CHAPTER 2

Hannibal

Put Hannibal in the scales: how many pounds will that peerless General mark up today?
Juvenal, Satire X, lines 147–8

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1 Why did Rome and Carthage come into conflict?

2 How did the city of Carthage develop in the third and second centuries BC?

3 What role did the Barcid family or dynasty, play in the development of the Carthaginian empire?

4 What strategies and tactics did Hannibal use against the Romans?

5 Why was he defeated?

6 Why was Hannibal considered a great leader?

7 Why should he be remembered? What were his achievements?

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the name Hannibal inspired fear and awe. ‘Hannibal is at the gates’ was a cry used to frighten Roman children or as a rallying cry to call Romans to action. This Carthaginian general terrorised the Italian peninsula for almost 15 years and came very close to defeating the Romans, and because of this he was hated, feared, demonised and credited with almost superhuman powers. All of the Carthaginian evidence was destroyed when the Romans razed the city of Carthage (Third Punic War) in 146 BC. Therefore all the evidence on Hannibal is from a Roman perspective and biased against him. As there is no evidence from a Carthaginian point of view, it is difficult to gain a balanced perspective of this man.

SOURCES ON HANNIBAL

The main ancient sources on Hannibal are Polybius, Livy and Appian. In an attempt to write a balanced account, Polybius referred to Fabius Pictor for a Roman perspective and Philinos of Agrigentum who had favoured the Punic cause.

Another source is Cornelius Nepos, who wrote eulogistic histories in the first century BC, and he tells us that Hannibal was accompanied by a number of Greek writers and teachers who formed a literary circle in his camp.
Hannibal’s deeds of arms have been recorded by many writers, among them two men who were with him in the camp and lived with him so long as fortune allowed, Silenus and Sosylos of Lacedaemon. And it was this Sosylos whom Hannibal employed as his teacher of Greek.

Cornelius Nepos, Hannibal, 13.3

Activity: research

- Throughout this chapter there are sources by Livy, Polybius, Cornelius Nepos and Appian. Use the Oxford Classical Dictionary or the internet and find out
  - who each of these men were
  - when they wrote
  - what they wrote
  - their perspective or interpretation of Hannibal.

Carthage: Foundation of the City

Carthage was founded by the seafaring Phoenicians from Tyre about 814 BC according to the Greek Timaeus. The name Carthage derives from the word ‘Qarthadasht’ meaning ‘New City’. The Phoenicians traded widely throughout the Mediterranean, and Carthage became strategically important as it was positioned on the jutting peninsula between the Mediterranean’s eastern and western seas. Because of its excellent position, it was a short journey to Sicily and the mainland of Italy. It also provided relatively easy access to the trading centres in Spain, Portugal and France. It had a safe harbour and fertile land. Carthage soon controlled trade in the western Mediterranean and developed a great commercial empire, with their allies ruling the islands of Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica.

They kept a fleet of war galleys to protect their trade.

The Greeks referred to the Carthaginians as Phoenikes and the Romans called them the Poeni and from this we get the adjective ‘Punic’.
The legend of Dido
Conflict with the Romans was inevitable because of the power struggle between the Romans and the Carthaginians and the desire of both to control the trade in the Mediterranean. The Romans, however, also gave an explanation of the hatred between the two powers. Dido, a princess of Tyre, was the legendary founder of Carthage. She escaped from her city and established a new city on the African peninsula. Dido then fell in love with the wandering Aeneas, supposedly the ancestor of Romulus. However, he left Dido to fulfil his destiny as the founder of Rome, and Dido swore undying hatred to him and all his descendants before she killed herself.

The Romans told this story to justify the hatred between Carthage and Rome, to explain the inevitability of the wars and their conquest of the Mediterranean.

Key features of the city
The city of Carthage was ideally situated on a ‘promontory, shaped like an arrowhead’ with lakes on either side. It was defended by a series of walls, the largest of which measured 32 kilometres in length, and was 12 metres high and nine metres thick. Contained within the walls were stables for 300 elephants, 4000 horses, barracks for 24 000 soldiers, arsenals and defensive towers. There were two man-made walled harbours connected by a channel. The circular harbour covering six hectares had docking facilities for 220 warships and an island in the middle of it with facilities for the admiral. The rectangular harbour covering five hectares was used for merchant shipping. Appian of Alexandria, writing in the 2nd century AD, describes it in Source 2.2.

Archaeological excavations at Carthage have confirmed Appian’s description and indicate that these harbours were a major engineering feat.

The city covered an area of five square kilometres with well laid out streets, and impressive public buildings, some of which were estimated to be six storeys high. The population was approximately 700 000 according to Strabo.

Archaeological evidence has uncovered an insula or block on the citadel of Carthage at Byrsa. The buildings on the insula were two storeys high with flat roofs. They were made of mud brick and stone, faced with plaster, and decorated with mosaic and patterns of inlaid stones. They contained storerooms, drainage systems and plaster-lined cisterns for collecting rainwater. There was also a temple to the Carthaginian god of healing, Eshmun at Byrsa.

Economic structure
The Carthaginians did not manufacture their own goods, but rather served as middlemen, buying minerals such as gold, silver and tin and other commodities and selling them in exchange for wine, cloth and manufactured goods. They tended to mass produce

---

**Figure 2.2** Diagram showing the Carthaginian harbours

Archaeological excavations at Carthage have confirmed Appian’s description and indicate that these harbours were a major engineering feat.

The city covered an area of five square kilometres with well laid out streets, and impressive public buildings, some of which were estimated to be six storeys high. The population was approximately 700 000 according to Strabo.

Archaeological evidence has uncovered an insula or block on the citadel of Carthage at Byrsa. The buildings on the insula were two storeys high with flat roofs. They were made of mud brick and stone, faced with plaster, and decorated with mosaic and patterns of inlaid stones. They contained storerooms, drainage systems and plaster-lined cisterns for collecting rainwater. There was also a temple to the Carthaginian god of healing, Eshmun at Byrsa.

**Economic structure**

The Carthaginians did not manufacture their own goods, but rather served as middlemen, buying minerals such as gold, silver and tin and other commodities and selling them in exchange for wine, cloth and manufactured goods. They tended to mass produce...
goods rather than manufacture quality items. Interestingly, the Carthaginians did not mint their own coinage until the 3rd century BC. They were renowned for their horses, their food production such as grain, figs, wine and their mixed farming methods of cereals, livestock, fruit, and vegetables. They practised crop rotation and irrigation. A Carthaginian writer, Mago, wrote numerous volumes on methods of soil conservation and agriculture which were so highly valued by the Romans that they had them translated into Latin.

**Religion**

The people of Carthage worshipped Tanit, the earth mother, and Baal, the sky god.

Diodorus Siculus tells us that they practised human sacrifice, usually at night before Baal Hammon. Parents presented their child of two or three years of age and in a ceremony with loud music, the priest took the child to slit its throat. Archaeological evidence has uncovered a child burial ground or tophet, in which urns containing the ashes of children were placed. Archaeologists have identified that these ashes belonged to children by studying the teeth. From the number of the remains, they believe there were approximately 500 sacrifices a year.

A grave stela found at the site tells us that the child was dedicated: ‘To the lady Tanit and her consort Baal Hammon…in fulfilment of a vow’. These sacrifices were obviously religious, but may also have been a form of family planning practised by the upper classes.

**Political structure**

‘Carthage would not have held an Empire for six hundred years had it not been governed with wisdom and statecraft.’

Initially, Carthage was a monarchy. By the time of Hannibal and his family, it was a mixture of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy. The form of government has been described as a merchant oligarchy. The Magonids were the original kingly dynasty and the monarchic element survived in two officers called sufetes. These two magistrates were elected each year from the influential families. They had a judicial role. One of the sufetes controlled the Council or Senate. Other officials included the state treasurer and moral censor. The sufetes and the judges were the actual powers in Carthage.

‘For the Carthaginians choose their magistrates, and particularly the highest of them—their kings and generals—with an eye both to merit and to wealth.’

A general was chosen by the popular assembly to control military affairs. As there was no limit on the general’s tenure of office, they became very professional. One of the disadvantages of this system was that the generals were regarded as employees of the state and therefore they did not always receive the support they needed.

There was a Council composed of several hundred members, chosen for life. Two committees were chosen from this council: one was a group of 30 councillors to run day-to-day affairs, and the other was a group of judges to review actions of generals and administer justice. The Citizen body, or popular assembly, voted on proposals put to it by the Council.

**Military structure**

Carthage had a great mercantile empire and a relatively small population. To enable them to concentrate on trade, the local citizens formed a small elite corps and they relied mainly on mercenaries from Africa and Spain. The mercenaries were hired for their particular skills such as the Numidians for cavalry skills and the Balearic Islanders as slingers. ‘The life of an industrious merchant, of a Carthaginian, was too precious to be risked, as long as it was possible to substitute for it that of a barbarian from Spain or Gaul. Carthage knew, and could tell to a drachma, what the life of a man of each nation came to.’

The Carthaginian fleet of quinqueremes and quadriremes was manned by citizen rowers who were called on in times of need. The main offensive weapon used was the beaked prow made of metal, which was used for ramming the enemy. Naval warfare included the use of archers and marines on board.

**FIRST PUNIC WAR**

**264–241 BC**

During the third century BC, Carthage extended her trading empire into the western Mediterranean and established bases on Sicily and Sardinia. Meanwhile, Rome conquered southern Italy including the powerful

---


Greek trading cities such as Croton and Rhegium. The Romans became concerned that the Carthaginians might expand into southern Italy while the Carthaginians were afraid that the Romans might move into their trading areas in Sicily. Both Rome and Carthage made a series of commercial and political treaties to define each other’s area of control.

Despite these treaties, Rome and Carthage came into conflict over the Sicilian city of Messana, which commanded the straits between Sicily and Italy. Italian mercenaries, the Mamertines, had seized this city and in turn, they were attacked by the city of Syracuse. The Mamertines appealed for help to both Rome and Carthage and both states responded.

In order to defeat the Carthaginians, the Romans constructed a fleet that counteracted the superior seamanship of the Carthaginians. The strategies used were sea battles and sieges of the cities of Sicily. The war lasted for 23 years with the Romans initially victorious in sea battles such as Mylae and Ecnomus. In 255 BC, the Romans launched an offensive against Africa where the consul Regulus was defeated.

In 247 BC the Carthaginian admiral Hamilcar Barca (father of Hannibal) began a campaign of guerrilla warfare against the Romans and their allies that lasted for three years. He fortified a position on Mt Eryx, behind the city of Panormus, from which he raided Roman strongholds. The Romans suffered a naval defeat at Drepana and then a reinforcement fleet was destroyed by storms. At this stage both sides were exhausted and there was a stalemate as neither side was quite strong enough to gain the upper hand.

In a ‘last ditch effort’ the Romans raised a fleet of 200 warships from donations from wealthy citizens. This fleet was successful against the Carthaginians at the Aegate Islands in 241 BC.

When they learned of this unexpected defeat, the Carthaginians, so far as resolution and the will to conquer were concerned, were still ready to fight on, but when it came to calculating their resources they found themselves in an impasse. First of all, the enemy had now gained control of the sea, which made it impossible for them to supply their own troops in Sicily; secondly, if they were to abandon and as it were betray these forces, they would be left without either the men or the leaders to continue the war. Accordingly, they immediately sent a message to Barca giving him full powers to handle the situation, whereupon Hamilcar acted like the good and prudent commander that he was. So long as there had been some reasonable chance of success, he had left no stratagem untired, however bold or dangerous it might seem, and if ever there was a general who tested every prospect of victory to the full it was he. But when Fortune had turned against him and he was left with no other possibility of saving the troops under his command, he showed his good sense and practical capacity in yielding to the inevitable and sending a delegation to negotiate for peace; for it is after all the duty of a commander to know when he is beaten, no less than when he is victorious.

Polybius, The Rise of the Roman Empire, I, 62, p. 108

Understanding and using the sources

- How did the Romans defeat the Carthaginians in the First Punic War?
- What methods did Hamilcar Barca use against the Romans?
- What does the source reveal about Hamilcar as a commander?

Terms of the peace treaty

- The Carthaginians were forced to evacuate Sicily; restore Roman prisoners; and pay a war indemnity of 2300 talents over ten years.

Results of First Punic War

- Carthage lost naval prestige and trade monopoly in Sicily. The reparation payments drained the Carthaginian treasury and they were unable to pay their mercenary army.
The Romans gained their first overseas province and became increasingly interested in expanding their empire. The Romans also suffered heavy losses in manpower, trade and agriculture.

Carthage's loss in the First Punic War was to have a significant effect on Hannibal's life. The Carthaginians had to re-think their strategy against the Romans. They realised they could not defeat Roman sea power so they would have to attack Italy itself.

After the Roman victory, the mercenary army of the Carthaginians revolted to gain their back pay and Hamilcar Barca had to use force to resolve it.

**Hannibal’s family background**

![Diagram of Barcid family](image)

**Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>275 BC</td>
<td>Hamilcar Barca born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>242–229 BC</td>
<td>Hamilcar Barca ruled; killed in battle in 229 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>247/6 BC</td>
<td>Hannibal born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>229–221 BC</td>
<td>Hasdrubal (son-in-law), murdered by a Celt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>221–202 BC</td>
<td>Hannibal in charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>205–146 BC</td>
<td>various sufetes in charge of Carthage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>197–195 BC</td>
<td>Hannibal Barca holds the position of sufete</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(The Carthaginians tended to use a limited range of names, therefore please note that as you read about Hannibal and his army, you will find there are a number of people with the same name, for example, Hasdrubal and Hanno.)

Hannibal, 'he who finds favour with Baal', was born in 247/6 BC, during the First Punic War. He was the eldest son of Hamilcar Barca and in 238 BC his father had him swear eternal enmity to Rome. Livy tells us the circumstances of this oath.
Hamilcar, after the campaign in Africa, was about to carry his troops over into Spain, when Hannibal, then about nine years old begged, with all the childish arts he could muster, to be allowed to accompany him; whereupon, Hamilcar, who was preparing to offer sacrifice for a successful outcome, led the boy to the altar and made him solemnly swear, with his hand upon the sacred victim, that as soon as he was old enough that he would be the enemy of the Roman people.

Livy, The War with Hannibal, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt, Book XXI, 1, p. 23

He had three older sisters whose names we do not know and two younger brothers called Hasdrubal (Baal is my help) and Mago (the gift). A famous Roman anecdote attributed to Hamilcar as he watched his three boys playing was “These are the lion cubs that I am rearing for the destruction of Rome!”

In 237 BC Hannibal went on the Carthaginian expedition to Spain with his father, brothers and brother-in-law. Cornelius Nepos, a Roman biographer writing in the 1st century BC, tells us more information.

After Hamilcar died and Hasdrubal [Hannibal’s brother-in-law] succeeded to the chief command, he was given charge of the cavalry. When Hasdrubal died in his turn, the army chose Hannibal as its commander, and on their action being reported at Carthage, it was officially confirmed. So it was, that when he was less then 25 years old, Hannibal became commander in chief.

CorNELIUS NEPOS, Hannibal, 3

Little is known of Hannibal’s personal life but he did marry Imilce, a Spanish princess from Castulo.

Understanding and using the sources

◆ What impression do you gain of Hamilcar Barca from these sources?
◆ Explain why the swearing of the oath is significant.
◆ Explain how Hannibal became the commander in chief.

SECOND PUNIC WAR
218–202 BC

Events leading to Second Punic War
Hamilcar Barca’s hatred of Rome was fuelled by Rome’s seizure of Corsica and Sardinia in 238 BC. Rome took advantage of the war between Carthage and her mercenaries who mutinied over a payment dispute. Rome accepted an offer from the mercenaries who had occupied Sardinia and sent out an occupying force. When Carthage protested, Rome threatened renewal of war and Carthage was forced to capitulate, paying an extra 1200 talents and losing control of Sardinia and Corsica. Rome now lost her reputation for fair dealing with the enemy and this further increased the hatred of Hamilcar Barca and his war party in power in Carthage. In 227 BC, Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica became Roman provinces. The loss of these territories so angered the Carthaginians that Hamilcar decided on a strategy to rebuild a new empire by conquering the southern half of Spain.

Early career in Spain up to 218 BC
The Carthaginians developed their holdings in Spain, as it was rich in minerals, and had timber for ship-building. For three years Hannibal served under his brother-in-law Hasdrubal, who had adopted a conciliatory policy towards the Spanish tribes. Hasdrubal continued to develop a new Carthaginian empire by founding the city of Cartagena (New Carthage).

The Romans became worried by Hasdrubal’s success and attempted to limit Carthaginian expansion. As Livy explains, “It was with Hasdrubal, because of his extraordinary flair for exercising influence upon the Spanish peoples and thus bringing them under Carthaginian sway, that the Romans had renewed the treaty of peace, fixing the Ebro River as the boundary between their respective spheres and establishing Saguntum as a sort of buffer state.”

There the Carthaginian commander Hasdrubal, who had governed the province for eight years, was assassinated in his lodgings at night by a certain Celt on account of a private grievance. He had done much to strengthen the Carthaginian presence in the country, not so much by military achievements as by the friendly relations he had established with the local chieftains.

*Polybius, The Rise of the Roman Empire, II, 36, p. 147*

The question of Hasdrubal’s successor was quickly decided. The military vote was in favour of the young Hannibal who was at once escorted to headquarters, where he was unanimously and enthusiastically acclaimed, and there is little doubt that the army’s choice was supported by the mass of the people in Carthage.

*Livy, The War with Hannibal, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt, Book XXI, p. 25*

So at the age of 26, Hannibal took command of the Carthaginian forces in Spain.

After Hasdrubal’s death, Hannibal reverted to a more aggressive policy in Spain. He attacked the tribe of the Olcades and captured their city of Althaea with the result that the rest of the tribe submitted. He imposed a tribute on the towns and returned to winter quarters in New Carthage. By treating his troops generously, he established goodwill for himself.

In 220 BC, he crossed the Tagus River and defeated two Spanish tribes: the Vaccaei and Carpectani. As a result of these actions, Livy tells us: ‘The whole of Spain south of the Ebro, with the exception of Saguntum, was now in Carthaginian hands.’

**Hannibal and Saguntum**

It is important to look at the issue of Saguntum from both sides. This event is significant because it sparked the Second Punic War. Who was responsible: Hannibal or the Romans? There are two agreements to consider here: Rome’s treaty with Hasdrubal concerning the Ebro line and Rome’s individual alliance with the city of Saguntum in 226 BC.

*ibid., Book XXI, 5, p. 28.*
The Saguntines, a colony of the island of Zacynthus, who lived about midway between the Pyrenees and the river Ebro, and all the other Greeks who dwelt in the neighbourhood of Emporiae and in other parts of Spain, having apprehensions for their safety sent ambassadors to Rome. The Senate, who were unwilling to see the Carthaginian power augmented, sent an embassy to Carthage. It was agreed between them that the limit of the Carthaginian power in Spain should be the river Ebro; that beyond that river the Romans should not carry war against the subjects of the Carthage, nor should the Carthaginians cross in arms; and that the Saguntines and the other Greeks in Spain should remain free and autonomous. And these agreements were added to the treaties between Rome and Carthage.

Appian, Roman History, trans. Horace White, Book VI, II, 7, pp. 149–51

The problem was that Saguntum was an independent Greek city in Spain that contained a strong pro-Carthaginian faction, even though it was (under the terms of the treaty) a ‘friend’ of the Romans. It was a feature of Roman foreign policy to make relations with friendly states or cities that might be useful to them in the future. The Romans had warned Hannibal that they considered Saguntum to be under their protection. Hannibal, however, argued that Roman interference in Saguntum was against the Ebro Treaty.

Another issue was that the Saguntines, probably encouraged by the Romans, made attacks against the Torboletae, a Spanish tribe, who were allies of the Carthaginians.9

In 219 BC, Hannibal besieged Saguntum for eight months. The Romans made no effort to help their so-called ‘friend’. A modern scholar, William Harris, suggests that by making the alliance with Saguntum, the Roman Senate was not concerned about defensive alliances but was actively promoting an aggressive stance. Likewise, when word came that Saguntum had fallen, the Senate did not debate the issue because they were already preparing for war.

William V. Harris, War and Imperialism in Republican Rome 327–70 BC, p. 204

Activity: discussion

◆ Who was responsible for the outbreak of hostilities in the affair of Saguntum: Rome or Hannibal?

Extended response

◆ Using the information provided and other evidence you have studied, explain the causes of the Second Punic War.

Hannibal’s preparations: defensive measures

After the declaration of war, Hannibal made his plans to engage the Romans.

● His brother Hasdrubal was left in charge of the defence of Spain with a small naval force, a

contingent of cavalry, 21 elephants and a large force of African troops.

- He dismissed some Spanish troops to their own cities to win their loyalty for the future.
- He organised for the security of Africa by ‘posting soldiers from Spain to Africa and vice versa, hoping in this way to cement the loyalty of each province to the other.’
- Hannibal made a trip to Gades to the temple of Tyrian Hercules ‘and swore to express further obligations to that god should his affairs prosper’.

Livy tells the story that Hannibal had a prophetic dream before leaving Spain. A vision appeared to Hannibal informing him that he had come to guide him to Italy and instructed him to follow, but not to look back. For a while he obeyed but, overcome by curiosity, he glanced back. He saw a monstrous snake destroying everything in its path, accompanied by storm clouds and crashing thunder. When he asked the guide the meaning of this, he was told that ‘it signified the laying waste of Italy,’ and that he must go forward without further questioning and allow destiny to take its course.

**Offensive strategy against Rome**

As the Carthaginians were limited in their naval capacity and the Romans commanded the sea, Hannibal was audaciously determined to invade Italy by land. It is important to understand how amazing this concept was and the monumental task that he had set for his troops. The journey was about 2400 kilometres long and they would have to cross two mountain ranges, the Pyrenees and the Alps, and travel through strange and hostile territory. This strategy took the Romans completely by surprise, especially as winter was approaching. The Romans considered such a journey impossible.

The consul, Publius Cornelius Scipio, ‘never expected in the first place that Hannibal would attempt the crossing of the Alps with a foreign army, and had assumed that if he did venture upon it the expedition was certain to perish.’

The Roman strategy to deal with Hannibal ‘was the despatch of one consul to Africa [Sempronius Longus], to block Carthage itself and of the other [Scipio] to Spain, to engage Hannibal there’.

It is important to understand the Roman system of government.

---

**Table 2.1 The Roman System of Command**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consuls (two)</th>
<th>Dictator (one)</th>
<th>Master of the Horse (magister equitum) (one)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Led the armies in the field</td>
<td>- In times of grave national emergency, a dictator (with supreme power), was appointed for a limited time of six months to take control of the situation.</td>
<td>- Assisted the Dictator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conducted the chief elections</td>
<td>- Presided over meetings of the Senate and carried out the Senate’s commands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Further preparations**

Hannibal made detailed preparations for this long, gruelling journey.

---

He had thoroughly informed himself concerning the fertility of the regions at the foot of the Alps and near the river Po, the density of the population, the bravery of its men in war, and above all their hatred of Rome which had persisted ever since the earlier war...Hannibal therefore harboured great hopes of these tribes, and had been at pains to send envoys who bore lavish promises to the Celtic chieftains, both those living south of the Alps and those who inhabited the mountains themselves. He was convinced that he could only carry the war against the Romans into Italy if, after having overcome the difficulties of the route, he could reach the territory of the Celts and engage them as allies and partners in his campaign...to overcome the difficulties of the route he engaged as his guides and scouts natives of the country who were about to take part in his campaign. On these matters I can speak with some confidence, as I have
questioned men who were actually present on these occasions about the circumstances, have personally explored the country, and have crossed the Alps myself to obtain first hand information and evidence.

Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, III, 34, pp. 210, 221–2

The problem with numbers

For his information on the troop numbers of the Carthaginian force, Polybius referred to the inscrip-tional evidence written in Punic and Greek that Hannibal left at the temple of Hera at Cape Lacinium (near Croton).

According to Polybius and Livy, Hannibal began the journey with a huge army of:
- 90 000 infantry and 12 000 cavalry made up of Celtiberian and African troops
- 37 elephants: these are believed to have been African bush elephants that existed in the Tunisia/Morocco area until the Christian era. The elephant appeared on coins and Lancel suggests it could be interpreted as a symbol of the Barcids
- pack animals
- siege weapons.

There are serious problems with the size of Hannibal’s forces. Dexter Hoyos points out that the size of Hannibal’s army is implausibly large. Hannibal set out with 90 000 infantry and 12 000 cavalry; crossed the Pyrenees with 50 000 foot and 9000 horsemen; crossed the Rhone with 38 000 infantry and 8000 cavalry and arrived in Italy with 20 000 foot and 6000 horsemen. ‘The general’s forces must have fallen by 43 000 men—over 40 per cent—even before he reached the Pyrenees, which is extraordinary. True, he suffered “great losses” in subduing north-eastern Spain. He then left his officer Hanno with 10 000 foot and 1000 horse to hold the region, while another 10 000 disillusioned Celtiberians were allowed to go home. But that would mean his fighting losses in the north-east were great indeed, over 20 000 men—more than his coming losses at the Trebia, Lake Trasimene and Cannae. This is not very plausible.’

Hoyos concludes ‘the original total more likely shows the full military strength that the Carthaginians had in Spain by mid-year. Hannibal himself then probably marched from New Carthage at the head of 87 000 men, including about 10 000 cavalry. He may have chosen to blur this in his Cape Lacinium record to impress readers with both the vastness of his original resources and, contrastingly, the smallness of the army he actually brought into Italy and with which he wrought such monumental havoc on the Romans.’

Accompanying Hannibal were his brother Mago, Hanno (his nephew), and trusted officers Marharbal and Gisgo. First came the infantry flanked by the Numidian cavalry and kilometres behind came the elephants, the pack animals and the wagons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.2 Troop numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Troop numbers that set out from New Carthage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 000 infantry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 000 cavalry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 Lancel, op. cit., p. 63.

Crossing the Ebro

As soon as Hannibal crossed the River Ebro, he was in hostile territory. The Carthaginians did not control the whole of Spain and north of the Ebro was either sympathetic to Rome or inhabited by Celtic tribes.

**SOURCE 2.11**

Having crossed the Ebro, he set about subduing the tribes Ilergetes, Bargusii, Aerenosii and Andosini as far as the Pyrenees. He made himself master of all this territory, took several cities by storm and completed the campaign with remarkable speed, but he was involved in heavy fighting and suffered some severe losses. He left Hanno [an officer of Hannibal] in command of the whole territory north of the Ebro and placed the Bargusii under his brother’s absolute rule; this was the tribe he mistrusted the most on account of their friendly feelings towards the Romans. He detached from his army, a contingent of 10,000 infantry and 1000 cavalry to be commanded by Hanno, and deposited with him all the heavy baggage of the expeditionary force. At the same time he sent home an equal number of troops.

*Polybius, The Rise of the Roman Empire, III, 35, p. 211*

In doing this, Polybius says Hannibal had a number of objectives:

- to leave men behind who were well disposed to him
- to hold out to his Spanish troops the prospect of returning home
- to have reinforcements available in Spain if necessary.

Livy informs us that ‘to prevent the undermining of discipline by idleness and delay, he proceeded forthwith to cross the Pyrenees with the rest of his troops’.14

**Activity**

- Draw up a chart and list the strengths and weaknesses of Hannibal’s preparations.
- Evaluate the Roman preparations.
- As you work through the information and sources on Hannibal, compile a list of words to describe Hannibal’s actions and leadership.
- Using Source 2.10, comment on Polybius’s methods as a historian.

**Over the Pyrenees**

The route by which Hannibal crossed the Pyrenees is not precisely known although Lancel suggests that Hannibal was trying to avoid the Greek colonies of Massilia.15 The Pyrenees formed the border between Gaul and Spain and according to Polybius, ‘by the time that he reached the Pyrenees he had completed nearly half the journey in terms of distance, but in terms of difficulty the greater part of his task still lay before him’.16

Hannibal moved with his reduced army towards the Pyrenees where Celtic/Gallic tribes controlled the passes through the mountains. At Ruscino, he met with a group of Gallic chieftains and placated them with gifts. Livy tells us that ‘the princes of the Gauls...came without reluctance to the Carthaginian, being won by his presence and suffered his army to pass through their territories...without any molestation’.17

As Hannibal’s forces moved closer to Italy, his forces were shrinking, probably due to desertion or because he placed garrisons of troops along the way. He continued to send out small reconnaissance forces to inform him of the enemy positions and likely problem areas.

Meanwhile a Roman fleet of 60 warships, under the command of Publius Cornelius Scipio had landed near Massilia. He was supposed to be in Spain but had been held up.

**Crossing the Rhone River**

As Hannibal moved across southern France, he followed the coastline. He had to contend with bogs, marshes and hostile tribes. When he reached the Rhone River, Hannibal found a local Gallic tribe, the Volcae, had taken up a position on the opposite shore. With the help of some locals who were friendly, the Carthaginians set about building rafts and boats. Meanwhile, he sent a cavalry column under the command of his nephew Hanno, further upstream to make the crossing and attack the enemy in the rear.

---

14Livy, op. cit., Book XXI, 22, p. 47.

15Lancel, op. cit., p. 65.


The Volcae were caught ‘between two deadly menaces, the thousands of armed men landing on the river bank and a second army unexpectedly pressing upon their rear’.18

After this success, he had to ferry the elephants across the river. Livy offers two possible methods. The first was that a ferocious lead elephant was goaded into the water and the other elephants herded after him, and the current carried them across. The second alternative (preferred by Livy), was that the Carthaginians prepared large floating rafts with soil on the bottom to make it look like a bridge. The female elephants were put on the raft and then towed across the river by rowing boats.

‘None of the animals showed any alarm so long as they were on what seemed the solid bridge; panic began only when the raft was cast off and they found themselves being carried into deep water; it was then that they showed fright, those nearest the edge backing away from the water and causing much jostling and confusion amongst their companions…A few completely lost their heads and fell into the water; their riders were flung off, but the beasts themselves stabilized by their weight, struggled on bit by bit, till they found shallow water, and so got ashore.’19

---

18Livy, op. cit., p. 51.

19Livy, op. cit., XXI, 28, p. 52.
At this point, Hannibal had some decisions to make. One of his reconnaissance forces encountered the Romans and fought with them. Should he stay and fight the first Roman army in his way or move on to cross the Alps? He decided to head for the Alps, but not before he intervened to settle a kingship dispute among the Allobroges tribe. The inhabitants were so grateful that Hannibal was able to rest his men and refit his supplies and equipment.20

**Understanding and using the sources**

- List the problems that Hannibal encountered in crossing the Pyrenees and the Rhone River.
- Explain the methods used by Hannibal to deal with these problems.


**Crossing the Alps**

Hannibal’s route across the Alps has excited writers through the ages. There are different versions of this story and it has been ‘elevated to the mythical level.’21 Problems arise because the ancient sources are not clear on the exact route taken by Hannibal and there are various views about the exact time of year that the crossing took place. It is outside the scope of this work to give a definitive answer to the route taken by Hannibal as the focus here is on the difficulties that he encountered.

Whatever the exact crossing, the sources do agree that it was an extremely difficult feat, there were heavy losses to the Punic troops and on the ascent, his soldiers’ spirits were battered.

21Lancel, op. cit., p. 71.
Appian sums up the whole event and tells us that:

When he came to the Alps and found no road through or over them (for they are exceedingly precipitous), he nevertheless boldly began to climb them, suffering greatly from the cold and deep snow. He cut down and burned wood, quenching the ashes with water and vinegar. Having thus rendered the rocks brittle he shattered them with iron hammers and opened a passage, which is still in use over the mountains and is called Hannibal’s Pass. As his supplies began to fail he pressed forward, the Romans remaining in ignorance even after he had actually arrived in Italy. With great difficulty, six months after leaving Spain, and after suffering heavy losses, he descended from the mountains to the plain.

**Polybius** gives a detailed account of the crossing that can be read in full in Book III, chapters 49–56, pp. 223–31. What follows is a summarised version of Polybius’s account.

1. The Celtic tribe, the Allobroges, (that Hannibal had previously helped) commanded positions along the roads that the Carthaginians were climbing. The Celts ‘inflicted heavy casualties on Hannibal’s troops’. His scouts realised that the enemy withdrew each night to a nearby town so Hannibal moved his army up quietly and took possession of the defile (pass) that the enemy had just left.
2. The tribes then attacked the ‘the long train of pack animals and horsemen’ as they made their way up the narrow track. The Carthaginians suffered heavy losses. ‘The road leading up to the pass was not only narrow and uneven but flanked with precipices, and so the least movement or disorder in the line caused many of the animals to be forced over the edge with their loads. It was chiefly the horses which brought about this confusion whenever they were wounded: some of them maddened by pain, would wheel round and collide with the baggage mules.’ Hannibal realised they would stand no chance if the baggage train was destroyed ‘so he took command of the body of troops which had seized the enemy’s positions on the previous night, and hurried to the rescue of those at the head of the column’, killing great numbers of the enemy troops but suffering heavy losses himself.
3. Hannibal then rallied his troops and attacked the town. He recovered a number of baggage mules and horses and gained a much-needed supply of corn and cattle. ‘This inspired fear in the tribes in the vicinity.’
4. The mountain tribes then conspired in a plot against Hannibal. They came to him bearing wreaths and branches (which were symbols of friendship) but he was reluctant to believe them. However, he engaged them as guides but after two days, the tribes attacked the Carthaginians as they moved into a steep pass. The enemy had gained the higher ground and threw rocks down onto the Carthaginians caught in the pass.
5. Hannibal had been suspicious of the friendly natives and ‘had stationed his mule train and his cavalry at the head of the column and the heavy infantry in the rear. The infantry covered his main body and were able to check the onslaught of the barbarians, so that the disaster was less serious than it might have been, but even so, a great number of men, pack animals and horses perished in the attack.’
6. While commanding the forces in the rear, Hannibal became separated from the main force and
had to shelter with part of his force overnight until they slowly made their way out of the gorge.

7. The Carthaginian column continued to be harassed by small groups of tribesmen. ‘His best resource in this situation were the elephants, for the enemy were terrified by their strange appearance, and never dared to approach the part of the column in which they were stationed.’

8. When they reached the top of the pass, Hannibal saw that his men had lost heart so he gathered the troops together and addressed them by pointing out the plains of Italy below.

9. Next day they began the descent. ‘The track which led down the mountain, was both narrow and steep, and since neither the men nor the animals could be sure of their footing, on account of the snow any who stepped wide of the path or stumbled overbalanced and fell down the precipices. These perils they could endure, because by this time they had become accustomed to such mischances, but at length they reached a place where the track was too narrow for the elephants or even the pack animals to pass. A previous landslide had already carried away some 300 yards of the face of the mountain, while a recent one had made the situation worse. At this point the soldiers once more lost their nerve and came close to despair.’ To add to the problems, new snow had fallen which quickly became mud and more men and animals lost their footing. Hannibal stopped the descent and set the troops to building up the path until it was wide enough for the column to pass. ‘He succeeded in getting the elephants across but the animals were in a miserable condition from hunger.’

10. According to Polybius, the journey from Spain had taken five months and the crossing of the Alps took 15 days. ‘On arrival he at once pitched camp at the very foot of the Alps, and his first concern was to rest his troops. The whole army had not only suffered terribly from the fatigue of the climb and the descent and the roughness of the mountain tracks, but they had undergone great hardships on account of the shortage of provisions, and the lack of the most elementary bodily necessities, so that under the pressure of continuous physical effort and want of food many of the soldiers had fallen into a state of utter dejection. It had proved impossible to carry enough provisions for so many thousands of men, and when the pack animals perished, the greater part of the supplies had been lost with them.’


Activity: illustration

- Refer to Source 2.13 on Polybius and the crossing of the Alps.
- Using a large sheet of paper, construct a sequence chart by making a drawing to illustrate each of the points of Hannibal’s crossing. You may use the following headings: Celts attack the column, Problem of the baggage train, Hannibal attacks the enemy town, Plot by the Celts, Hannibal commands the rear, Enemy terrified by elephants, Hannibal rallies the troops, Difficult descent in the snow. Using the sources, add key words or captions to your drawings.

Understanding and using the sources

- Using Sources 2.12 and 2.13, list the problems that Hannibal and his men encountered on this journey.
- Explain the methods Hannibal used to overcome these difficulties.
- Add to the list of words describing Hannibal’s leadership.
- Imagine you are Hannibal, and write the speech that you give to rally and encourage the troops.

Hannibal’s aims: the break up of the Roman Confederacy

Rome was the dominant city-state that had gradually conquered all of Italy and bound the various groups together by a series of alliances. The inhabitants of Italy were incorporated into the Roman state by dividing them into three classes:

- citizens (cives)
- allies (socii)
- colonists (coloni).

The citizens were basically the people of Rome; allies had been conquered and had various rights and duties that they owed to the Romans, and colonists were poor Roman citizens or ex-soldiers sent out to live in the conquered territories.

An important part of Hannibal’s political strategy as he marched into Italy, was to break up the Roman alliance. He fully expected that once he appeared in Italy, the allies of the Romans would take the opportunity to rebel against them and join his side. His military purpose of course, was to surprise the Romans and defeat them as quickly as possible.
Engagement at Ticinus 218 BC

The Roman commander, Publius Cornelius Scipio, had narrowly missed Hannibal’s army in Gaul but quickly marched to confront the Carthaginians as they moved into Italy. He crossed the Po River and took up a position on the northern tributary called the Ticinus. (Lancel says that the actual encounter took place closer to Lomello). Scipio built a bridge over the river and a blockhouse to protect it. Although the Roman religious omens were bad (bees over the general’s tent), Scipio moved forward with his cavalry and spearmen to check out the strength of the Carthaginian forces.

Maharbal and the Numidian cavalry had been instructed by Hannibal to harass and encourage ‘the Gallic chieftains to turn against their Roman masters’. Realising that an engagement with the Romans was imminent, he recalled the Numidians and offered his troops rewards of land, immunity from taxation and Carthaginian citizenship.

In the cavalry engagement that ensued, the Romans under the command of Publius Scipio were defeated. Scipio was wounded in the battle and realised that it was not a wise idea to engage the Carthaginians in open territory.

Source 2.14

Scipio posted his spearmen and Gallic cavalry in the front line, with the Roman troops and the pick of the allies in support. The native cavalry formed the centre of Hannibal’s line with the Numidian horse on the wings. Hardly had the battle cry been raised, when Scipio’s spearmen broke and ran, hoping to save themselves amongst the support troops in the rear. For a time the respective cavalry formations maintained an equal struggle, until Scipio’s squadrons found themselves seriously handicapped by the spearmen—infantry troops—who had got mixed up with them...Suddenly the Numidian horse, which had formed the enemy wings, executed a circling movement and appeared in the Roman rear. It was a severe blow to Roman morale, and the situation was made worse by the fact that Scipio was wounded, and saved from death only by the intervention of his young son. This was the boy who was later to win the glory of bringing the war to a successful conclusion, and by his splendid victory over Hannibal and the Carthaginians to earn the title Africanus.

This was the first battle of the war, and it showed clearly that in cavalry the Carthaginians had the advantage.


Scipio and the Romans swiftly retreated across the bridge and went to Placentia. By the time Hannibal’s troops reached the bridge it had already been destroyed. His army had to construct a bridge of rafts...
in order to cross the river. He followed Scipio and pitched his camp nearby.

The town of Clastidium, about ten kilometres south of the Po River, was particularly important to the Romans as it was a grain depot and vital to their war effort.²⁴ It was even more significant because it was a Latin colony and enjoyed a special relationship with Rome. It was a severe blow to the Romans when the commander of the town surrendered it to the Carthaginians for the sum of 400 gold pieces. The Romans suffered further setbacks when the Gallic auxiliaries in their army took the opportunity to kill the sentries and deserted to Hannibal. Scipio was concerned by this series of events and thought it might lead to a general Gallic revolt. He decided to move his forces to the River Trebia and took up a position in the hills.

**Understanding and using the sources**

◆ How did the Carthaginians win at Ticinus?
◆ Using this information and Source 2.14, explain Hannibal’s tactics.
◆ List the positive and negative points of Scipio’s leadership.

**Battle of Trebia (or Trebbia) 218 BC**

Scipio fortified his position in the hills with a palisade and a trench and awaited the arrival of the other consul Sempronius Longus and his army. Meanwhile Hannibal pitched his camp nearby. The two consuls were divided over what action to take and they were concerned about the loyalty of the Gallic tribes in the area. Tiberius Sempronius Longus was anxious to do battle as it was nearing the end of his year as consul and he wanted to win glory. The winter weather would soon make battle impossible.

‘Between the armies was the stream, running between high banks and edged for some distance by a dense growth of marsh plants together with the brambles and scrub which usually cover waste ground. Hannibal rode around on his horse carefully examining the terrain, and when he found a place which afforded adequate concealment for cavalry, he summoned his brother Mago.’ Hannibal set up an ambush. He instructed Mago to conceal himself with 1000 horses and 1000-foot soldiers and to wait.²⁵

Livy tells us that it was a snowy winter’s day in December made worse by the proximity of the river and the marshes.

Hannibal then ordered his ‘Numidian cavalry to cross the Trebia at dawn, advance to the enemy position, and lure him to engage by an attack with missiles on his guard post; then, once the fight was on, they were to give ground gradually and so draw him to cross the river.’

Hannibal ordered the rest of his troops to prepare themselves by:

◆ oiling their bodies
◆ having a good breakfast
◆ arming and saddling their horses
◆ awaiting his command.

Meanwhile in the Roman camp, ‘Sempronius was thirsting for action’ and immediately was lured into Hannibal’s trap. He led out his whole cavalry force followed by 6000 infantry and finally the entire army. In contrast to the Carthaginian troops, the Romans had left the shelter of their camp without a moment’s warning; they had eaten nothing, and taken no sort of precautions against the cold. ‘There was not a spark of warmth in their bodies; and the nearer they approached the chilling breath of the water, the more bitterly cold it became.’²⁶ They crossed the flooded Trebia, in chest high water and consequently the whole army was wet, cold, exhausted and hungry before the battle had even begun.

Polybius informs us that Hannibal deployed his troops about two kilometres from the Romans. The infantry consisting of 20 000 men were drawn up in a single line (stretching for about three kilometres) while the cavalry of over 10 000 men took up positions on the two wings. The force of elephants was stationed on the wings, in front of the infantry to protect them. The Romans, with their backs to the river, were drawn up in customary battle order: infantry in the centre with heavily armed foot soldiers covering the front line and the cavalry on the wings.²⁷ The infantry of both armies engaged in fierce hand-to-hand fighting. The Roman wings, however, soon gave way under the pressure from the Punic cavalry and elephants. With the loss of the wings, the Roman infantry centre was exposed and easily attacked by Hannibal’s pikemen and slingers. The hidden forces of Mago now attacked the Romans in the rear and completely encircled them. The other cavalry units and the skirmishers joined the attack. ‘The victory was due to the classic encirclement tactics which have made the Punic

²⁴Lancel, op. cit., p. 84.
²⁶ibid., p. 81.
²⁷Lancel, op. cit., p. 87.
general famous among military theorists. Some Romans took the only way to escape and "hacked a passage with the edge of the sword right through the African centre, supported as it was by its allied Gallic contingent. The river barred the way back to the camp, and it was raining so hard that they could not see at what point in the melee they could best help their friends, so they took the shortest route to Placentia." Others retreated to the Trebia but were either cut down or drowned in the flooded river.

The Carthaginians ceased their pursuit of the Romans at the river and returned to their camp. They too, had been badly affected by the rain and wintry conditions and had lost many of their pack animals and elephants. They made no attempt to stop the remnant of the Roman army from crossing the river the next night and escaping to Placentia.

More detailed accounts of this battle can be found in Livy, Book XXI, pp. 52–6, and in Polybius, Book 3, pp. 70–5.

The results of this battle were:

- A 40 000 strong Roman army was largely destroyed.
- Sempronius tried to convince the Senate that the disaster was due to the bad weather (not his impetuosity and bad leadership).
- Cisalpine Gaul was abandoned except for garrisons at Cremona and Placentia.
- In Rome, news of the defeat caused such panic ‘that people fancied that at any moment Hannibal would be at the city gates’.
- The Romans despatched legions to Sardinia and Sicily; garrisoned Tarentum and other strategic positions; and fitted out a fleet of 60 quinqueremes.
- Large numbers of Gauls defected to Hannibal’s side. (Even though many of the Gauls already in his own army were unhappy that the warfare was taking place in their territory and that he seemed to have little regard for the loss of life among his Gallic troops.)
- Hannibal also suffered losses of men, horses and elephants due to the weather.

**Understanding and using the sources**

- What was the problem between the Roman consuls?
- Explain Hannibal’s preparations for the battle.
- What tactics did he employ in the battle?
- What mistakes did the Romans make?
- To what extent was the outcome of the battle determined by the physical conditions and the weather?
- Add to the list of words describing Hannibal’s leadership/tactics.

**For discussion**

- What is your opinion of Hannibal as a strategist, tactician and leader of men?

**Undercover Hannibal**

Throughout the winter, the Carthaginians continued to harass the Romans. In one of these raiding parties, Hannibal was wounded. Despite this setback, the Carthaginians still managed to capture some key fortresses and trading posts. At the same time he made attempts to win over Roman allies in northern Italy, particularly the Celts.

**Source 2.15**

During this winter, Hannibal also tried a characteristically Punic deception. He was well aware of the fickleness of the Celts, and because it was only very recently that he had established friendly relations with them, he was on his guard against attempts on his life. He therefore had a number of wigs made, each of which created the impression of a man of a different age, and these he constantly changed, while at the same time dressing in a style, which matched the wig. In this way he made it difficult to recognise him, not only for those who caught no more than a passing glimpse of him, but even for those who knew him well.

*Polybius, The Rise of the Roman Empire, III, 78, p. 245*

This account of Hannibal dressing up is ‘generally rejected by historians because it seems incompatible with the dignity of a commander in chief and is above all too clearly inspired by a tradition mainly concerned with highlighting the famous Punic perfidy’.

---

28 Hoyos, op. cit., p. 114.
29 Livy, op. cit., XXI, 56, p. 82.
30 ibid., XXI, 57, p. 83.
31 Lancel, op. cit., p. 90.
Understanding and using the sources
◆ What does Source 2.15 tell us about Hannibal’s character?
◆ Can you see any examples of Polybius’s bias?
◆ Can you identify any problems with this account?

Between Trebia and Trasimene
As a result of Hannibal’s victories, the Romans raised 11 new legions, the burden of which fell largely on the peasant class. The expense of the new legions was so great that the Romans had to devalue their coinage. The new consuls for 217 BC were Gnaeus Servilius Geminus and Caius Flaminius. They believed that Hannibal was aiming to attack Rome and therefore they had to intercept him before this occurred. Flaminius proceeded to Arretium where the consular army was stationed.

The severity of the European winters meant that fighting ceased between December and April. In the spring of 217 BC, Hannibal moved out of his winter camp and crossed the Apennines and then the swampy marshes of the Arno River. As he pushed his way through the marshes, he encountered further difficulties as recent floods and melting snows had swollen the river, and the water level was too high for his men to make camp. It took four days without resting, for his army to force their way through the marshes. Hannibal developed ophthalmia (a severe eye infection) and because of the difficult circumstances and lack of treatment, he lost the sight in his right eye. After resting his army for a few days, he bypassed Arretium and ordered his troops to gather food and supplies in the region of Etruria. The Punic forces then burnt and pillaged the area. Etruria was a rich, agrarian area that was vitally important to the Romans and Hannibal was aiming to draw Flaminius to react.

SOURCE 2.16
Flaminius immediately responded as the Carthaginian had predicted... As soon as he realised that the Punic army had passed him and was devastating the land of Rome’s allies, he marched out of Arretium in pursuit. He is supposed to have ignored the advice of his senior officers, as well as a series of bad omens... It was immensely humiliating when an enemy could violate the field of a state or its allies without any interference from the army of that state.

Adrian Goldsworthy, The Fall of Carthage, p. 185

Lake Trasimene 217 BC
Flaminius followed the Carthaginians through the Borghetto pass, where his army was ambushed and trapped between the hills on one side and Lake Trasimene on the other side.

Table 2.4
| Time | Misty morning in June 217 BC\(^{32}\) |
| Location | Shores of Lake Trasimene |
| Geographical features | Borghetto pass (leading to Lake Trasimene) widens to a small plain about five kilometres long and then narrows again. At the time of Hannibal, the hills came right down to the shores of the lake. Heavy fog off the lake in the early morning that reduced visibility (Romans may have exaggerated the impact of this as an excuse for the disaster).\(^{33}\) |
| Roman leader | Caius Flaminius |
| Roman numbers | 2 legions (10 000) 10 000 Italian allies Lightly armed troops (2000) cavalry (600 Roman + 3000 Allied cavalry) extraordinarii: an elite unit of cavalry and infantry |

\(^{32}\)Ovid, Fasti, VI, pp. 767–8.
Roman strategy

To follow and engage the enemy. Flaminius aimed to catch the Carthaginians in a *pincer* movement, between his own army and that of the other Roman consul. Flaminius did not send out scouts.

Reached the pass in the evening and camped.

In the morning the army moved into the pass in column formation (three columns). Hills on the left obscured by mist but the Romans had enough visibility to see the Punic camp at the end of the pass.

**Hannibal’s numbers**

- Between 10 000 and 12 000 African troops
- 7/8000 Spanish troops
- Between 10–15 000 Celtic troops
- Lightly armed troops: 8000
- Cavalry: 400 Numidians, 4000 Celtic heavy cavalry, 2000 Spanish heavy cavalry

**Hannibal’s strategy**

- Marched through the defile or pass to Tuoro and established a camp visible to the Romans as they entered the pass.
- During the night, he constructed an ambush by dividing his force into columns, and moved them into position behind the hills.
- He placed the Balearic slingers and the javelin skirmishers facing the lake.
- Cavalry were hidden in the hills nearest the Romans.
- Gauls and light troops were in the centre.
- The Spanish and African infantry were conspicuously positioned on the ridge near the Punic camp.

**Key features/factors**

- Hannibal’s troops waited until the Roman column had moved through the Borghetto pass beside the lake and then sprung the trap.
- Punic cavalry cut off the Roman retreat.
- Romans trapped on all sides by Hannibal’s forces.
- The Roman rearguard were forced back to the lake where many drowned from the weight of their armour.

**Results**

- Romans lost 15 000 men.
- Flaminius killed by a Gallic lance. Hannibal tried to recover the body to give the Roman funeral honours. It is believed that the Gaul may have decapitated Flaminius and took the head as a trophy so the body of the consul was never found.
- 6000 of the Roman advance guard survived but were later captured by Maharbal.
- Carthaginian losses: between 1400–2500 dead (depending on the source)
- After the battle Hannibal gave funeral honours for the Punic dead and the Roman officers.
- The prisoners were divided into Romans and allies. All the allies were freed with the message that Hannibal had come to liberate them from their Roman masters. The Roman soldiers were enslaved.
- The Punic army re-equipped itself using the weapons and armour taken from the Roman dead.
- Despite the victory, the towns of the Italian regions of Umbria and Etruria did not defect to Hannibal’s side as he had expected.
- Deep cremation pits containing arrow and spearheads, ashes, dismembered bodies and shattered skulls have been uncovered at Trasimene.  

34ibid., p. 180.
Aftermath of Trasimene

The defeat at Trasimene was so great that when word of it reached Rome, the people were in despair. Livy records that people waited by the city gates desperately hoping for their loved ones to return. The praetor Marcus Pomponius was unable to play down the scale of the disaster and addressed the people on the steps of the Senate announcing that ‘we have been defeated in a great battle’. Three days later, the Romans were completely shattered when they heard the news that an advance party of 4000 cavalry sent out by Servilius had also been annihilated.

The Senate debated at length about what they should do. As it was a state of emergency, they decided to appoint a dictator. Under the Roman system, a dictator had to be nominated by a consul but in 217 BC, one consul, Flaminius, was dead, and the other consul, Servilius, was cut off by Hannibal’s forces. For the first time in Roman history, according to Livy, the Senate allowed the dictator to be chosen by a public election.

After Trasimene, Hannibal headed for the Adriatic coast where he rested his men and animals. At some point Hannibal sent messages to Carthage to inform them of his successes against the Romans. Did Hannibal intend to march on Rome? Was he planning to link up with a Carthaginian fleet on the coast and attack Rome by land and sea? Modern scholars are divided about Hannibal’s intentions at this point.

SOURCE 2.17

At Lake Trasimene, Hannibal inflicted a devastating defeat that left Rome without a field army. It is unlikely that Hannibal was unaware of this. That he chose not to march on Rome has been adjudged by many to have been a fatal error. Hannibal however, never seriously entertained the notion of marching on the city, no matter how superficially attractive the option appeared to be. Not only was the seizure of Rome beyond his military capabilities, it also detracted from his chosen strategy of destroying her power by affecting the break-up of the Roman confederation.

M. Healy, Cannae 216 BC Hannibal Smashes Rome’s army, p. 57

Figure 2.14  Battle plan of Lake Trasimene

---

37Hoyos, op. cit., p. 116.
**PROFILE**

**HANNIBAL’S OPPONENT: FABIUS MAXIMUS CUNCTATOR (THE DELAYER)**

Quintus Fabius Maximus was chosen as the dictator because as Plutarch tells us he was a man ‘who would wield this power with the utmost energy and without fear, and that Fabius Maximus was the only man fitted for this task. He alone, they believed, possessed a spirit and a dignity of character which were equal to the greatness of the office.’ Fabius was a 58-year-old aristocrat who was known for his moderate views in the Senate. The normal practice was that the dictator would choose his Master of the Horse (second in command), however in this instance, the Roman assembly made the decision and appointed M. Minucius Rufus. He belonged to a different political faction in the Senate, and this caused disagreements between the two men.

On taking up office, his first actions were to consult the *Sibylline Books* and to enforce strict religious piety. He also took steps to strengthen the defences of Rome, reinforcing the walls and watchtowers and destroying the bridges over the Tiber. The citizens of Rome were enrolled as a sort of ancient *Home Guard* and the inhabitants of unfortified towns were removed to places of safety. A *‘scorched-earth policy* was strictly applied wherever Hannibal was likely to pass’. Fabius knew that any more devastating defeats would lead to revolt by the Italian allies. In every previous defeat the faith of the allies in Rome’s strength had been weakened. Fortunately, however, because they had enjoyed nearly half a century of peace under Roman rule they remained loyal, unwilling to side with Hannibal. Fabius realised that the only way to deal with the situation was to wear Hannibal down—to carry out a policy of *attrition*. He insisted that the Romans should never engage Hannibal in a pitched battle but instead follow his army, dog his heels and prevent the allies from joining him. For this reason he became known as ‘Cunctator’—the Delayer.

This strategy became known as the Fabian strategy of delaying tactics.

---

**SOURCE 2.18**

*His plan was to exhaust his opponent’s strength, which was now at its peak, by means of delaying tactics and gradually to wear down his small army and meagre resources. With this object in view he always bivouacked in mountainous country where he was out of reach of the enemy’s cavalry, and at the same time, hung menacingly over the Carthaginian camp. If the enemy stayed still, he did the same. If they moved, he would make a detour, descend a little distance from the heights and show himself just far enough away to prevent himself from being forced into an action, against his will, but near enough to create the suspicion from the very slowness of his movements that he might be about to attack.*

*Plutarch, ‘Life of Fabius Maximus’, Makers of Rome, 5, p. 58*

---

---


40Plutarch, op. cit., chapter 5, p. 59.

41Lancel, op. cit., p. 99.
Figure 2.15  Fabian Tactics: the chase
kindling wood attached to their horns. During the night the oxen with burning torches alight on their horns, were driven up the slope above the Roman guards. Believing that the Carthaginians were escaping, the Romans abandoned their position guarding the pass and mistakenly followed the cattle. In the darkness below, Hannibal's army marched to freedom. Fabius made no move. Polybius suggests he was afraid, but in reality he was prudent.

This was the last straw for Fabius's critics and he was recalled to Rome to account for his inaction. Minucius was left in charge. Fabius left him with strict instructions not to engage in battle with the Carthaginians. Minucius, however, after minor successful skirmishes against Hannibal, was appointed co-dictator with Fabius. 'Minucius who was now puffed up with pride was jealously opposing him at every turn and was wholeheartedly set upon risking a battle.'

The dictators could not agree and Minucius chose to separate into two forces. He then decided to attack the Carthaginians but was only saved by the quick intervention of Fabius.

Minucius then recognised the wisdom of Fabius's policy and relinquished his co-dictatorship. Fabius's six months as dictator had concluded and the Romans elected two consuls for the new year.

### 216 BC: Hannibal's problems

Hannibal had sent messengers to Carthage detailing his successes against the Romans and requested that they send him reinforcements and money. His enemies in the government refused his requests, arguing that successful generals did not ask for money. He then wrote to his brother Hasdrubal in Spain and requested that he attack Italy with as many forces as he could muster, to divide and exhaust the Romans.

As the constant supply of food for a large army was a critical issue for him, Hannibal moved from his winter camp at Gerunium and occupied the position at Cannae. He chose Cannae because it commanded the surrounding district and it was a Roman collection point for corn and other food supplies.

Another problem Hannibal faced was the threat from the mercenaries in his army to desert him because they had not been paid.

### 216 BC: the Roman situation

The new consuls elected in 216 BC were L. Aemilius Paullus and C. Terentius Varro. The Romans found Hannibal's presence in Italy intolerable and they levied four new legions to fight against him. According to Appian, the Romans begged the consuls to 'end the war by battle and not to exhaust the city by delay, by continued service, by taxes, and by hunger and idleness due to the devastation of the fields'.

It appears from the accounts of the ancient sources that Varro was rash and foolhardy and particularly keen to attack the Carthaginians. He was even willing to risk the wrath of the gods by ignoring the omens that were always taken before any battle. According to Appian, the Roman army probably numbered about 79,000 men.

Polybius tells us that on the previous day, Hannibal drew his army into formation and 'made it plain to the Romans that he wished to give battle at once'. As the Romans did not respond, he ordered the Numidians to attack their water carriers. The Romans were greatly provoked by this action and were impatient for a fight. On the 2nd August, Varro was in command and he

---

**SOURCE 2.19**

> When Hannibal saw Fabius showing a vigour far beyond his years, as he forced his way through the thick of the battle, up the hill towards Minucius, he knew that the battle had turned against him. He therefore broke off the action, signalled a retreat, and led the Carthaginians back to their camp...It is said that as Hannibal marched back he spoke jokingly to his friends about Fabius...'Haven't I kept telling you that the cloud we have seen hovering over the mountaintops would burst one day like a tornado?'

*Plutarch, 'Life of Fabius Maximus', Makers of Rome, 12, p. 67*
ordered his troops to advance. He placed 1600 Roman cavalry on the right wing next to the river, approximately 70,000 infantry in the centre and 4800 allied cavalry on the left wing with the light-armed troops in the front.

Hannibal responded by placing his Spanish and Celtic cavalry, commanded by Hasdrubal (not his brother), opposite the Roman cavalry who were under the command of Paullus. Hannibal’s cavalry numbered about 10,000 in total. Maharbal and the Numidian light horse were on the right wing opposite the allied cavalry. In the centre, he placed 40,000 Spanish, Celtic and African infantry. As they moved forward, he organised the infantry into the unusual formation of a ‘crescent shaped bulge, with the line of the flanking companies thinning out as it was extended’. This deployment was intended to break the momentum of the Roman advance. Hannibal commanded the centre with his brother Mago while Hanno took charge of the right wing. The Roman forces were facing south and Livy wrote that a wind called the ‘Volturnus was a disadvantage to the Romans as it carried clouds of dust into their eyes and obscured their vision’.

The cavalry on the left wing with their superior numbers soon overwhelmed the Roman cavalry. Meanwhile, the infantry in the centre was gradually being pushed back by the weight of the Roman forces. The Romans, sensing that the Carthaginian centre was weakening, moved steadily forward, thinking that victory was theirs. ‘They penetrated the enemy’s line so deeply that they then found they had both contingents of the African infantry on their flanks...The result was exactly what Hannibal had planned: the Romans by pressing too far ahead in pursuit of the Celts were trapped between the two divisions of Africans.’ Meanwhile, the Numidians effectively kept the allied cavalry engaged until Hasdrubal arrived after dealing with the Romans by the river. At this point, the allied cavalry fled and Hasdrubal joined in the encirclement and slaughter of the Roman infantry.

During the battle Paullus was severely wounded by a sling stone but as Livy recounts, the commander heroically refused to leave his men when offered the chance to escape. Varro managed to withdraw with 70 horsemen and managed to reach the town of Venusia.

Next morning, the Carthaginians collected the spoils and surveyed the carnage. To the ‘enemy’s eyes it was a shocking spectacle. All over the field Roman soldiers lay dead in their thousands...Here and there wounded men, covered with blood...were dispatched by a quick blow as they struggled to rise from amongst the corpses.’

**Views on Cannae**

Polybius comments that ‘At Cannae, as in previous encounters, it was the superior numbers of the Carthaginian cavalry which contributed most to the victory.’

- ‘The Carthaginian general had exploited the diversity of a multiracial army to defeat the homogeneous forces of his enemy.’

---

48 Livy, op. cit., XXII, 46, p. 146.  
50 Livy, op. cit., XXII, 51, p. 151.  
51 Polybius, op. cit., p. 274.  
The year 216 BC marked the apogee of Hannibal’s military career, with Cannae the foremost demonstration of his brilliance.\(^{53}\)

‘It had been a well co-ordinated effort, successful because of the discipline and experience of the mercenary units and the careful planning and battlefield coordination of their commander.’\(^{54}\)

**Activity**


- **Using the information given, describe the Roman strategy at Cannae.**

- **What was Hannibal’s strategy? (See Polybius, III, 115, p. 272.)**

- **Explain how Hannibal made use of the wind to defeat the Romans. List the other factors that enabled Hannibal to win at Cannae.**

- **Write a brief evaluation of the Roman leaders Varro and Paullus.**

- **Livy comments that ‘Hannibal did not follow up his victory’. Explain what Livy means by this.**

- **Add to the list of words describing Hannibal’s leadership/tactics/strategies.**

- **Using the information provided in these sources, write an assessment of Hannibal as a military strategist.**

**For further reading**

- **The size of the armies at Cannae and the exact numbers killed continues to cause scholarly debate. To aid in discussion of these issues you could read pp. 79–80 and pp. 84–6 of Lazenby, Hannibal’s War or p. 213 of Goldsworthy, The Fall of Carthage.**

**Impact of Cannae**

**For Rome**

The loss at Cannae was a devastating blow for the Romans.

The sources vary on the exact number of Romans killed.

In book XV, 6, Livy states that 50 000 were killed; Appian and Plutarch also note this figure; the Roman educator Quintilian claimed 60 000 died and Polybius says 70 000.\(^{55}\)

The consul L. Aemilius Paullus was killed.

29 of the 48 military tribunes were dead.

80 senators and ex-magistrates perished.

Hundreds of Roman knights (distinguished by their gold rings) died and this was enough to give Hannibal’s brother Mago a large quantity of rings to pour out over the floor of the Punic Senate house at Carthage a few weeks later.\(^{56}\)

4500 soldiers were taken prisoner.

There was panic in Rome as they fully expected Hannibal to invade the city.

Livy XXII, 57 says that the Romans even resorted to human sacrifice as a way to satisfy the gods.

**For Hannibal**

Hannibal lost about 7000 to 8000 men in this battle.

After the battle, the Carthaginians attacked and captured the two Roman camps. Then they buried the dead, collected the spoils and Hannibal rested his men.

Maharbal urged him to attack Rome. When Hannibal decided against this, Maharbal derisively commented, ‘you know Hannibal, how to win a fight; you do not know how to use your victory’. Livy’s view of this was that ‘the day’s delay was the salvation of the city and the Empire’.\(^{57}\)

Hannibal addressed the captured prisoners and explained to them that he was not involved in a ‘war to the death with Rome but rather that he was fighting for honour and empire’.\(^{58}\)

Hannibal expected that after winning such a stunning victory that the Romans would be ready to sue for peace, so he sent Carthalo to Rome to negotiate. The Romans refused to meet with Carthalo and refused to pay Hannibal money for the captives.

He despatched his brother Mago to Carthage to report on his successes and to bring reinforcements.

---

\(^{53}\) Healy, op. cit., p. 87.


\(^{55}\) Livy, op. cit., p. 149, footnote 1.

\(^{56}\) Hoyos, op. cit., p. 119 and Livy, op. cit., XXIII, p. 12.

\(^{57}\) Livy, op. cit., XXII, 51, p. 151.

\(^{58}\) ibid., XXII, 58, p. 158.
Loss of Italian allies, e.g. Capua was a significant blow to the Romans. Women were forbidden to mourn in public. The Romans refused to ransom the captives. The Senate realised that the Fabian strategy was indeed sensible and decided that never again would a Roman army engage in battle with Hannibal. Rome once more raised an army but this time from men as young as 17, criminals, debtors and slaves.

Many of the Italian allies ‘despaired of the survival of Roman power’ and decided to join Hannibal. Samnium, Apulia, Lucania, Campania and the significant town of Capua joined the Carthaginian cause. This provided Hannibal with supplies and was a serious blow to the Romans. However, it meant that Hannibal had to divide his forces in order to keep control of the newly acquired areas. Modern scholars continue to argue about the wisdom of Hannibal’s decision not to march on Rome.

For further reading
◆ Read scholars such as Hoyos pp. 119–21, Goldsworthy pp. 215–18, and Lazenby pp. 85–6 then draw up a chart noting the different views of the modern scholars on this issue.

Activity: debate
◆ Debate the statement ‘Hannibal should have marched on Rome’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>215 BC</td>
<td>Syracuse</td>
<td>The new ruler Hieronymous formed an alliance with Carthage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>214–212 BC</td>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>Philip V made a treaty of mutual aid with Hannibal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>214–205 BC</td>
<td>Syracuse</td>
<td>Romans conducted the First Macedonian War against Philip V. He was unable to send assistance to Hannibal because of the strength of the Roman fleet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>212 BC</td>
<td>Sicily</td>
<td>Carthaginians defeated in Sicily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>211 BC</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>The Scipio brothers are defeated and killed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Romans recovered Capua.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210 BC</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Hannibal gained possession of Tarentum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>209 BC</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>P. Cornelius Scipio (although a private citizen and only 25 years old) was made commander of Spain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>208 BC</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Scipio captured New Carthage and undermined Carthaginian authority in Spain by winning over the Spanish leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>207 BC</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Battle of Metaurus River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206 BC</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Scipio defeated Mago Barca and Hasdrubal Gisgo at the battle of Iliipa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>205 BC</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Scipio elected consul and was given permission to invade Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>204 BC</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Scipio makes alliance with Massinissa (Numidian king). Hannibal recalled to Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>202 BC</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Battle of Zama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity: research

- Use the timeline and map, your library resources and the internet site <http://www.barca.fsnet.co.uk/punic2.htm>. Write a summary of Hannibal’s actions in Italy 215–204 BC.
- Investigate Hannibal’s capture of the city of Tarentum. Explain what this reveals about Hannibal’s methods. (A good account can be found in chapter 11, L. Cottrell, Enemy of Rome.)
- Why was Philip V of Macedon unable to send aid to Hannibal?
- What strategies did the Romans use in this period?

Battle of Metaurus

By 207 BC Hannibal had been in Italy for 11 years and desperately needed reinforcements. At last Hasdrubal (his brother), following much the same route as Hannibal before him, advanced towards Italy with an army of 20,000 men. He arrived in northern Italy in early spring and made an unsuccessful attempt to take Placentia. Ten thousand Cisalpine Gauls and Ligurians were recruited. They brought the strength of his army to 30,000. He then proceeded to move south to Ariminum. It was imperative for him to make contact with his brother Hannibal in southern Italy. Six horsemen were despatched with a letter to Hannibal with the...
information that Hasdrubal’s army was marching to Umbria on the Adriatic side of Italy where the two armies would join forces. The horsemen rode the entire length of Italy without being captured. However near Tarentum they were ‘picked up by a Roman foraging party and under the threat of torture, handed over the letter to Hannibal and disclosed all they knew’.59

Meanwhile Hannibal, waiting anxiously for news from his brother, moved into Apulia. The letter with this much-needed intelligence was delivered to the consul Claudius Nero who now put into action a daring plan. He sent a letter to the Senate advising them to recruit every Roman able to bear arms to defend the Flaminian Way (one of the main roads to Rome) and to bring a legion from Capua to protect the city. Nero himself chose 6000 infantry and 1000 cavalry and set out supposedly to attack Lucanum. Instead, Nero’s real intent was to travel using forced marches as quickly as possible 386 kilometres north. He planned to join his colleague, the consul Livius Salinator, who was encamped at Sena Gallica a few kilometres beyond the River Metaurus.

Hasdrubal had marched south followed by the praetor Lucius Porcius Licinius. Meanwhile, Nero had sent messengers ahead asking the inhabitants of Picenum and Umbria to supply the advancing army with provisions as they marched north.

Hannibal in Apulia knew nothing of these events. The Romans arrived at night and the soldiers shared tents so that Hasdrubal, encamped a short distance away, was unaware that another consular army had arrived. He found out the next morning when he heard two trumpet blasts from the armies instead of one. Immediately, he moved his army to the River Metaurus. He attempted to withdraw but was followed and ultimately trapped by the Roman armies. It is believed that Hasdrubal died fighting with his men.

The sources differ on the number of Carthaginian losses. Livy says 57,000 died and Polybius claims that 10,000 died and many prisoners were taken. Two prisoners were released to relay the events of the disaster to Hannibal. The Roman commander Nero took Hasdrubal’s head as a trophy and had it flung into Hannibal’s camp. (Compare this to Hannibal’s treatment of Roman commanders killed in action, e.g. Paullus.)

**Importance of Metaurus**

Hannibal realised that:
- There would be no further reinforcements from Carthage.
- The Romans now possessed armies, commanders and strategies capable of defeating the Carthaginians.
- The Roman confederation was still strong.
- Italy was now lost.

He appears to have lost heart at this point and moved his army to Bruttium where he remained for another four years.

**Scipio Africanus**

In the war against the Carthaginians, the Romans were greatly disadvantaged because their generals were unable to produce the strategies and tactics to defeat Hannibal. They were inflexible and conservative, lacking the ability to outmanoeuvre the brilliance of Hannibal. It was not until 210 BC when Publius Cornelius Scipio (the son of P. C. Scipio who served in Spain and northern Italy) was appointed as commander in Spain that Rome produced a general who could outwit Hannibal and play him at his own game.

### Activity: research

- Using the chart, library resources and the internet, research the life and achievements of Publius Cornelius Scipio (Africanus).
- Find out about each of the following: his unusual appointment, military reforms, battles and achievements in Spain, relationship with the Senate and the strategies and methods he used. Present your findings in a chart using these topics as headings.

---

59 Bagnall, op. cit., p. 263.
THE INVASION OF AFRICA

In 205 BC the Roman strategy changed direction due to the influence of Publius Cornelius Scipio who had been elected consul for that year. This change of strategy was not taken without a fierce debate in the Roman Senate between Fabius Maximus and Scipio. They debated whether they should defeat Hannibal in Italy or invade Africa and force him to leave Italy to defend his homeland. Scipio, as the new consul, was rumoured to be about to take the unprecedented step of taking over Africa as his sphere of action without following the usual procedure of drawing lots to decide where consuls would be sent. Never before had Africa been assigned to a consul.

The debate

The full debate can be found in Livy, XXVIII, 42–45, pp. 552–61. Below are extracts from the debate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scipio’s arguments</th>
<th>Fabius’s arguments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘He had been named consul with the object not merely of conducting the war but of bringing it to an end; and this could be achieved only if he personally took an army across to Africa.’</td>
<td>‘Hannibal is formidable still: to prefer to fight elsewhere may well look more like fear than contempt. Why then do you not gird yourself for the campaign which lies before you? Tell us no more that when you cross to Africa Hannibal will surely follow you…march direct to where Hannibal at this moment is, and fight him there.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Hannibal won’t keep me here, I shall draw him after me, I shall force him to fight on his native ground and the prize of victory will be Carthage, not a handful of dilapidated Bruttian forts.’</td>
<td>‘Situated as we are now, even apart from the fact that public funds cannot support two separate armies, one in Italy and one in Africa, and no resources are left for maintaining fleets and furnishing supplies, the magnitude of the danger we run is surely patent to everyone…just suppose that Hannibal is victorious and marches on Rome, are we then, and not before, to recall you from Africa?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Italy has suffered long; let her for a while have a rest. It is Africa’s turn to be devastated by fire and sword. It is time that a Roman army threatened the gates of an enemy camp. Let Africa be the theatre of war henceforward; for 14 years all the horrors of war have fallen thick upon us, terror and defeat, the devastation of our farms, the desertion of our friends; it is her turn now to suffer the same.’</td>
<td>‘And as for Hannibal, in which circumstances is he likely to be the stronger, when he is boxed up in a corner in Bruttium, still vainly asking for reinforcements from home or when he is close to Carthage with all Africa at his back?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 2.19 Map of North Africa
Understanding and using the sources

◆ How do the arguments put forward by Fabius reflect what you already know about his character and policies?
◆ What are Scipio’s main reasons for invading Africa?
◆ Who do you think has the more convincing arguments? How would you vote?
◆ What does the source reveal about Hannibal’s position at this time?

Scipio’s preparations

Scipio was assigned Sicily and 30 warships and permission to cross to Africa if he ‘judged it to be in the public interest’. He called for volunteers and was able to sail for Sicily with a volunteer force of 7000 men. For the next few months these troops were rigorously trained in fighting methods and military tactics. He made an agreement with Syphax of Numidia in the expectation that their powerful cavalry would support the Roman cause.

Carthaginian preparations

Meanwhile in Carthage, news of a Roman landing was greeted with ‘universal panic’. Laelius, the Roman commander raided the surrounding countryside near Hippo Regis. The Carthaginians were ill prepared and relied on mercenaries. ‘Mago in Gaul was neither causing a rising against Rome nor attempting to join Hannibal, and Hannibal was no longer the man he was either in reputation or in strength.’

The Carthaginians decided to:

● Levy new troops.
● Strengthen the city’s defences and build up supplies.
● Equip a fleet to be sent against the Romans at Hippo Regis.
● Strengthen alliances with neighbouring kings.
● Send reinforcements to Mago in the hope that he would be able to join forces with Hannibal.
● Most importantly, delegations were sent to Hannibal in Italy to urge him to ‘hold Scipio back with every possible threat’.

It was at this stage that Masinissa, a Numidian prince, approached Laelius asking him to urge Scipio not to delay in his invasion of Africa and offering his loyalty and a force of infantry and cavalry. Scipio had also hoped for an alliance with another powerful Numidian king, Syphax, and had entered into a pact with him. However, the Carthaginians instead made an alliance with Syphax in the following way.

Source 2.21

Not only was Hasdrubal, son of Gisgo, bound to Syphax by ties of hospitality…but preliminary mention had also been made of a family connection through the king’s marriage to a daughter of Hasdrubal. The girl was already marriageable age, so Hasdrubal visited Syphax to see the arrangements completed and a time fixed for the ceremony; then seeing the king was aflame with desire…he sent to Carthage for the young woman (Sophonisba) and hurried on the wedding…by way of strengthening the family tie by a national compact, a treaty of alliance between the people of Carthage and the king was declared and sworn to, guarantees being mutually exchanged that each would have the same friends and the same enemies…Hasdrubal none the less could not but remember the pact which Syphax had made with Scipio…so while he still had some influence over Syphax, before his passion had time to cool, he induced him, with the help of some gentle persuasion from his young wife as well, to send envoys to Sicily to convey a warning to Scipio not to cross into Africa in reliance upon his former promises.


Understanding and using the sources

◆ Why was it so important to make alliances with the Numidians?
◆ With reference to the source, what indication is there that this was an extremely important alliance for the Carthaginians?
◆ What impact would this have on the Roman hopes?

Scipio was greatly disappointed to lose this important ally, but continued with his preparations for the invasion. The size of the invading Roman force is not clear from the sources, but when Scipio finally set sail it was at the head of a superbly trained army backed by ample logistic support.

60 Livy, op. cit., XXVIII, 45, p. 561.
61 ibid., p. 570.
62 ibid., p. 570.
63 ibid., p. 571.
64 A. Goldsworthy, In the Name of Rome, Phoenix paperback, Great Britain, 2004, p. 76.
The fleet embarked at Lilybaeum in Sicily and landed at modern day Cape Farina, where the troops disembarked and a camp was established 26 kilometres from Utica. In Carthage the gates were closed and the cavalry despatched to deal with the Romans. Scipio moved his camp further inland and only a minor skirmish took place. Masinissa now arrived to join the Romans with a cavalry force. Scipio attacked Utica, and the Carthaginians with their leader, Hanno, were lured out of the city by Masinissa’s cavalry. Hanno and some 2000 Carthaginians were killed. Scipio ravaged the surrounding countryside but was unable to take Utica. Encamped nearby and greatly outnumbered, he spent the winter months preparing for the campaign in the following spring. It is interesting to note that Scipio was in a similar position to that of Hannibal in Italy: winning victories while outnumbered, yet unable to take major cities.

Scipio also pretended to enter into negotiations with Syphax with the same guile as that used by Hannibal. He sent envoys into the camp of Syphax including ‘centurions of proved intelligence and ability. These men were humbly dressed and made to look like servants, and while the envoys were in consultation, they would wander separately about the camp… gathering information about the entrances and exits, the shape and layout both of the camp as a whole and the separate portions occupied by the Numidians and the Carthaginians.”

They noticed in particular that the Carthaginian camp was made of wood, reed and thatch. The fact that the enemy camps were constructed of such flammable materials inspired Scipio to plan destruction by fire. To distract the Carthaginians from his real purpose, he gave every indication that he was preparing to attack Utica from the sea. His real intent was to set fire to the camps of Syphax and Hasdrubal and reduce numbers and morale. While the Roman ships sailed towards Utica, Lælius and Masinissa set fire to the camp of Syphax and when it was well alight, Scipio attacked Hasdrubal’s camp. It too was set alight. This was a major blow to the Carthaginians as there was huge destruction and loss of life. Syphax and Hasdrubal managed to escape. Hasdrubal arrived in Carthage where there was great panic and many thought that Hannibal should be recalled to save his country.

Battle of the Great Plains

Scipio thought that the Carthaginians were defeated and was busy besieging Utica. However, the energetic Hasdrubal gave the Carthaginians hope and raised and trained fresh troops. Meanwhile Syphax assembled another Numidian force. Livy suggests that Syphax was influenced in this decision by his young wife, Sophonisba, who begged him to continue the alliance with her father. Scipio was now surprised to find that Hasdrubal had formed another army. He led the Romans to an area known as the Great Plains where Hasdrubal, Syphax and some Celtiberian mercenaries confronted them. The Carthaginian force was soundly defeated. Hasdrubal managed to escape and Syphax was pursued all the way back to Numidia where he was taken prisoner by Masinissa. This resulted in the surrender of his city of Cirta. The defeat of this important Carthaginian ally was a dreadful blow for the Carthaginian cause and panic broke out in Carthage.

For further reading

◆ For romantic intrigue, sex, and tragedy in the Second Punic War, read the story of Masinissa and Syphax’s wife, Sophonisba, in Livy, XXXIII, 12–15.

Recall of Hannibal

The Carthaginian government made an armistice with Scipio but it had to be ratified by the Roman Senate. In 203 BC, as a precautionary measure, the Carthaginian government recalled Hannibal and Mago. Fifteen thousand veterans of the Italian campaign returned with Hannibal when he landed at Leptis Minor. Mago had been severely wounded in his last battle and died before he reached Africa. The Carthaginians decided to break the truce they had made with the Romans as the presence of Hannibal made them hope for a better outcome. The truce was officially broken when the Carthaginians ransacked the shipwrecked Roman convoy bearing much needed supplies and munitions for Scipio. The Roman leader responded by ravaging towns and crops throughout the region.

The Carthaginians were divided about what they should do: fight on or make an end to the war. Hannibal urged them to fight on and he began to train a new army.

‘The climactic battle was not fought until Autumn 202, seven or eight months after the supply ship’s affair and at the far end of the new campaigning season. Throughout that time Scipio avoided confrontation.” Hoyos argues that if Hannibal had attacked the Romans in this period, before the arrival

65Livy, op. cit., XXXIII, 3, p. 622.

66Hoyos, op. cit., p. 174.
of Masinissa’s forces, he would have found Scipio in a critical position.\textsuperscript{67}

Before the Battle of Zama took place, Hannibal met with Scipio to see if a lenient peace could still be made. He offered to surrender Sicily, Sardinia and Spain but retain Carthage and the African territory. Scipio was in a winning position at this stage, because Masinissa and his Numidian horsemen had joined him, and so he insisted on an unconditional surrender. Livy notes that the negotiations failed and the issue ‘must be decided by blows’.

**Battle of Zama**

It is difficult to identify the exact site of this battle, as there are a number of places with this name.\textsuperscript{68} It is generally thought that the Zama where the battle occurred was 110 kilometres south-west of Carthage. At Zama, it appears that the Romans and Carthaginians were closely matched in terms of numbers.

**Roman troop placement**: the Italian cavalry on the left was commanded by the quaestor Laelius, while the 4000 Numidian cavalry on the right were commanded by Masinissa. (Interestingly, the young Numidian prince Masinissa had been captured by Scipio in Spain and the Roman leader had won him over.) In the centre, Scipio placed the three lines of infantry behind one another so that there were open lanes between them. The hastati or spearmen were in the front line, the principes or leaders formed the second line and the triarii (older, more experienced men) formed the third line. The light-armed troops (velites) were placed in the gaps ready to harass the elephants. This was an unusual formation as the Romans tended to use the quincunx formation (\:\:\:) and use the lightly armed troops to begin the battle.

Scipio also had the advantage of a well-trained army and the soldiers and the officers had served with him for the last three years.

**Carthaginian troop placement**: Hannibal put his 80 trained war elephants in the front line and behind them the mixed infantry of Gauls, Ligurians and Moors. In the second line, he placed the newly trained Carthaginians and Libyans while his best troops were in reserve; the veterans of the Italy campaign were in the third line. It is interesting to note that Hannibal adopted the Roman practice of keeping his best troops in reserve. He placed the Carthaginian cavalry on the right wing and the Numidian cavalry on the left facing Masinissa. Unlike previous battles, Hannibal was not strong in cavalry and this limited his manoeuvres.

Hannibal’s forces at Zama were a disparate group being a mixture of veterans, remnants of other forces and new recruits. There had not been sufficient time to organise them into a cohesive force. This is illustrated by the fact that he addressed only one part of the army before the battle and allowed other commanders to talk to their troops.\textsuperscript{69}

**Battle begins**

Hannibal intended that the elephants would charge the Roman lines, break them up and create chaos. This tactic was ‘neutralized by a simple tactical device of Scipio’s’.\textsuperscript{70} The Roman leader had left lanes between the troops so that the elephants could be herded through and then his troops re-formed their lines. He also ordered his men to make as much noise as possible—shouting, banging on metal—to frighten the animals. Meanwhile, the archers aimed for the mahouts (elephant drivers). These combined manoeuvres worked and some of the elephants panicked and stampeded into their own lines. Masinissa immediately attacked Hannibal’s Numidians and completely routed them. Laelius also used the opportunity to attack and chase the Carthaginian cavalry from the field.

It has been suggested that because Scipio had the advantage in cavalry, Hannibal organised his troops so that the weaker Carthaginian cavalry would entice the Roman/Numidian cavalry away and then his troops would use the double encirclement tactic as they had

\textsuperscript{67}ibid., p. 175.

\textsuperscript{68}See discussion of this issue in Lancel, op. cit., p. 174.

\textsuperscript{69}Livy, op. cit., XXX, 33. p. 661.

\textsuperscript{70}Hoyos, op. cit., p. 177.
done at Cannae. Lazenby questions that Hannibal took such a risk, as it would leave his flanks seriously exposed.\textsuperscript{71}

The first line of Hannibal’s infantry was forced back onto the Carthaginian second line that broke under the Roman onslaught. Hannibals veterans at the back then had to try and stop the Carthaginians from retreating. There was a slight lull in the midst of the battle that enabled Hannibal to re-form his troops on the flanks and engage the Romans. Polybius noted that both sides ‘were equally matched not only in numbers but also in courage, in warlike spirit and in weapons, the issue hung for a long while in the balance’ until the Roman cavalry returned and attacked Hannibal’s forces in the rear.\textsuperscript{72} Hannibal was decisively defeated. He left the battlefield and went to Hadrumentum and then to Carthage where he urged the government to make peace.

\textbf{SOURCE 2.22}

\textit{During the battle he had used every resource which a good general of long experience could be expected to employ…at his meeting with Scipio he had done his utmost by his own single handed efforts to find a solution before the battle…once he had committed himself to battle, he handled the action in such a way that it would have been impossible for any commander with the troops equipped as Hannibal’s then were to make better dispositions against the Romans. The order of battle used by the Roman army is very difficult to break through…He had massed that large force of elephants and stationed them in front of his army with the express purpose of throwing the enemy into confusion and breaking their ranks. He had also drawn up the mercenaries in front with the Carthaginians behind them in the hope that the enemy would become physically exhausted…Meanwhile he kept the most warlike and the steadiest of his fighting troops at some distance in the rear…leaving their strength and spirit unimpaired until he could draw upon their martial qualities at the critical moment. And so if, after having taken every measure that lay within his power to secure victory, this commander who had never before suffered defeat failed in the final outcome, we must excuse him. There are times when Fortune thwarts the plans of the valiant, and others when, as the proverb says, A brave man meets one stronger than himself. This, we may say, is what befell Hannibal on this occasion.}

\textbf{Polybius, The Rise of the Roman Empire, XV, 15, p. 478}

\textsuperscript{71}Lazenby, op. cit., p. 223 comments on this conjecture by other scholars.
\textsuperscript{72}Polybius, op. cit., XV, 14, p. 477.

\section*{Understanding and using the sources}

- Explain how Scipio won the Battle of Zama.
- Polybius states that Hannibal was a good general. What reasons does he present to support his view?
- Using the information provided and the source, do you agree with Polybius’s assessment of the Battle of Zama? Give reasons for your view.
- Add to the list of words describing Hannibal’s leadership/tactics/strategies.

\section*{Results of Zama}

Carthage was reduced to a north African state.
- She became a dependent ally of Rome losing all her territory including Spain.
- All the war elephants were handed over.
- All prisoners and deserters were handed over.
- The warships were destroyed; the Punic fleet was reduced to 10 ships.
- Carthage was unable to wage war without Roman permission.
- Carthage had to pay a large indemnity of 10 000 talents\textsuperscript{73} over 50 years and hand over 100 hostages.
- Masinissa was given all the African land previously held by him or his ancestors as a reward for his work at Zama.
- Hannibal was allowed to live unharmed in Carthage.
- Scipio was given the title ‘Africanus’, in honour of the country he had conquered.
- Victory at Zama meant that Rome controlled the Western Mediterranean.

\section*{Activity}

- Using the information provided, draw up two Mind Maps\textsuperscript{\textregistered} noting the reasons for Roman victory and the reasons for Hannibal’s defeat.

\section*{After Zama: the Romans and Hannibal}

In 201 BC the Romans declared war once more on Philip V of Macedon. Lancel comments that ‘Philip was not threatening Rome and had most carefully refrained from provoking it. But his alliance with Hannibal in 215 had not been forgotten and, even if that alliance had remained something of a dead letter,
Macedonia was still a bogeyman in Roman public opinion.\(^{74}\)

**Hannibal: Carthaginian sufete**

After Zama, Hannibal became a private citizen for a time. The oligarchic government in Carthage experienced problems; they tried to make an indemnity payment to the Romans using debased silver. Hannibal was recalled and elected to the position of sufete in 197 to 195 BC. ‘Public revenues were being lost... there was not enough money to meet the tribute paid to Rome each year and the citizens were threatened with heavy taxation.’\(^{75}\) In response to this, Hannibal argued that the state of Carthage should be rich enough to pay the tribute to the Romans without imposing further burdens on private citizens. Many of the judges and members of the Council had been enriching themselves at state expense and they were furious with Hannibal for his interference. He attempted to eliminate this corruption among state officials and made a number of constitutional reforms that weakened the power of the oligarchs. He reorganised revenues, proposed that judges should serve no more than two years, encouraged commerce and agriculture. His measures were extremely popular with the ordinary citizens of Carthage. Then Hannibal ordered one of the prominent judges to appear before him on financial irregularities. This angered the political factions within the city so much that in 194BC, his political enemies informed Rome that he was intriguing with Antiochus of Syria.

**SOURCE 2.23**

[The Carthaginians claimed that Hannibal’s] spirit was unrelenting and implacable; he was like one of those wild beasts that cannot be tamed by any method; that he was complaining that a country wasting away and mouldering in idleness would be aroused from its torpor only by the clashing of arms. The memory of the previous war, caused as well as waged by this one man, made these accounts seem likely. Hannibal, had moreover, aroused the resentment of many powerful Carthaginians by his recent behaviour.

*Livy, Rome and the Mediterranean, XXXIII, 45, 60, pp. 136–8*

The Senate was greatly concerned about what ‘Hannibal and the Carthaginians would be likely to do, if war should break out with Antiochus’.\(^{76}\) According to Livy, Scipio tried to defend Hannibal—‘he considered that it consorted ill with the dignity of the Roman people to associate themselves with the animosities of Hannibal’s accusers, to add the support of official backing to the factions at Carthage, and, not content with having defeated Hannibal in war, to go on to act as his prosecutors.’\(^{77}\) Despite this, the Romans sent a commission of enquiry to Carthage, and Hannibal, realising ‘that Roman policy was aimed at himself alone’, was forced to flee.

**Understanding and using the sources**

- What does this information and source reveal to us about Hannibal as a political leader?
- Explain the Carthaginian attitudes to Hannibal.
- What does this tell us about the Roman attitudes?

**Hannibal and the Hellenistic East**

After leaving Carthage, Hannibal travelled to Tyre, the mother city that had originally founded Carthage. He then sought asylum with the Seleucid monarch, Antiochus. When the Carthaginians learnt of this, their response was to send ships to arrest Hannibal. His property in Carthage was confiscated, his house was demolished and he was declared an outlaw.\(^{78}\)

Hannibal realised that the Hellenistic kingdoms would soon come into conflict with the power of Rome. He tried to advise them on the best ways to proceed, but some just accused him of stirring anti-Roman feelings. He encouraged Antiochus to attack Italy and supposedly, he even asked for an army to invade Italy. In 190 BC Hannibal commanded the fleet of Antiochus and was defeated in a naval engagement at Side by a Rhodian fleet. When Antiochus was defeated at Magnesia and made peace with the Romans, he was required to hand over Hannibal to them, but once again Hannibal fled.

This time Hannibal fled to Gortyn in Crete and there is an interesting story about his visit there. Polybius VI, pp. 46–7, comments that the Cretans were particularly noted for being greedy. When Hannibal fled from Carthage, he took with him his fortune in gold and

\(^{74}\)Lancel, op. cit., p. 187.
\(^{75}\)Livy, *Rome and the Mediterranean*, XXXIII, 46, p. 137.
\(^{76}\)ibid., XXXIII, 45, p. 60.
\(^{77}\)ibid., XXXIII, 47, p. 138.
silver coins. He placed most of this fortune into large bronze statues and placed them in full view in his garden. He also placed some large jars in the temple of Artemis where the Cretans guarded them. In the temple jars, Hannibal had placed a layer of gold and silver coins on top but beneath that they were filled with lead.

**Understanding and using the sources**

- What does this story reveal about Hannibal?
- **Extension exercise:** the modern historian
  Lancel comments that this could be an example of hagiography. Look up the word ‘hagiography’ in a dictionary. What do you think?

From passing references in a number of sources it appears that after leaving Crete, Hannibal spent some time in the court of Artaxias of Armenia, advising him about a new capital. He then sought refuge with Prusias of Bithynia, where he became his military adviser in a war against Eumenes of Pergamum and, according to Pliny the Elder, also advised Prusias about the building of a new capital at Prusa. This shows there was another dimension to Hannibal than just a military leader.

Nepos reports that in a naval battle with Eumenes, Hannibal devised the strategy of throwing earthenware jars at the enemy ships. ‘At first these projectiles excited the laughter of the combatants, and they could not understand what it meant. But as soon as they saw their ships filled with snakes, terrified by the strange weapons and not knowing how to avoid them, they turned their ships about and retreated. Thus Hannibal overcame the arms of Pergamum by strategy; and that was not the only instance of this kind, but on many other occasions in land battles he defeated his antagonists by a similar bit of cleverness.’

**For discussion**

- Was Hannibal an ‘old harmless bird’ or did the Romans have reason to fear him still?

**Impact in his lifetime**

Hannibal’s influence did not die with him. Is it valid to ask what impact did Hannibal have on the period in which he lived?

In 184 BC, when the Roman consul Titus Quinctius Flamininus heard that Hannibal was in the kingdom of Pergamum he informed the Senate. The Romans believed that ‘while Hannibal lived they would never be free from plots’. King Prusias was ordered to hand Hannibal over to the Romans. He did not dare to oppose the Romans but he did not want to violate the laws of hospitality so he informed the Romans that they would have to take Hannibal from his ‘place of abode’. Even at the end of his life Hannibal showed that he was no fool; according to Plutarch, Hannibal ‘had always distrusted the weakness of Prusias and feared the Romans’, so his house had numerous exits and entrances and seven underground tunnels. The Romans surrounded the stronghold at Libyssa where Hannibal was living. Hannibal sent out a slave to see if he was indeed surrounded on every side and whether there was any chance of escape. When he realised there was no way out this time, he committed suicide by drinking from a poisoned cup rather than be taken by the Romans. Hannibal was 64 years old when he died in 183 BC.

Plutarch comments that there were varied responses to his death. Some felt that Flamininus was ‘odious and cruel’ to kill an old harmless bird like Hannibal and that he only did it to win glory and so that his name ‘might be associated with the death of Hannibal’. Comparisons were made with Scipio who had treated Hannibal with clemency and honour after Zama. Others responded to Hannibal’s death by praising what Flamininus had done. They believed that ‘as long as he was alive, [Hannibal] was a consuming fire which needed only to be fanned’ and they feared ‘his ability and experience coupled with his ingrained bitterness and hostility’.

---

79Lancel, op. cit., p. 206.
80ibid., p. 207.
81Nepos, op. cit., ch. 11.
The Romans believed that it was his influence that caused the problems with the kings and rulers of the Hellenistic East and that it was his ‘reputed connection with Eumenes that filled all Asia with wars and rebellions’.86

‘The Second Macedonian war and the war with Antiochus can thus be seen to have had direct links with the Hannibalic War, even if Rome’s involvement in the east was not as inevitable as her commitments in northern Italy and in Spain, and it can certainly be argued that but for Philip’s fatal alliance with Hannibal in 215, Rome’s empire would at least have been far slower to extend eastwards across the Adriatic.’87

Impact beyond his lifetime

Many scholars have written about the importance of Hannibal and the impact that the Second Punic War had on the development of the Roman empire. They include Arnold Toynbee’s two volume work, Hannibal’s Legacy: The Hannibalic War’s Effects on Roman Life. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine in depth all the ways that Hannibal may have influenced the Roman world. The main impacts can be summarised as follows.

- The Third Punic War and the destruction of the city of Carthage was part of Hannibal’s impact: ‘There is also a certain inevitability about the final conflict between Rome and Carthage, and, looking back from this distance in time, it is tempting to see it as a final legacy from Hannibal to both nations, though he had been dead for over 30 years before it broke out.’88

- The pressure of the Second Punic War resulted in significant changes to the Roman political system, e.g. allowing military leaders to have extended commands and expanding the number of magistrates to accommodate the growth in Rome’s territories.

- Development of Italian nationalism.

- Provided the stimulus for the growth of Latin over Greek or other cultures.

- The devastation caused by Hannibal’s armies in Italy and the scorched earth strategy of Fabius Maximus led to a significant exodus of people from rural areas of Italy.

- The Hannibalic war further affected Italian agriculture when small farms were replaced by the growth of large estates run on slave labour and the decrease in the number of free peasants.

- The encirclement tactics Hannibal used at Cannae have been studied by military greats throughout history including Napoleon, Clausewitz, Schlieffen, and Montgomery and in recent times, Norman Schwarzkopf. His tactics and strategies continue to be studied in military colleges. Barbara Tuchman explains the influence of Hannibal on the German strategy for the First World War. ‘To achieve decisive victory, Schlieffen fixed upon a strategy derived from Hannibal and the battle of Cannae. The dead general who mesmerised Schlieffen had been dead a very long time. Two thousand years had passed since Hannibal’s classic double envelopment of the Romans at Cannae. “Field gun and machine gun had replaced bow and slingshot”, Schlieffen wrote, “but the principles of strategy remain unchanged. The enemy’s front is not the objective. The essential thing is to crush the enemy’s flanks…and complete the extermination by attack upon his rear.”’89

Assessment of life and career

It is a difficult task to assess the life and career of Hannibal accurately because the sources have generally been influenced by the victors. There are no Carthaginian sources on Hannibal. All the sources do agree that he was a military genius—‘by common consent one of the world’s greatest soldiers’ (Oxford Classical Dictionary). This military genius was demonstrated by:

- his extraordinary tactical skill

- his capacity for leadership which commanded the loyalty of mercenary troops

- his development of the Hellenistic system of combining infantry and cavalry until he could surround and annihilate the enemy.

The modern military genius Napoleon Bonaparte wrote this glowing assessment of Hannibal: ‘This most daring of all men, perhaps the most astonishing; so bold, so assured, so broad of vision in all things; who at the age of twenty six conceives what is scarcely conceivable and carries out what is deemed impossible; who, giving up all communication with his own land, passes through hostile or unknown peoples whom he must attack and conquer, scales the Pyrenees and the Alps, that were thought insurmountable, and comes down into Italy paying with half his army merely to attain a battlefield and the right to fight; who occupies, overrun and rules this same Italy for sixteen years, on several occasions places the terrible

86ibid., 21.6.
87Lazenby, op. cit., p. 245.
88ibid., p. 245.
and fearsome Rome within inches of its downfall, and leaves his prey only when Rome profits from the lessons he has taught to go and fight him on his home ground.⁹⁰

His later career shows that he was not just a soldier; it reveals that he was also a statesman and a diplomat. His strategical plans and reforms for Carthage and his alliances with other leaders in the Mediterranean world illustrate this.

**Legacy**

During his lifetime and in the immediate aftermath, the Romans viewed Hannibal as a ‘bogeyman’. By the time of Juvenal in the first century AD, he was treated with irony and had become the subject of Roman school work. (See Source 2.24.) Many Romans believed he was a war criminal and accused him of perfidy (of violating trust and breaking treaties). He was particularly accused of this because of his methods of waging war, using surprise attacks, raids and ambushes. He was often accused of cruelty. For example, the first century philosopher and writer Seneca reported that Hannibal gazed on a trench filled with human blood and exclaimed ‘what a marvellous sight’. None of the writers bothered to check the truthfulness of the stories and the rumours they so gleefully recount.⁹¹

The fear of Carthage had receded somewhat by the time of Augustus who developed a new city on that site and made it the capital of Roman Africa. However, certain names still had an emotional charge that aroused fear and loathing. A senator in the reign of Domitian who named two of his slaves Mago and Hannibal was executed for this and other conspiracy charges.

Throughout the ages there have been numerous artworks and plays about the Punic leader. He has generally been typecast as the epic hero who meets a tragic end and his name will forever be associated with elephants. Even in the 21st century Hannibal continues to arouse interest; there are two films being made of his exploits.

---

⁹⁰Lancel, op. cit., p. 223.
⁹¹ibid., p. 219.
This is the man for whom Africa
Was too small a continent, though it stretched from the
surf beaten
Ocean shores of Morocco east to the steamy Nile,
To tribal Ethiopia, and new elephants’ habitats.
Now Spain swells his empire, now he surmounts
The Pyrenees. Nature sets in his path
High Alpine passes, blizzards of snow; but he splits
The very rocks asunder, moves mountains with vinegar.
Now Italy is his, yet still he forces on:
‘We have accomplished nothing,’ he cries, ‘till we have
stormed
The gates of Rome, till our Carthaginian standard
Is set in the City’s heart.’ A fine sight it must have been,
Fit subject for caricature—the one eyed commander
Perched on his monstrous beast! Alas, alas for glory,
What an end was here: the defeat, the ignominious
Headlong flight into exile, everyone gawping at
The once mighty Hannibal turned humble hanger-on,
Sitting outside the door of a petty Eastern despot
Till His Majesty deign to wake. No sword, no spear,
No battle-flung stone was to snuff the fiery spirit
That once had wrecked a world; those crushing defeats,
Those rivers of spilt blood were all wiped out by a
Ring, a poisoned ring. On, on, you madman, drive
Over your savage Alps, to thrill young schoolboys
And supply a theme for speech day recitations!

\textbf{Juvenal Satire X, lines 148–67, quoted in \textit{Livy}},
The War with Hannibal, trans. \textit{Aubrey de Selincourt}, p. 7

For further reading

\begin{itemize}
\item Detailed analysis of Hannibal’s impact and legacy on Carthage, Rome and the Mediterranean world can be found in a number of scholarly works such as in Lazenby chapter 8, Lancel chapter 9, and Hoyos pp. 200–11.
\item Draw up a chart with three headings: Carthage, Rome and the Mediterranean world. Read one or all of these scholars and make a list of the points each writer makes about Hannibal’s impact/influence/legacy under these headings.
\end{itemize}

Ancient and modern interpretations of Hannibal

\begin{itemize}
\item Hannibal the Carthaginian, son of Hamilcar. If it be true, as no one doubts, that the Roman people have surpassed all other nations in valor, it must be admitted that Hannibal excelled all other commanders in skill as much as the Roman people are superior to all nations in bravery. For as often as he engaged with that people in Italy, he invariably came off victor, and if his strength had not been impaired by the jealousy of his fellow citizens at home, he would have been able to conquer the Romans. But the disparagement of the multitude overcame the courage of one man. Yet after all, he so cherished the hatred of the Romans which had, as it were, been left him as an inheritance by his father, that he would have given up his life rather than renounce it. Indeed, even after he had been driven from his native land and was dependent on the aid of foreigners, he never ceased to war with the Romans in spirit.

\textit{Cornelius Nepos}, Hannibal, chapter 1
\end{itemize}
Figure 2.23  Hannibal Barca
acccusations of perfidy and cruelty deriving from Roman propaganda) that counts and that has given to the Hannibalic War its epic quality and invested his name with undying glamour.

N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (eds), The Oxford Classical Dictionary, p. 487

SOURCE 2.27
Hannibal, like his father before him, was pre-eminently a warrior. But he was not a fanatic and he knew how to compromise in order to accommodate the wide ethnic diversity of the various national and tribal contingents that formed his army. He was therefore a leader who may serve as a model for all those holding international appointments. He led by example, fully understanding the capabilities and limitations of those he commanded. He was also mentally and physically robust, imaginative and so innovative, fearless without being foolhardy, unswerving in pursuit of his objective, outstandingly competent professionally, through intelligent study, and ruthless when necessary.

Nigel Bagnall, The Punic Wars, p. 332

SOURCE 2.28
Hannibal is a curious character historically. We know quite a lot about Hannibal as a general, leader and indeed as a politician. We know very little of Hannibal the man compared to say Alexander the Great. We know very little about his family, his tastes, about the sort of things he enjoyed. We are not even sure how Hannibal appeared.

Quote from video Hannibal, Greatest Heroes in History

SOURCE 2.29
I hardly know whether Hannibal was not more wonderful when fortune was against him than in his hours of success. Fighting for thirteen years in enemy territory, far from home, with varying fortunes and an army composed not of native troops but of a hotch-potch of the riff-raff of all nationalities, men who shared neither law nor custom nor language, who differed in manner, in dress, in equipment, who had in common neither the forms of religious observance nor even the gods they served, he yet was able, somehow or other, to weld this motley crowd so firmly together that they never quarrelled amongst themselves nor mutinied against their general, though money to pay them was often lacking and provisions to feed them were often short.

Livy, The War with Hannibal, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt, XXVIII, 12, p. 512

SOURCE 2.30
The renewal of interest in Antiquity in present times especially favours Hannibal, for two or three features which are his, and his alone. Just as the war he waged against Rome was the first world war, its leader was the first international hero the world had ever known. He was international not only for the breadth of his field of action, which extended to the Orient during his time in exile…The most famous Carthaginian is a paradox because, apart from his early childhood, he spent only a few short years in Carthage, and of those years tradition retains only the year of his suffetate for certain. Nevertheless, his acquaintance in his youth with Iberian societies and cultures, then his approach to the Celtic world and, lastly and chiefly, the strong attraction that must have been exerted on him by the Campanian and Samnite lands, the Greek towns of southern Italy, and later the cities of the Hellenized east, never erased his feeling of belonging to a native culture, to a religion that remained original and strict despite external contributions, or his loyalty to his Punic homeland.

S. Lancel, Hannibal, pp. 223–4

SOURCE 2.31
Livy also accuses Hannibal of cruelty and avarice…but he too records few actual atrocities, or indeed, examples of treachery…As against these generalised accusations we may set Hannibal’s chivalrous attitudes towards dead foes…A possibly authentic trait, since it has survived despite the conventionalised portrait of the grim avenger, is the wry sense of humour which lies behind many of the anecdotes told about Hannibal…But it is as a general that Hannibal really comes alive. Because it failed in the end, the astonishing strategic insight that lay behind his march to Italy is all too easy to overlook, yet few generals in history would have dreamed of such a plan, let alone have put it into operation.

J. F. Lazenby, Hannibal’s War, p. 255
Activity

- Use the sources given and draw up a chart listing the strengths and weaknesses of Hannibal’s character and actions.
- From the sources provided in this chapter, explain the changing interpretation over time of Hannibal’s character and personality.

CONCLUSION

Goldsworthy sums up Hannibal rather well when he says that: ‘The true character of Hannibal eludes us. None of our sources provide the equivalent of the anecdotes told about the childhood and family life of the important Greek and Roman politicians of the era, many of whom were the subject of detailed biographies. We can say a good deal about what Hannibal did during his career, and often understand how he did it, but we can say virtually nothing with any certainty about what sort of man he was. As with so many other things that we simply do not know, that even our sources probably did not understand. Was Hannibal for instance a Hellenized aristocrat who dreamed of copying and surpassing the great expeditions of Alexander or Pyrrhus, or did he remain very much the Punic nobleman with a very different set of beliefs and ambitions? Much as we try to understand Hannibal, he will always remain an enigma.’

Activity: revision

- Briefly describe Hannibal’s career up to 218 BC.
- Explain why Hannibal invaded Italy.
- Explain the difficulties that Hannibal encountered on his journey to Italy.
- Describe how Hannibal defeated the Romans at Lake Trasimene.
- Assess the importance of the Battle of Cannae for both Carthage and Rome.
- Explain the importance of the Battle at the River Metaurus for both the Carthaginians and the Romans.
- Evaluate Hannibal’s abilities as a general.
- Explain why Hannibal was forced to leave Italy and return to Carthage.
- Explain why Hannibal was unable to defeat the Romans.
- Assess the career of Hannibal in the years after Zama (202 BC–183 BC).