those still wanting to fight.

While the elites debated war and peace, events soon forced their hand. In early 202, a fleet of transport ships carrying supplies from Sicily to the Roman army was blown off course and got beached across the bay from Carthage. After some debate, the Carthaginian Senate sent out its warships to tow the Roman vessels back to the city.

Scipio was furious. Eventually, he sent envoys to parlay with the Carthaginian Senate, but the mood there seems to have swung definitively back to war. No truce resulted, and Carthaginian vessels also attacked the envoys' ship as they departed.

Naturally, this provocation incensed Scipio, and he gathered up his forces and pillaged town after town in the Carthaginian heartland. He sold the population into slavery and destroyed everything and everyone he came across.

All Carthaginian hopes of defeating Scipio now fell on Hannibal. But the great general does not seem to have been enthusiastic. Crucially, Hannibal's army lacked cavalry—thousands of his horses had been left back in Italy. With the fall of Syphax, he lacked a substantial Numidian ally who could play the key role in his battle plans.

He managed to scrape together a few thousand horsemen from the fringes of the Numidian kingdoms to join his roughly 35,000 soldiers, a mix of hardened veterans of the Italian campaign and untrained recruits hastily marshaled by Carthage. Historians' best estimates are that Rome and their Numidian allies had a similar number of troops in North Africa.

The Commanders Meet

Hannibal waited for a few days and then shifted his camp from Hadrumentum toward Zama, a few days' journey west from the coast. The exact location where the two armies met in autumn of 202 BCE is much debated, and several localities in Tunisia claim to be the spot of Hannibal's last stand.

The two sides formed up, and the two commanders rode out to meet each other, ultimately leaving their armed escorts behind. Though both were fluent in Greek and could have conversed naturally, the symbolism of the occasion demanded that Scipio speak Latin and Hannibal Punic, so translators were used.

Hannibal claimed that Carthage would give up all interests in Sicily, Iberia, Sardinia, and all the islands between, but he asked for an honorable peace. Scipio refused, blaming Carthage for the latest turn of events, and demanded absolute surrender.

The Battle of Zama

The next day, Hannibal drew his army up in three lines. In the first line were the remnants of Mago's army, mostly Ligurian, Celtic, and Balearic soldiers. Skirmishers were in front of this line, along with 80 elephants. The second line was newly recruited Libyans and Carthaginians, and the third line was his veteran troops. The cavalry was on the wings, with Numidians and Carthaginians on the left and right, respectively.

Scipio's troops were also drawn up in three lines, but his infantry formations were more loosely spaced than was typical, which was an adaption to help prevent Hannibal's elephants from doing too much damage. On the wings were his cavalry, including the main Numidian force under Masinissa on the right.

The Battle of Zama opened with the cavalry engaging each other on wings. Hannibal ordered his cavalry to lure their Roman and Numidian counterparts away from the battle to protect his flanks. Meanwhile, he ordered his elephants to charge into the Roman lines. But the elephants were largely ineffective because of Scipio's precaution of spacing the infantry.

Soon, the two main bodies of troops clashed in a shower of noise. The legions slowly began to prevail. The first Carthaginian line began to waver, and Scipio's troops eventually clambered over dead bodies to reach the second Carthaginian rank, who, like the first, eventually began to break. Finally, Hannibal's Italian veterans in the third line began to engage, and they fought with ferocity.

But cavalry proved to be the decisive factor in the battle. The Roman and Numidian cavalry, led by Masinissa, had dispatched their Carthaginian counterparts and returned to charge into the rear of Hannibal's army. What had been a somewhat evenly matched battle now turned into a total rout, and a reported 20,000 of Hannibal's army perished, with that many again captured.

Back to Carthage and Peace Terms

Hannibal and all that remained of his defeated army galloped back to the coast to Hadrumetum. But it was not long until he was summoned to Carthage. He was 45, and, as far as we know, it had been 36 years since he'd set foot in the city where he was born. In front of the Senate, Hannibal conceded defeat and advised the Carthaginians that their only hope now was to sue for peace. Scipio was henceforth known as Africanus after Zama. He dictated the peace terms, and the treaty to end the Second Punic War was ratified by 201 BCE.

In addition to the restoration of hostages and deserters, Carthage had to pay financial reparations to Rome in the form of 10,000 talents in installments over 50 years. Their overseas colonies, from Iberia to Malta, were all ceded. All of the war elephants at Carthage were surrendered, and the entire Carthaginian fleet was burned in the bay while the population looked on.

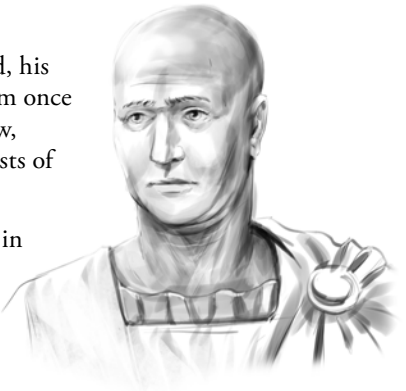
Their territory was restricted but left largely intact, although they were forbidden to wage war outside Africa. Within Africa they had to seek authorization from Rome to take military action against their neighbors, notably the now-greatly-empowered Masinissa.

Hannibal's Second Act

Hannibal kept a low profile for a few years. Eventually, he reentered the public sphere and was elected to the highest office in Carthage. He became one of the two *suffetes*, or chief magistrates, in 196 BCE. His period of office appears to have been a successful one. He was credited with reforming the Carthaginian constitution to weaken the power of the ruling elites and reorganizing the state finances to help repay the war indemnity to Rome.

Carthage seems to have been unusually prosperous in the period just after the end of the war. Important to Carthage's prosperity was the growing Numidian kingdom. As Masinissa's enlarged realm developed, an increased demand for luxury goods and commodities traded through the Mediterranean aided the Carthaginian financial recovery.

Exile



Once Hannibal's year in office was finished, his longtime enemies conspired to get rid of him once and for all. He was a populist politician now, with too much power to threaten the interests of the elite.

Concurrently, Rome was preparing for war in the eastern Mediterranean against the Seleucid king Antiochus III. The Roman Senate received letters claiming that Hannibal was conspiring against them and that he was in secret contact with the Seleucids. On receipt of these accusations, Scipio Africanus spoke on behalf of his old enemy in the Roman Senate, but it was to no avail. An envoy went to Carthage to ask that Hannibal be indicted on the charge of planning war with Antiochus. Hannibal was declared an enemy of the state at Carthage.

Hannibal went into exile and made his way to Tyre on the other side of the Mediterranean. The Carthaginians traced their roots back to the original Phoenician colonists from Tyre. It was now part of the Seleucid kingdom, which was a natural choice of refuge, given that they were powerful enemies of Rome and unlikely to hand him over.

Hannibal's arrival would have been met with some fanfare—he was, after all, one of the most famous men of his era. Tales of his deeds had long spread across the wider Mediterranean, and as Rome's power grew, Hannibal was a potent focal point for anti-Roman agitation. When he put himself in the service of the Seleucid king Antiochus, he was warmly welcomed. It seems Hannibal mostly served as an advisor to the king. This was not a position Hannibal was used to, and the old soldier had little patience for the niceties and intrigues of court life.

The End of the Journey

War broke out between Rome and the Seleucids in 192 BCE. Almost immediately, Hannibal suggested to Antiochus that a fleet and soldiers be dispatched to land in southern Italy, and he even offered to lead the expedition.

Antiochus didn't accede to Hannibal's request and initially kept him at court. But by 190 BCE, the war was going poorly. Hannibal received a small fleet, and he would lead several naval operations off the coast of Asia Minor.

However, after a significant defeat, the Seleucids soon sued for peace. The specific terms agreed that aside from the Seleucids losing "all possessions west of the Taurus mountains," Antiochus was also "to give up Hannibal the Carthaginian," among others. At the age of 57, Hannibal was once again on the losing side of a fight against Rome and was forced to flee the court of Antiochus.

His trail became elusive now, though there many stories and legends, some more outlandish than others. One version of the history has him in Gortyn in Crete before taking refuge in Armenia and then settling in Bithynia, an independent kingdom in Asia Minor that was at war with Pergamon, a Roman ally.

Hannibal was given command of a fleet once more. But Bithynia lost, and the subsequent peace treaty once again demanded that Hannibal be handed over to Rome. Most sources imply that Hannibal saw that he had finally reached the end of the road and chose to commit suicide rather than fall into Roman hands. He had reached old age by then.

Hannibal, the brilliant military mind who had engineered some of the most devastating defeats ever inflicted on the armies of Rome, may have been surprised to meet his end quietly in old age. His implacable opposition to the growing power of Rome had made him the focus for resistance to its imperial ambitions for more than 40 years.

He died as he had spent most of his life: as an outsider in a land far from Carthage. Yet he is inextricably linked to the fate of his homeland and is remembered as the most famous Carthaginian of them all. Hannibal had come very close to defeating Rome. His imagination and creativity in warfare were unrivaled, and his daring invasion of Italy and incredible victories on the battlefield have been taught in military textbooks ever since.

Hannibal could not single-handedly overcome the power of Rome. Even in his failure, though, his bitterest enemies continued to admire and fear him. And more than 2,000 years later, the name Hannibal still holds power.

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