

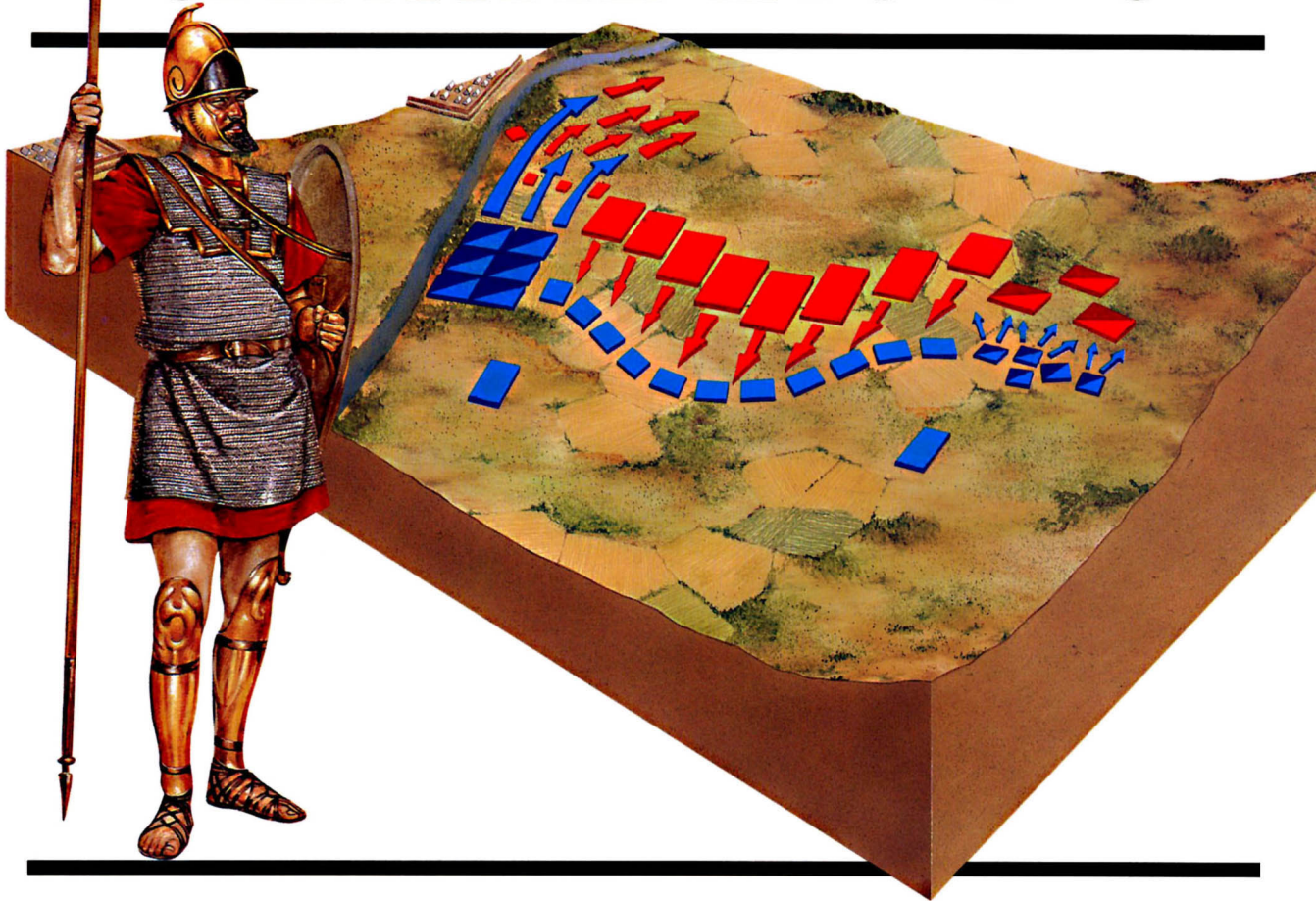
GENERAL EDITOR DAVID G. CHANDLER

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36

# CANNAE 216 BC



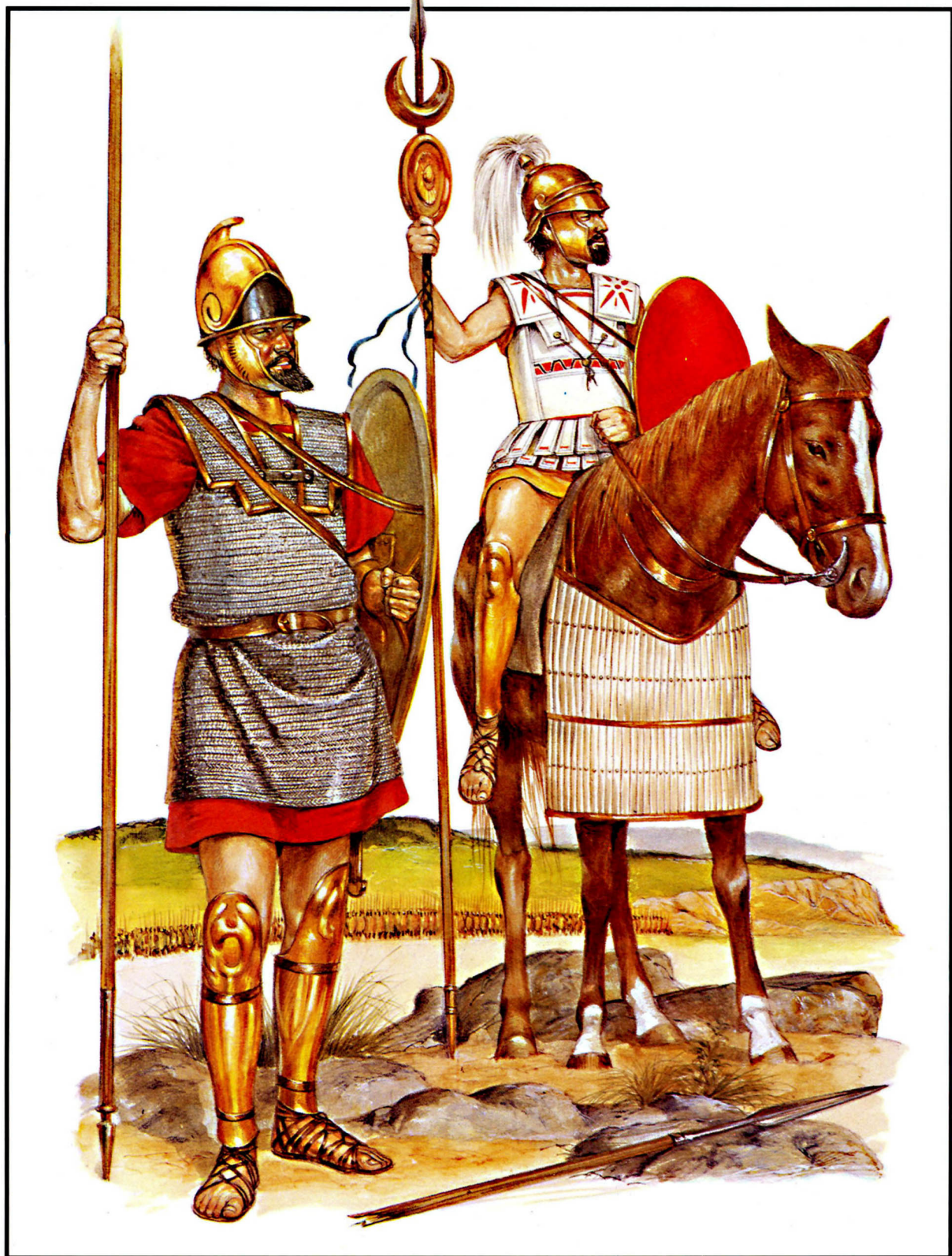
## HANNIBAL SMASHES ROME'S ARMY

MARK HEALY

# CANNAE 216 BC

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## HANNIBAL SMASHES ROME'S ARMY

MARK HEALY

◀ *The heavy African infantry illustrated on the left of this plate wears a mail lorica stripped from a dead legionary after the Battle of Lake Trasimene. By the time of Cannae, Hannibal had equipped many of his troops with captured equipment so that Livy was able to observe that on the day of the battle the Africans looked like Romans. Others may have worn a full Roman panoply, but the example here is still equipped*

*with his Macedonian-type helmet, shield and long pike. The mounted figure well illustrates the Greek style panoply of an African heavy infantryman prior to 217. The linen cuirass and pteruges were clearly felt by Hannibal to be less effective than the heavy mail shirts. The crescent and the disk are thought to be accurate renderings of Carthaginian standards. (Painting by Richard Hook)*

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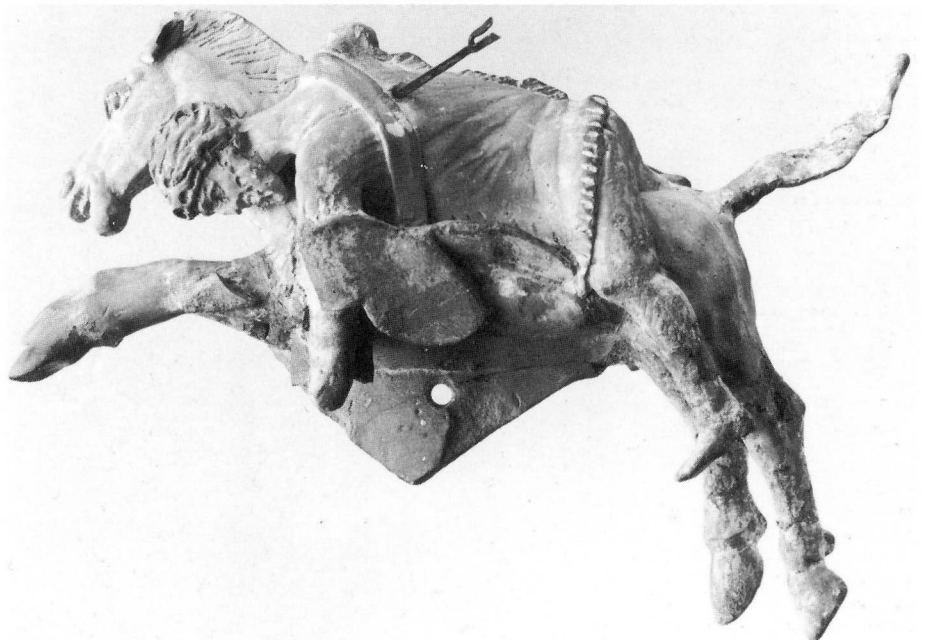


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◀ Although this carving from Trajan's column depicts Berber cavalry, like many Roman depictions of non-Roman troops, it is highly stylised. The hair and dress could equally represent Numidian cavalry from the Punic Wars period. (Courtesy of David Nicolle)

▶ Terracotta statuette of a falling Numidian warrior from southern Italy, 3rd to 2nd centuries BC. (Louvre Museum, 5223, Paris)





# INTRODUCTION

It has been the verdict of most historians, whether ancient or modern, that the immediate cause of the Second Punic War was Hannibal's capture of the Spanish city of Saguntum in 219 BC. While marking the formal outbreak of hostilities between Rome and Carthage, however, it was in reality the climax of a series of developments, following the First Punic War, that made conflict between these two powers certain. The notion of an embittered and economically revived Carthage living in peace alongside a dynamic and expansionist Roman state was unlikely, when it was only a matter of time before they clashed in the one area where their interests were bound to coincide – in Spain. While there is much to suggest that neither Carthage nor Rome deliberately engineered this new war, the fall of Saguntum nevertheless precipitated the inevitable conflict that would decide the great question that lay unresolved at the heart of their mutual antagonism: which of them would control the western Mediterranean? An issue of such import could

never have been resolved by diplomacy – only war could determine its outcome. Once hostilities commenced, the strategy chosen by Hannibal to further the cause of Carthage was so audacious, and his mastery of the battlefield in the Italian theatre so overwhelming, that he came very near to extinguishing the Roman state. Consciousness of how perilously close the enterprise of Rome came to disaster at his hands goes far to explain how deeply the name of this Carthaginian general became etched on the collective psyche of the Roman people in the centuries that followed. 'Hannibal ad portas' retained its efficacy as a rallying cry for Romans in times of national distress and as a potent threat on the lips of every Roman matron until the end of the Empire. In the two years following his invasion of Italy, Hannibal humbled and decimated the citizen legions of Rome in a number of great battles. The high water mark of his campaign occurred in 216, when at Cannae he inflicted upon his numerically superior enemy, the greatest defeat ever suffered by



◀▶ Few remains of the original city of Carthage which pre-date its destruction by the Romans in the Third Punic War in 146 BC exist today. Those remains seen on the site date from Roman times and later. The site was first settled by the Phoenicians of Tyre c.814 and was named by them Kart-Hadasht meaning 'new city', which is rendered in Latin as Carthago. By the time Carthage and Rome came into open conflict in 264 BC, the former power had a mighty commercial empire and had been the domi-

Roman arms. He did so by employing tactics that even today are regarded as the classic example of victory secured through the double envelopment of the enemy.

### The Causes of the Second Punic War

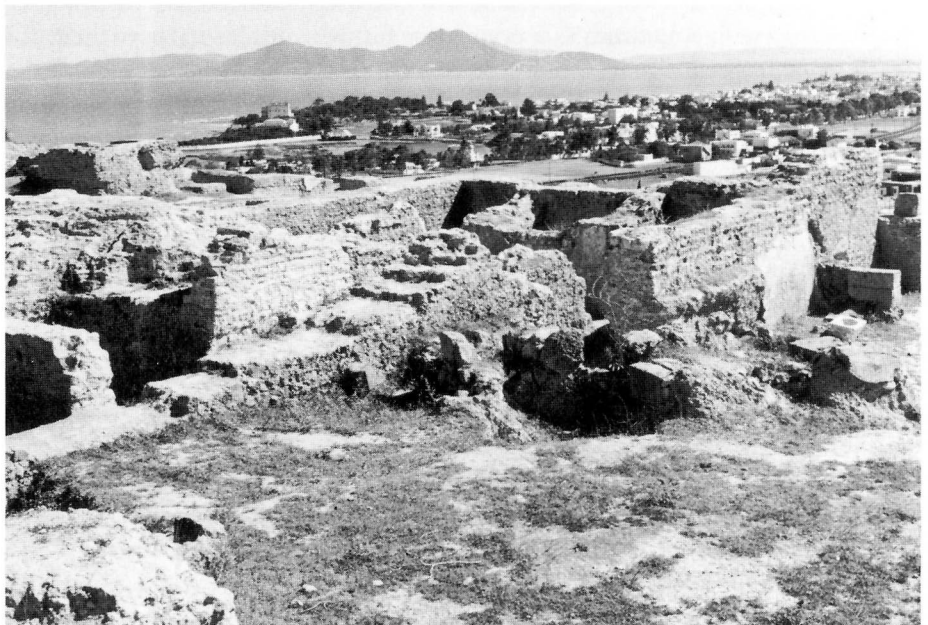
It was at an early age that Hannibal acquired the animus towards Rome that was to motivate him so strongly throughout his life. Growing up in the formative shadow of his illustrious father, Hamilcar Barca, Hannibal could not help but be influenced by the bitterness and resentment felt by Hamilcar Barca and many in Carthage towards Rome. While such feelings arose naturally from their defeat in the First Punic War, it was Rome's behaviour towards Carthage in the years following that conflict that fanned the flames of hate and sowed the seeds for a war of revenge.

Following the decisive Roman naval victory off the Aegates Islands in 241, the Carthaginian Sufete (Senate) empowered Hamilcar to sue for peace after twenty three exhausting years of war. A victorious Rome demanded that their Punic enemy pay a high price for ending the hostilities. Carthage was required to evacuate Sicily and to pay a huge war indemnity of 3,300 talents over a period of just ten years. While such painful terms had to be borne, it was Roman actions in the three years fol-

lowing the end of the First Punic War that prompted the undying enmity of Hamilcar and the Barcids. In 237 Rome seized Sardinia from Carthage. By so doing, she was technically breaking the peace treaty of 241. When the latter prepared to reoccupy the island, an ultimatum from Rome forced the Carthaginians into a humiliating climb-down, which was compounded when a further indemnity of 1,200 talents was levied. Polybius observed that the Carthaginians 'deeply resented the injustice, but were powerless to prevent it'.

As a trading nation, the economic consequences for Carthage of the loss of Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica were grave. It was in search of compensation that Hamilcar was dispatched to Spain to re-establish the Carthaginian position there. The region had long been important to Carthage for the supply of vital raw materials and as a recruiting ground for mercenary manpower for her army. It was to carve out an empire in Spain that Hamilcar landed there with his army, Hannibal and his son-in-law Hasdrubal, in 237. In the years that followed, Hamilcar conducted a highly effective campaign in the peninsula. Subsequent interpretations by historians of his policy there, and also of his longer term intentions, have been mixed. However, there are sound reasons for believing, as did Livy, that 'Hamilcar's ultimate object was an enterprise of far greater moment, and

*nant power in the western Mediterranean for the previous three centuries. Notwithstanding treaties of mutual recognition and trade regulation dating to 508 and 348, Roman domination of the Italian peninsula brought her into inevitable conflict with Carthage over Sicily. The 24-year war was described by the Greek historian Polybius as 'the most continuous of which we have knowledge'. The peace that followed would seem to have been but a truce before the struggle resumed. (Tunisian Tourist Office)*



that had he lived the invasion of Italy would have taken place under Hamilcar's leadership'.

The policy of conquest continued when Hasdrubal assumed command, following Hamilcar's death in 229. Hasdrubal's military success was allied to his deft employment of diplomacy, through which he forged alliances with many Spanish tribes. It is most unlikely that Rome was unaware of Carthage's burgeoning military power under Hasdrubal. The city of Massilia (Marseilles) had strong economic interests in Spain and was highly suspicious of Carthaginian expansion there. As a long time 'friend of Rome' it was in her best interests to make such intelligence available to Rome, and it was probably in response to Massilia's promptings that Rome formally intervened in 226 to limit Hasdrubal's northward advance. The treaty agreed between Hasdrubal and Rome required that the Carthaginians would not cross the River Ebro in arms. The treaty however made no mention at all of the city of Saguntum. Lying some 140 kilometres to the south of the Ebro, its status in the light of the treaty was clearly anomalous. According to Polybius, the people of Saguntum had 'placed themselves under the protection of Rome' some years before 226; the exact date when this was done is problematic, but it may have been as early as 231. That this relationship was possibly an established fact by 226 perhaps explains Carthaginian acquiescence in the situation, the proviso being that Rome did not use its friendship with Saguntum as a pretext for future interference in Spain. It was, however, exactly that perception – mistaken or otherwise – that led to Saguntum becoming the *casus belli* between Rome and Carthage just seven years later.

### Hannibal and Saguntum

When Hasdrubal was assassinated in 221 the army in Spain unanimously appointed Hannibal as his successor. At 25 years old, he was chosen 'notwithstanding his youth because he had already shown that he combined a daring spirit with a quick and fertile brain'. Hannibal reverted to his father's policy of military conquest and rapidly advanced northwards to the Ebro line. In the meantime, events within the city of Saguntum initiated a series of developments that would lead to the outbreak of

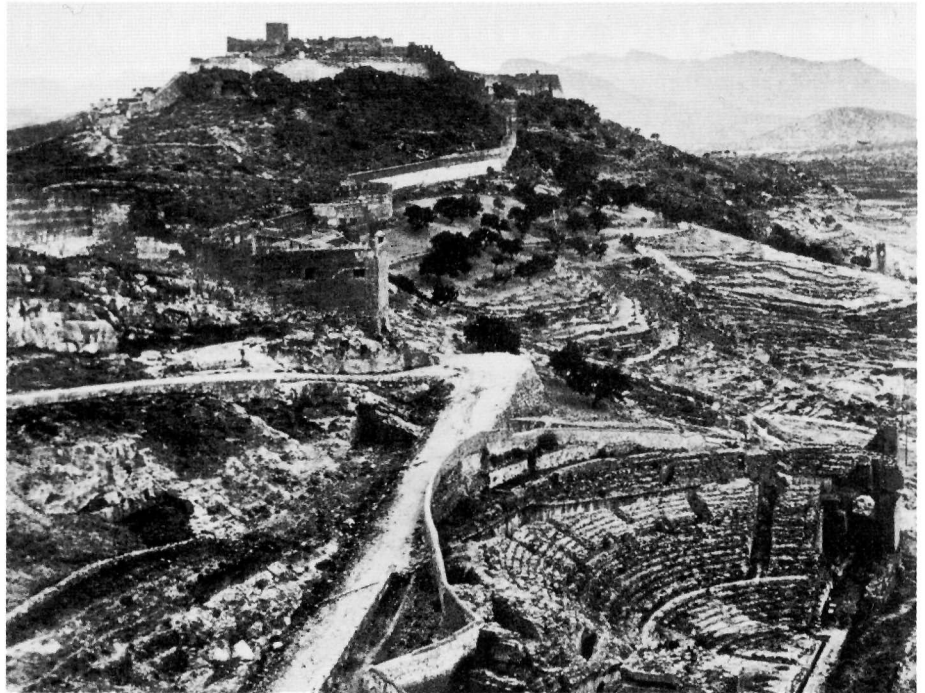
war between Rome and Carthage. At some juncture prior to Hannibal's return to New Carthage in the winter of 220/219, a serious dispute had broken out in Saguntum between respective factions favouring the support of Rome and Carthage. The former called upon Rome to arbitrate in the dispute. A delegation was dispatched by the Senate and a solution found; but in the process a number of citizens of the pro-Carthaginian group were executed. It was possibly this same Roman delegation that now visited Hannibal and demanded he forego intervention in the internal affairs of Saguntum and abide by the treaty of 226 not to advance beyond the Ebro. Hannibal's indignant response was to assert that Carthaginian citizens had been killed and that he was also obliged to uphold the justice of their cause. He decided to refer the matter to the Suffete in Carthage, who in their turn advised Hannibal to deal with the problem as he saw fit.

Matters had now come to a decisive pass, and Hannibal had to weigh carefully the consequences of whatever course of action he chose to pursue. There was little hesitation in his response. In submitting to the judgement of Hannibal, the Suffete was fully cognisant that he would choose to oppose the Roman demands – indeed he could hardly do otherwise. They were as aware as he that for Carthage to acquiesce to Rome in this matter would provide them with a precedent to justify future interference in Spanish affairs – and that was as unacceptable to them as Hannibal.

Although Hannibal could not be fully certain of a militant Roman response to the attack on Saguntum in April 219, he nevertheless proceeded on the assumption that war would follow. In that sense the attack on Saguntum must be seen as the overture to the invasion of Italy. Saguntum's capture was necessary, for Hannibal could not leave this pro-Roman city as an unconquered 'bridge-head' deep in his rear. He was thus setting his Spanish house in order prior to initiating his main strategy the following year. Nor could he have been unaware that to have this new conflict begin in Spain also served his longer term strategy by encouraging the Romans to believe that Spain would be the major theatre of the war.

Rome's response to the plight of Saguntum was to do nothing. Yet when news of its fall finally

► *Hannibal's decision to lay siege to, and carry by storm, the Spanish city of Saguntum in 219 was the event that brought about the Second Punic War. (Spanish Tourist Office).*



reached Rome in February 218 it produced a profound shock among the members of the Senate. That they should have reacted so was not at all surprising. They had assumed that the forcible presentation of Rome's position on Saguntum to Hannibal the previous winter would have been sufficient to deter him from taking military action against the city. Intimidation based upon bluff was the essence of their policy, for such had succeeded before with Carthage. Now that the bluff had been called it would appear they were uncertain as to what course of action to pursue. If this were so, then the fall of Saguntum was not automatically perceived as a *casus belli* by everyone in the Senate, and it was now witness to some lively debate over the future course of action.

A number of sources speak of heated exchanges of views between members of the Senate, some of whom demanded an immediate declaration of war while others counselled a more careful policy, including sending a delegation to Carthage. It is possible even at this early juncture to discern the clash of factional interests that was to form a major element in the senatorial disputes over strategy throughout the Hannibalic War. It is certainly a significant theme in our understanding of Roman politics in the period leading up to Cannae. There was

without doubt a complex of motivations governing the deliberations in the Senatorial body. It would seem reasonable however to presume that underlying all rational debate in the Senate lay a genuine atavistic fear of the ambitions of a revived former enemy who barely a generation earlier had been defeated in the greatest and most costly war Rome had yet fought.

After much debate it was agreed by the Senate that an embassy would be sent to Carthage armed with a provisional declaration of war. They were to place before the Suffete a simple alternative. Give up Hannibal and his staff – thereby accepting that he had attacked Saguntum of his own volition – and disown him or Rome would declare war. It was Livy who described one of the most dramatic scenes from ancient history when in about mid-May 218 the Roman delegation was brought before the Carthaginian Senate. One of the delegation, Fabius, heard the Carthaginian refusal to hand over Hannibal then 'laid his hand on the fold of his toga where he had gathered it at his breast and "Here", he said, "we bring you peace and war. Take which you will". Scarcely had he spoken when the answer no less proudly rang out: "Whichever you please – we do not care." Fabius let the gathered folds fall and cried: "We give you war." The Carthaginian sena-



# The Western Mediterranean 241–218 BC



tors replied as one man: “We accept it: and in the same spirit we will fight to the end.”

## Hannibal’s Strategy

For eight months Saguntum withstood the assault of the Carthaginian army before finally succumbing towards the end of 219. Hannibal retired to New Carthage to begin preparations for the invasion of Italy the following year. While he never wrote memoirs that allow us access to his thinking on the strategy he formulated to defeat Rome, it is possible to identify those factors instrumental in its design. It is clear that he never entertained the notion of a *defensive* war against Rome, for such would have been fundamentally at variance with the primary motivation of the Barcid house in the event of a new conflict. The fundamental aim of Carthage and the motor of Hannibal’s strategy was quite simply to reverse the outcome of the First Punic War. A defensive strategy wherein Carthage allowed Rome to seize the initiative and dictate that Spain become

the main theatre of war could never have realised this end. We must assume Hannibal had determined that the only means whereby Carthage could triumph over the Roman Republic was by defeating her on land – and in Italy itself.

While the First Punic War had witnessed many land battles, its outcome had none the less been determined by sea power. Rome’s greatest achievement in that conflict had been to wrest command of the seas from Carthage. Remarkable though this maritime triumph had been, it could not mask Rome’s true nature as essentially a land power. Hannibal had discerned that only by attacking the basis of her military superiority could Carthage hope to triumph over her. This lay in the very large resources of manpower available for annual service in the Roman Army. By way of example, Polybius quotes figures of more than 700,000 infantry and 70,000 cavalry available for service in 225, adding the rider that they ‘show how great was the power which Hannibal later ventured to attack’. Yet attack he did in spite of the knowledge that Rome’s

◀ By the terms of the peace treaty that ended the First Punic War in 241, Carthage was forced to cede Sicily, which became Rome's first province. Three years later, Rome forced Carthage to acquiesce in her seizure of Corsica and Sardinia. To recompense herself for these territorial and economic losses, Carthage turned to Spain where she moved to re-establish her influence and embarked upon a policy of sustained military conquest. Under the leadership, first of Hamilcar Barca, then after 229 of his son-in-law Hasdrubal, Carthaginian military success was such that in 226 the Romans moved to limit her advance northwards to the line of the River Ebro (1). Either before or after this date the city of Saguntum (2) entered into a pact of friendship with Rome. Following Hannibal Barca's succession to the command in 221, the Carthaginians resumed their policy of conquest in Spain. A dispute over Saguntum led to Hannibal putting the city to siege in the spring of 219. Its fall was regarded by Rome as a *casus belli*. Over the winter of 219/218 Hannibal prepared to invade Italy. Having first sent reinforcements to Africa, he left New

Carthage in early June and crossed the Ebro with his army about mid-July. The crossing point of the River Rhône (3) was reached about 20 September. In the meantime a Roman army of two legions under the consul P. Cornelius Scipio the Elder had landed at Massilia (4). A few days later there was a skirmish between Roman and Numidian cavalry, but Scipio had missed Hannibal, who now moved into the Alps. Scipio ordered his brother to take the two legions on to Spain; he returned rapidly to Italy with the news of Hannibal's intentions and to take command of Roman forces in northern Italy. The Senate reacted promptly and ordered the other consul for 218, T. Sempronius Longus, to return with his legions from Sicily (5) where they were preparing to invade Africa and come to Scipio's aid. Hannibal arrived in northern Italy after a gruelling passage of the Alps on or about 8 November. The first clash took place at the River Ticinus (6) where the Romans were defeated. By mid-December, Sempronius and his troops had joined Scipio on the Trebbia (7), and on the 22nd the first great battle was fought.

strength in terms of manpower was of an order Carthage could never ever hope to equal.

While there can be no doubting his absolute

confidence in his own military ability, Hannibal was too much the realist to entertain seriously the notion that he could ever extinguish such a colossal quanti-

▶ Although Carthage could still dispose of a sizeable navy in 218 it was the reality of a numerically superior Roman fleet that precluded Hannibal considering an amphibious descent on the Italian coast. This relief of a Roman trireme dates from the 1st century BC but retains the characteristics of its Punic War forbears in the prominent ram and prow, and naval infantry carried to board enemy vessels. From the Temple of Fortuna at Praeneste.





tative advantage on the battlefield. Herein lies the crux of Hannibal's strategy – for his invasion of Italy was never predicated on the assumption that Rome's defeat could be secured solely by military means. His employment of his army was above all directed towards the realisation of an explicitly *political* aim. By invading Italy, Hannibal sought to undermine Roman power by destroying the political confederation that linked the Republic with her allies. It was this political mechanism that provided Rome's vast manpower advantage, for every Latin colony and Italian ally was required by treaty to provide military units to serve beside the legions of the Roman state. If he could detach these allies from their political allegiance, or at least induce them to stay neutral, this must make a profound impact on the totality of Roman military might. Such, he believed, could only be achieved when the allies became convinced that the power and credibility of the Roman army, as the ultimate sanction of the Republic's political authority, had been shattered beyond salvation by repeated defeats at his hands. Nor was he merely drawing upon baseless optimism in believing this could happen. Intelligence drawn from a variety of sources on the political mood in Italy led him to believe that there were more than a few allies who needed little incentive to defect from the Roman Confederation.

It was in order to encourage these doubts that Hannibal set out to capture the 'hearts and minds' of these allies. No sooner did he arrive in Italy than he took every opportunity to declare that his fight was with Rome and not her allies, and by releasing allied prisoners after his victories. As we shall see, the greatest success of this policy followed Rome's catastrophic defeat at Cannae, when virtually the whole of southern Italy defected from Rome. It was his hope that beyond a certain point Roman manpower losses in battle and the subsequent defection of her allies would so denude Roman power that she would be forced to sue for peace.

The most remarkable aspect of this whole strategy was that Hannibal was aware how limited would be the military resources available to him to address this massive task. Although crossing the Alps would grant him the vitally important element of surprise, there can be little doubt Hannibal fully appreciated that his army would suffer very heavy losses as it

wound its way through the mountain fastness. In this choice of route, however, he had no alternative. The ever-present military reality limiting his options was Roman sea power, which had been strongly maintained ever since the end of the First Punic War. Under such conditions, Hannibal could not consider an amphibious landing on the coast of Italy. But he did have sound reasons for believing that many of the losses he would necessarily incur in getting his army to Italy could be made good by recruiting as allies the Celts of Cisalpine Gaul, whose animosity towards Rome at this time was very great. Bitter memories of their defeat at Telamon in 225 followed by Roman expansion into Cisalpine Gaul and the establishment of two new Roman colonies at Cremona and Placentia was a great provocation to the Celtic tribes of the Boii and Insubres. So when Hannibal's agents arrived secretly in their territories in early 218 to sound out their possible support to make common cause with Carthage against Rome they were given a sympathetic hearing. In a very real sense, the success of the whole audacious scheme turned on the preparedness of the sometimes fickle Celtic tribes to support him with supplies and manpower. So it was with much relief that the return of the envoys from the Po valley in early May brought him the vital news that the Celts would cooperate and that they were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Carthaginian army. As important were reports that, while passage across the Alps for a large army would be very difficult, it was nevertheless possible.

All was now ready. The army had been called to the colours in the early spring, trained and made ready for war. When news of Rome's declaration arrived, the die was cast. It was probably sometime between the beginning and middle of June that Hannibal rode out through the gates of New Carthage with his entourage to join the assembled multitude standing to arms before the city walls. Following a final speech from Hannibal, the signal trumpets sounded and the army of 90,000 infantry 12,000 cavalry and 37 elephants began to move. Slowly and ponderously, it turned north to begin the first stage of a long march that would, in some six months, see less than a quarter of its number finally debouch, cold, hungry and exhausted, on to the plains of Northern Italy.



▲ *Terracotta statuette of an African war-elephant, found in archaeological excavations at Pompeii. The mahout is also an African, but the statuette almost certainly represents an elephant in*

*Roman, rather than Carthaginian, military service. The date is uncertain, but is probably much later than the Punic Wars. (Naples, National Museum).*

### The March to the Rhône

It took some six weeks for the Carthaginian army to reach the River Ebro. Tracing the next stage of the journey is somewhat problematic. The Carthaginian army was involved in some very heavy fighting as Hannibal moved quite deliberately against a number of pro-Roman tribes living between the Ebro and the Pyrenees. His own losses were high, but this region had to be reduced and placed under Carthaginian control in order that he could be certain of the security of his lines of communication from Italy back to Spain. It would seem that an essential element in his design was not just to draw on the resources and supplies of allies in Italy but

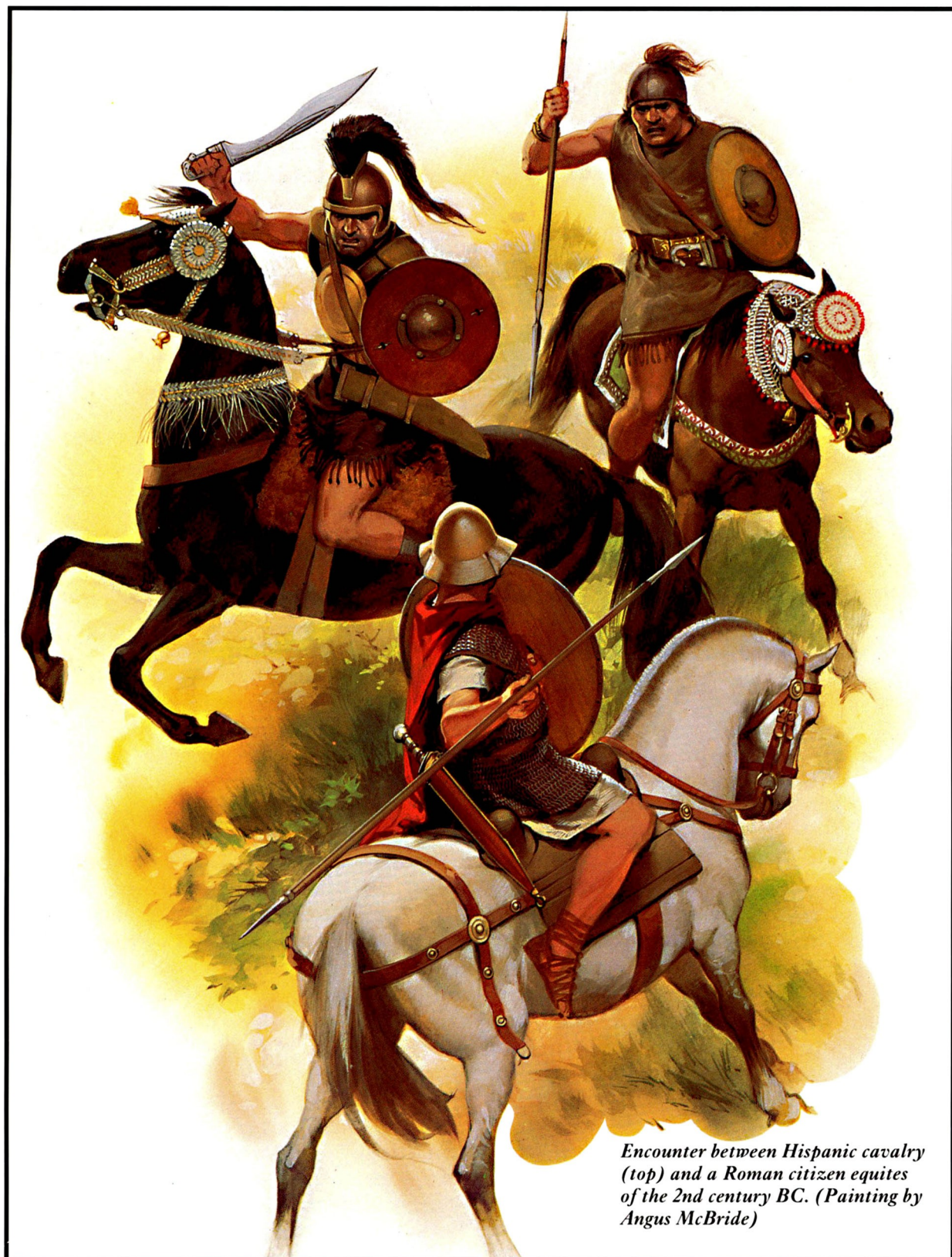
also on the men and material that could be funnelled to him overland by Hasdrubal from Spain. As the security of this region was therefore of great significance to his wider strategy, it is not surprising that he detached a sizeable force of 10,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry from his army under the charge of one Hanno to ensure its acquiescence and maintain a watching brief over the pro-Roman Greek colony of Emporion on the coast. According to Livy this reduction in the Carthaginian strength had already been compounded by some 3,000 desertions from among the less reliable Spanish levies. Rather than see the morale among his other troops affected because of these desertions, Hannibal dismissed a further 7,000 Spanish troops of whose reliability he was suspect. By the time he left Emporion in late August he had thus lost since leaving New Carthage no fewer than 20,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry. Polybius records the strength of his army as no more than 50,000 infantry and 9,000 cavalry by the time he began his crossing of the Pyrenees.

The rapid arrival of Hannibal's army at the River Rhône towards the end of September had been facilitated by an agreement with the Celtic tribes in the region who, in return for gifts, had allowed the Carthaginians safe passage. It has been suggested that the figures cited by Polybius for Hannibal's troop strength during the course of the march may well be unreliable, as he claims that for this stage of the trek another 12,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry were lost. Although his crossing of the Rhône was contested by the Gauls, there is no suggestion on the part of either Polybius or Livy that Hannibal suffered great losses in the process. However, it has been mooted, and is to an extent supported by archaeology, that these troops were actually detached by Hannibal to establish and maintain garrisons to protect the line of communication back to Spain.

### Rhône to the Alps

The exact place of Hannibal's crossing of the Rhône has generated, in common with almost every aspect of his march to Italy, fierce and intense academic debate over many years. Some place it at the modern town of Beaucaire, which in the 3rd century BC was





*Encounter between Hispanic cavalry (top) and a Roman citizen equites of the 2nd century BC. (Painting by Angus McBride)*



the crossing point of the ancient *via Domitia*. On or about 25 September, Hannibal sent his army across the river in multifarious craft. As the Gauls crowded towards the bank to oppose the landings, Hannibal sent a pre-arranged smoke-signal to a hidden Carthaginian cavalry column which, having already crossed up-river, left its place of hiding and fell on the rear of the totally unsuspecting Gauls, who broke in surprise.

By the end of the day – his sixth night since arriving at the river – all his army was across save his elephants, and it was while he was having these brought over on the following day that reports reached him of Scipio's landing on the eastern mouth of the Rhône. A rapidly dispatched group of 500 Numidian light cavalry was sent southwards to ascertain the situation. In the meantime Gallic representatives from the Po valley had arrived at the encampment with words of encouragement for Hannibal and his men. The 300 Numidian survivors who returned the following day confirmed Scipio's arrival, and indeed the Roman cavalry had the audacity to ride right up to the edge of the Carthaginian encampment before retiring post-haste to warn their commander.

Without all the elephants yet across and without further ado the Carthaginian army aban-

▲ *No attempt has been made in this short text to address the still highly contentious matter of Hannibal's route. Many alternatives have been offered over the years, and there is insufficient space here to discuss the matter fully.*

▲ *However, Hannibal's achievement in crossing the Alps with his army was quite remarkable, and these two pictures give a sense of the difficult country that he had to traverse to reach Italy. (French Tourist Board)*

doned its camp and moved off north along the eastern bank of the Rhône. Four days later the army reached the place referred to by Polybius and Livy as 'the island'. (Once more, learned exegesis is unable to resolve the actual site of this feature and this text will make no attempt to choose from among the contenders. Rather, as with the whole matter of the dispute over Hannibal's actual passage of the Alps, the bibliography identifies titles wherein these matters are dealt with in some detail and from which interested readers can gain a better idea of the issues involved.) Thereafter the Carthaginian army advanced for a further ten days until, on or about 14 October, Polybius tells us 'Hannibal began his ascent of the Alps'.



# THE OPPOSING LEADERS

## Hannibal Barca

It was Livy who, prior to the Battle of Zama, spoke of Hannibal saying that he had 'filled Italy from the Alps and Gaul with monuments of his tremendous campaigns. Hannibal moreover was in command of an army which had been with him all through his years of fighting, an army toughened by hardships almost beyond human endurance.' Although at variance with Livy's usually harsher judgements of the man, it does convey the reluctant Roman admiration for one who by his prodigious military deeds made a greater impact on their history than any other foreigner.

Livy draws our attention to Hannibal's most remarkable trait. For many years he held together his mercenary army – 'a hotch potch of the riff-raff of all nationalities' – by the force of his personality and leadership skills. That men fighting for money and booty would in the end be prepared to forsake

those very things and endure all manner of privations and even death for his sake is testimony to his charisma. This derived in the first instance from his uncanny insight and sensitivity concerning the psychology of those he led. He had the ability to manipulate the motivations of each of the nationalities in his force in such a fashion as to maximise their distinctive fighting abilities in battle; and indeed all his great victories turned on this.

Though their commander, he would share their privations, so that when they were hungry and cold so too was he; and like them he slept on the ground wrapped in nothing but his cloak. Above all, they had undoubted confidence in his military abilities, to the extent that they could be sure that when he chose to give battle it was under conditions that nearly always tipped the outcome in their favour. Even though needs dictated that Hannibal husband his resources, he tried his best to avoid entanglements that might lead to the unnecessary sacrifice of



◀ *It is generally accepted that few busts purporting to represent the appearance of Hannibal can be relied upon. The marble bust on the left and in particular the bronze bust on the right, from Volubilis in Morocco, are thought to be of the young Carthaginian general. The latter displays a number of similarities to heads on coins struck at Cartagena in Spain c.220 and which are thought to show Hannibal in the guise of the god Melkart. (Tunisian Tourist Office)*

his soldiers' lives. These men fought for Hannibal. The cause of Carthage, their actual paymaster, clearly came in a very long second, if at all.

Hannibal's march across the Alps stands as one of the most remarkable achievements in all military history, and it illustrates one of his primary virtues as a military leader. He did not eschew the need to take risks, recognising that success in war must come from such – and indeed the crossing of the Alps was clearly the greatest of these – but the point is that they were always calculated. This much was recognised by Polybius, who says that 'he pursued his plans with sound common sense'. While the audacity of his enterprise is evident, it is apparent

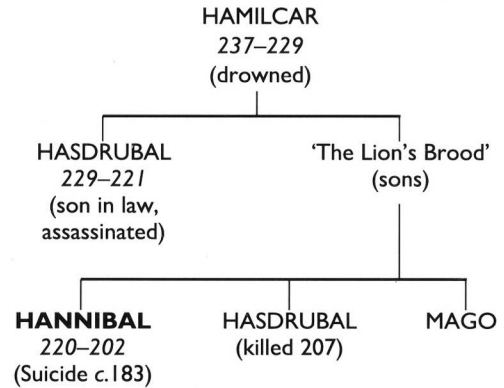


▲ This one-and-a-half-shekel piece is thought to show the features of Hannibal himself. (Hirmer Fotoarchiv, Munich)

► This bust, which is housed in the Naples Archaeological Museum, is presumed to represent Hannibal in old age. He went into voluntary exile from Carthage in 195 to escape Roman attempts to seize him. In 183, having learnt of his support of the King of Bithynia, the

Roman Senate ordered that he be handed over. Rather than accept the dishonour and indignity of being taken by his great enemy, he took poison. His last words were, 'Let us now put an end to the great anxiety of the Romans, who have thought it too lengthy and too heavy a task to wait for the death of a hated old man.' (via the Tunisian Tourist Office)

### THE FAMILY OF HAMILCAR BARCA



Dates in *italic* refer to periods of military command of Carthaginian armies in Spain or Italy.

on closer examination that the great care and preparations he took greatly reduced his chances of failure. His intellectual mastery of the diverse elements of strategy manifested itself in a temperament inclined to 'favour the unexpected solution'. Thus at the Trebbia, Trasimene and in particular at Cannae, we see him employing his imaginative intellect





to secure devastating victories over the Romans. It is clear that until the advent of Scipio Africanus there existed no Roman able to fight Hannibal on the field of battle with any prospect of success.

Roman valour, dogged determination and numbers could not compensate for the intellectual chasm that lay between their commanders and Hannibal. No better illustration of the profound sense of frustration and deep humiliation he inflicted upon this proud people can be offered

than that they explained away his prodigious skill as being accomplished by nought but 'Punic trickery'. That ultimately he failed in his attempt to bring down Rome and its confederacy cannot detract from the measure of his achievement on the battlefield in Italy. It is for that reason that the Second Punic War was indeed 'Hannibal's War', and he emerges from that conflict with a record that places him in the foremost rank of the great commanders of history.

*A Roman equites showing horse equipment, personal protection and armament. At Cannae the Roman cavalry were swept aside by the fer-*

*cious assault by the heavy Carthaginian cavalry under Hasdrubal. (Painting by Richard Hook)*



► *What is thought to be a representation of Hannibal's brother, Hasdrubal Barca, on a single shekel coin. He was left in Spain when Hannibal started his epic invasion of Italy, and was to be killed later at the battle of the River Metaurus whilst trying to reinforce Hannibal's army in Italy. (Hirmer Fotoarchiv, Munich)*

### Consuls as Commanders

The Carthaginian tradition of separating political and military powers within the state finds no counterpart in the Roman Republic. Indeed, the issues of who was to command the legions and which from among the competing strategies would be employed to prosecute the war against Hannibal were matters that lay at the heart of the internal politics of Rome between 218 and 216. Although the Roman 'state' was so organised that its resources were harnessed to serve its 'defence', the nature of its constitution also operated to prevent the emergence of a professional military caste. Thus the command of the army lay not with professional soldiers but with two annually appointed consuls – who, according to the *Lex Genucia*, were not permitted early re-election to the office. Although the *imperium* (supreme executive authority, military, civil and judicial, the most important of which was the power to command an army) vested in the consulship carried with it supreme command of Rome's legions and responsibility for the prosecution of war, those elected to the office were rarely chosen for their military ability. Of much greater moment was that the candidate come from a distinguished family. (This was the norm, but others devoid of such illustrious antecedents could, as we shall see, also aspire and rise to the consulship.) In consequence, the military experience of Roman generals, particularly in command of large forces, was thus more limited compared with the professional expertise garnered by Hannibal and his officers over many years of continuous service. Even so they cannot be derided as rank amateurs. All had acquired a modicum of military experience. Roman convention required an ambitious politician ascending the ranks of the *cursus honorum* (hierarchy of office) to serve five or ten years as a tribune.

The Roman system was sufficiently flexible to adapt to circumstance, however. The *Lex Genucia* was suspended in 217 for the duration of the con-



flict so that ex-consuls with proven military expertise could be re-elected within the ten-year limitation. It was also the case that annual tenure of command was not always rigidly enforced. When necessity demanded it was possible to prorogue the consul's *imperium*. Not surprisingly, the prorogation (hence 'pro-consul') was far more common in times of war, when continuity of command was highly desirable. Under such circumstances it is hardly surprising that consuls became more effective the longer they were in a position to exercise command. However, their progression up the 'learning curve' during the first two years of the Hannibalic War was realised at a frightful cost, as indicated by figures found elsewhere in this text.

Prior to the Second Punic War, Roman military success was frequently achieved *in spite* of the quality of its generalship. Indeed, the tactical system of the Roman army in all probability evolved in response to the limitations of the command style of the consuls. The discipline and effectiveness of the legions was generally an effective compensation and the standard tactic of charging the enemy in the centre of his line sufficient to carry the day. But when faced with a military genius like Hannibal the very predictability of Roman tactics was turned against them, with devastating results. In such circumstances the inadequacies of Roman generalship was laid bare. While their personal bravery was

rarely called into question, they were in the main hidebound by tactical tradition. To the late Sir Basil Liddell Hart their military method was best described as 'good honest bludgeon work'. There can be little doubt that Hannibal's military self-confidence stemmed in part from his perception of the limited military capabilities of these men. He could thus depict them before the Battle of the Trebbia as 'men who are blind to the arts of war'.

### Quintus Fabius Maximus

Only one Roman figure emerges from the turmoil and humiliation of these years of the Hannibalic War with any credit, and this only as a post-factum judgement of his contribution to Rome's survival and eventual victory in the conflict. Certainly at the time Quintus Fabius Maximus (c.260–203) was regarded by many within the Roman establishment and populace with derision – the epithet 'Cunctator' meaning 'Delayer' was first used as a term of abuse. It was only after the débâcle of Cannae, when his policy was again employed and with greater vigour, that Fabius was vindicated and the title employed as an honorific.

By the time he was elected to the post of dictator in 217 in the wake of the disaster of Lake Trasimene, Quintus Fabius Maximus was a man of great experience. He had already been consul twice, in 233 and 228, and censor in 230. According to Plutarch, his election arose from the recognition that 'he alone, they believed, possessed a spirit and a dignity of character which were equal to the greatness of his office'. Polybius in similar vein says of him that he was 'a man of great natural gifts and outstanding for his steadiness of judgement'. Although he was no military genius, his unique contribution to the salvation of the Republic lay firstly in his perception that in Hannibal the Romans were facing a prodigious military talent. He had concluded that so long as they continued to *accept* battle when it was offered by him they must inevitably lose. Fabius employed his dictatorial powers to initiate a new strategy to combat Hannibal. This was predicated in the first instance on his refusal to take risks and fight pitched battles against the Carthaginian army. He would then exhaust Hannibal by using delaying tactics. His

intention was thus to exploit to the full Rome's advantages of 'inexhaustible provisions and manpower'.

That this was undoubtedly the correct strategy at the time was apparent only, it would seem, to a few. That it was to offend many arose from it's being geared to the longer term. In that sense it repudiated traditional Roman military strategy, which was imbued with the notion of the offence and grounded in achieving success in war though defeat of the enemy in decisive battlefield victories. After Cannae the 'Fabian' strategy was again adopted: between 216 and 203, when Hannibal finally departed Italy, the Romans never again fought a pitched battle against him on the mainland. Fabius's strategy was thus one of containment and, while it could not win Rome the war after the disasters of the Trebbia, Trasimene and in particular Cannae, it did ensure they would not lose it.

▼ *Quintus Fabius Maximus (c.260–203 BC) was the saviour of Rome in the Second Punic War. His refusal to engage Hannibal after Lake Trasimene earned him the nickname 'Cunctator' meaning the 'Delayer'.*

*Originally a term of abuse, it became a honorific title after the disaster at Cannae, when it was reluctantly recognised that the strategy he advocated was the correct one.*





# THE OPPOSING ARMIES

## The Carthaginian Army

It is unfortunate that we possess no source for the organisation of the Carthaginian army such as Polybius provides for the Roman. Carthaginian armies were composed essentially of mercenaries commanded by professional officers, most of whom were native Carthaginians. While historically their armies displayed an amazing diversity of nationalities, that of Hannibal in 216 was composed of Africans, Spaniards (including Balearics) and Celts from Cisalpine Gaul. The performance of this force over many years is testimony not only to Hannibal's leadership skills but also to the discipline and professional standards the officer corps was able to impose on this diverse multinational force.

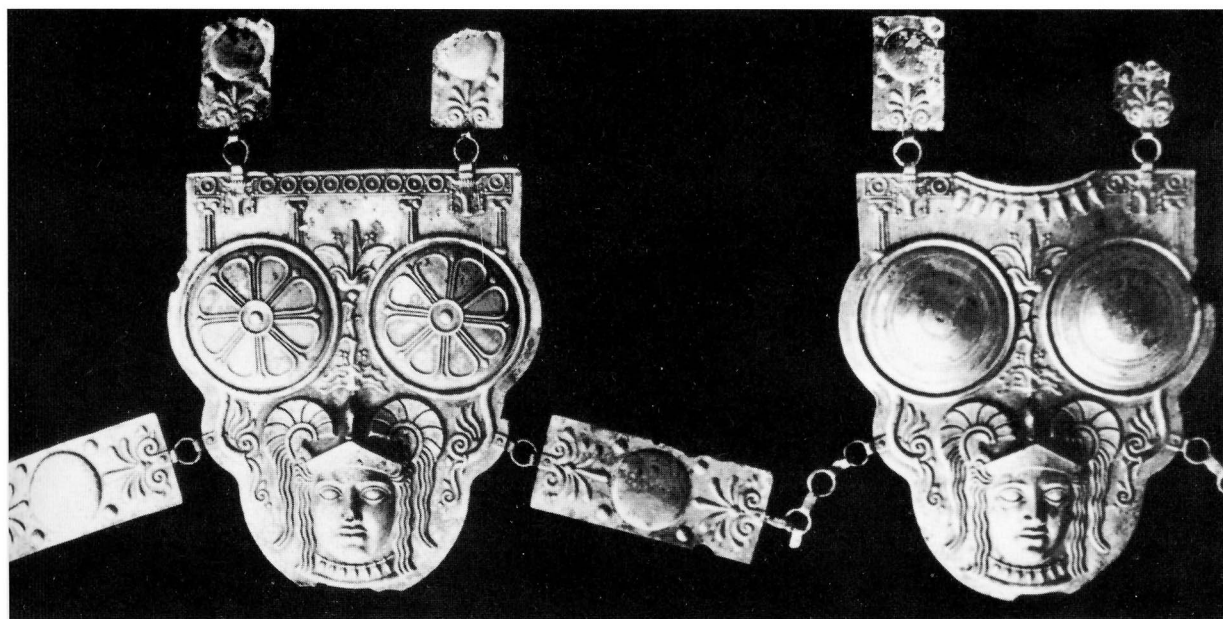
Of the African troops it was the Libyphoenicians who formed the most important element among the infantry. These were drawn from her African provinces and formed the phalanx which was the core of the striking force of the infantry

arm. It is very likely that until Trasimene they were dressed in standard Macedonian phalangite apparel. Upon Hannibal's orders they were re-equipped with legionary mail shirts after the battle. Debate as to their armament still continues, with a number of commentators presuming they were pikemen and others that they carried lighter lance-type weapons.

The bulk of the infantry at Cannae were Celtic and Spanish. The former came into Hannibal's army in 218. Their quality was variable; although individually brave, they were generally unreliable. It was for that reason and for the fact of their greater numbers that Hannibal saw them very much as '*pilum* fodder'. Accounts of their appearance at Cannae suggests that the bulk of them were

▼ *A very ornate triple-disc cuirass recovered from a tomb of one of Hannibal's soldiers at Ksour-es-Sad in Tunisia.*

*The design originates in southern Italy, in all probability from the region of Campania. (Tunisian Tourist Office)*







▲ The most common sword type employed in Spain during this period was the cut-and-thrust

*falcata*. While sometimes worn in a scabbard, the *falcata* was always worn on the left side.

► Gallic warriors of the 3rd to 2nd century BC. The figure in the centre wears a fine bronze 'Montefortino' helmet with massive cheek guards and is armed with a large thrusting spear, two javelins and a sword. The mounted warrior is based upon a passage in Plutarch in which Cimbrian cavalry at Vercellae are described as wearing helmets like the gape-jawed heads of terrible beasts heightened with tall feather plumes; carrying white shields, two javelins and a large, heavy sword; and wearing an iron breastplate. (Painting by Angus McBride)



◀ A close up of the ornate iron work on the hilt of a *falcata*. The grip was originally lined with bone.





still devoid of body armour and protected only by their oval, leather-covered shields. Their principal weapon was a 75–90cm long ‘slashing’ sword. It is probable that some among them of higher rank wore mail armour and a helmet. Hannibal’s Spanish infantry were highly regarded and were mainly *scutari*, this name deriving from the ‘*scutum*’-like shield (so called because of its resemblance to the oval shield carried by Roman legionaries) they carried. The national dress of white woollen tunics edged in purple was worn at Cannae and commented upon by Polybius and Livy. The Spanish

tactics were much like those of the Roman infantry. They discharged a shower of throwing spears and then followed up with their short swords – either the *falcata*, a curved single-bladed weapon derived from the Greek *kopsis*, or the cut-and-thrust, straight-bladed weapon from which the Roman *gladius hispaniensis* was derived.

Hannibal’s light troops were in a different class from those of the Romans. They were very highly trained and were capable of inflicting much damage on the enemy. Of particular importance were the Balearic slingers. These were organised into two





▲ This *falcata* has the grip enclosed by a small protective bar. The blade is ornately engraved. This example was recovered from Almedinilla in Spain.

▼ One of the types of snaffle bits employed by Spanish cavalry of the period.



corps, each a thousand strong. They were armed with three types of sling for employment at different ranges. Such was their accuracy and their volume of fire that they were deemed more useful than archers.

It was Hannibal's cavalry that proved to be the dominating feature of his army. The Numidians were some of the most remarkable light horsemen of ancient times. They rode without reins, controlling their mount by a rope around the neck, the pressure of their knees and a small stick. These born horsemen would wheel-in close to the enemy and discharge their spears but never allow themselves to become drawn into close combat. They were superb as mounted skirmishers, and Hannibal often used their idiosyncratic fighting methods to engage the Romans and draw them out as at the Trebbia. It was this singular way of fighting that frequently invoked the ire of the Romans. Hannibal was not slow in employing the Numidians to provoke the Romans into premature combat, as at the Trebbia, where their taunts and shouts of derision from just beyond the edge of the legionary encampment prompted Sempronius to lead out his troops before they were fully prepared for battle.

At Cannae, the Celtic and Spanish horse were grouped together. The former were recruited from among nobles and their retainers and this is mirrored in the expensive mail armour and helmets they wore. Spanish cavalry were dressed very much as their infantry and armed with a *falcata* and long spear. A small shield was carried for defence. By the time of the battle it is clear that Hannibal had succeeded in welding together these disparate horsemen into a highly trained and disciplined body of cavalry. Testimony to this comes in the battle itself when in the midst of combat he could rein in his Celtic and Spanish horse and redirect them to another part of the battlefield.



► *Left: This terracotta, showing a Gaul, may represent the appearance of one of Hannibal's Gallic mercenaries quite closely. The large oval shield with boss and spine is typically Gallic, as is the long sword girt to the waist. He wears boots and breeches. (once Paris, Collection Fouquet)*

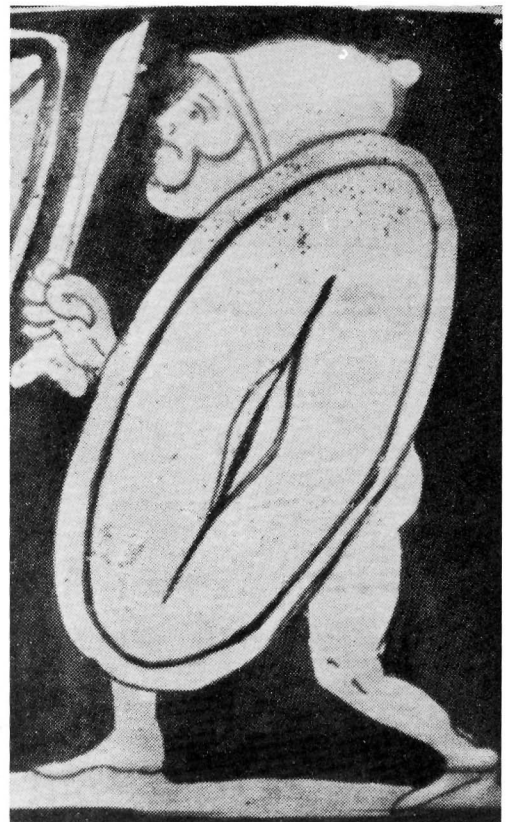


► *Right: The wild appearance of the Celts, as witnessed by the long hair and moustaches sported by this individual, struck fear into their Mediterranean neighbours. Many Celts fought naked in the frenzy of battle. Note the distinctive hilt of the Celtic sword, well observed in this statuette. (Dresden, Albertinum)*

► *Left: Limestone statue of a Gallic warrior, discovered in 1834 in a field near Mondragon (Vaucluse). His arms, and the edge of his fringed cloak, rest on top of his enormous 'Latene' shield. Apart from his fringed cloak, this warrior fought naked. (Avignon, Musée Calvet)*



► *Right: Probably the earliest representation of a Gaul in Italian art comes from a red-figure vase. As the detail from it shows, he carries the distinctive oval Celtic shield, and wears a helmet of 'Montefortino' type. The hilt of the Celtic sword is shown accurately, with its double pommel, but the blade has been rendered inaccurately, under the influence of the Greek kopis. (Berlin, Antiquarium Inv. 398)*







◀ *Top far left: A lime-stone statue of a Gallic warrior, this time found at Vacheres (Basses-Alpes), is fully clothed and much more heavily equipped, with a mail cuirass. Note the sleeved tunic. (Avignon, Musée Calvet)*

◀ *Top near left: Spanish light infantry were called caetrati from the light shield, or caetra, they carried (Paris, Louvre)*

◀ *Below far left: The curved sabre-like sword, which can be compared to the Greek kopis, is carried by a Spanish heavy infantryman in this relief. Livy terms the Spanish heavy infantryman a 'scutatus' from the heavy shield, called a scutum in Latin. (Madrid, Museo Archeologico Nacional)*

◀ *Near left: The Spaniards maintained forces of cavalry, as well*

*as infantry. While it is not absolutely clear, this relief shows a horseman carrying what seems to be a Spanish curved sword, rather than a non-military object.*

▲ *Above: Depictions of Numidian cavalymen are rare. This Roman coin was struck by one P. Crepusius in Rome around 82 BC. The family background of Crepusius, and therefore the significance of the horseman used as a device on the reverse, is unknown. It is just possible, however, that a Numidian is being shown. (British Museum)*

▲ *Above right: Tarentine coin showing a light cavalryman. A number of Italian cities, badly treated and resentful of Roman rule, deserted the Roman alliance and supplied military contingents, including cavalry, to Hannibal's army. (British Museum)*



### The Roman Army of the Hannibalic War

In contrast to the essentially mercenary army employed by Hannibal, the core element of the Roman army raised for operations in any one year was the legion or 'levy' of heavy infantry formed from the property-owning citizens of the Roman republic. For those eligible, military service in defence of the *ager Romanus* (the Roman state) was regarded as a social responsibility, a personal honour and a mark of status. However, by the time of Hannibal's invasion, this had ceased to mean just the citizens of the city of Rome, for, in the process of extending her rule throughout Italy during the preceding century, cities that had been allies or even former enemies had been granted full or partial citizenship. In the case of the latter, they accrued the benefits and responsibilities of citizenship, including that of military service, but were deemed *sine suffragio* – without political rights. Some measure of the manpower resource this generated for service in the legions can be derived from Polybius, who stated that in 225 Rome and Campania alone could provide a potential 250,000 infantry and 23,000 cavalry for enrolment. Serving alongside the citizen legions of the *ager Romanus*, and always an integral element of the Roman army on campaign during this period, were units of the *Socii* or allies, who were obliged by treaty to furnish military forces at Rome's behest.



## LEGIONS RAISED IN THE PERIOD 218–216 BC

This table attempts to identify the legions raised by the Senate during the first two years of the Hannibalic War. The method employed designates as *Legion 1*, the first legion specifically mentioned by Polybius at the onset of the war. This method is also employed in the text.

Note that the legions in this period were maintained in the field over winter and did not disband, to re-assemble the following spring, as under normal circumstances. The information as to the levying of legions is derived mainly from Livy. Such a table could never be definitive, and it is accepted that other interpretations are possible.

**Legion 1** Mentioned by Polybius as stationed in Cisalpine Gaul under the command of the *praetor* Lucius Manlius. Designated the 'fourth' legion. Suggests that it had been raised the previous year i.e., 219, and that it had wintered in the Po valley. Later taken over by Scipio. After the Battle of the Trebbia, remnants fled to Cremona or Placentia, where they wintered. In spring 217 these joined Geminus at Ariminum. Taken over by Fabius when *dictator*. Under command of Geminus winter 217/216 at Gerunium. Raised to full 5,000 men spring/early summer 216. Served at Cannae.

**Legion 2** Originally one of the two Legions raised by Cornelius Scipio. It was dispatched to Cisalpine Gaul under command of the *praetor* Gaius Atilius to relieve Legion 1, by then under siege by the Celtic tribe of the Boii. Taken over by Scipio. The rest as for Legion 1.

**Legion 3** Raised by Sempronius for service in Sicily and Africa. Returned to Italy and marched north to take part in Battle of the Trebbia. Remnants handed over to Flaminius beginning of 217. Almost certainly totally destroyed at Battle of Lake Trasimene

**Legion 4** As above.

**Legion 5** This was the second of the two original legions raised by Cornelius Scipio. Taken by him to southern Gaul. Sent on to Spain under his brother, Gnaeus Scipio. Almost totally destroyed in 211.

**Legion 6** The sixth legion was the new legion raised to replace Legion 2. Taken by Cornelius Scipio to southern Gaul. Sent on to Spain under his brother Gnaeus Scipio. Almost totally destroyed in 211.

**Legion 7** Raised after the Battle of the Trebbia. Sent to serve in Sicily to prevent a Carthaginian attempt to take the island.

**Legion 8** Raised after the Battle of the Trebbia. Sent to Sicily to defend the province against a possible Carthaginian landing.

**Legion 9** Raised after the Battle of the Trebbia. Sent to Sardinia to prevent any Carthaginian attempt to recover the island.

**Legion 10** Raised for service with consul Flaminius in the spring of 217. Destroyed at the Battle of Lake Trasimene.

**Legion 11** As above.

**Legion 12** Raised for service with consul Geminus in the spring of 217. With him at Ariminum. After Trasimene ordered south to join Fabius, who took command. Geminus resumed command of legion. Based at Gerunium in winter 217/216. Raised to full strength of 5,000 men in spring/early summer 216. Took part in Battle of Cannae.

**Legion 13** As above.

**Legion 14** One of the four legions 'conscripted for the emergency'. Taken by Fabius to join Geminus's four legions (remnants of 1 and 2 and the 12th and 13th) north of Rome. Then taken south. Command passed from Geminus to Regulus at Gerunium, winter 217/216. This legion

brought up to full strength of 5,000 men spring/early summer of 216. Took part in Battle of Cannae.

**Legion 15** As above.

**Legion 16** One of the four legions 'conscripted for the emergency'. Unlike Legions 14 and 15, this unit was left in Rome. In the summer the 16th was taken south by Varro and Paullus to join the legions under Geminus and Regulus. If Legions 16 and 17 were the *legiones urbanae*, the nature of their manpower may have rendered them unsuitable for campaigning in 216. In that case, if Legions 20 and 21 were newly raised, but with properly levied troops, they may have been prepared for service in battle in preference to the 16th and 17th. If so, then Legions 16 and 17 were used rather than 20 and 21 after Cannae as the only force to hand.

**Legion 17** As above. (It is possible that the 17th was the second of the *legiones urbanae* raised for garrison duties in Rome and, as with the 16th, did not serve at Cannae.)

**Legion 18** One of the four extra legions raised by the Romans in 216. Along with the 19th, this legion was dispatched to the Po valley in the early summer of 216 under the *praetor* L. Postumius Albinus.

**Legion 19** As above

**Legion 20** The third of the unprecedented four extra legions raised for 216. The 20th remained in Rome. After Cannae the 20th and 21st were the only trained legions to hand with which Rome could address the immediate consequences of Cannae. (But it is possible that the 20th did serve at Cannae and was destroyed there.)

**Legion 21** As above.

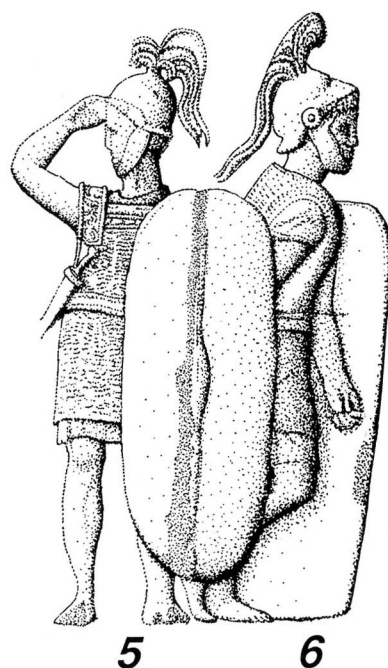
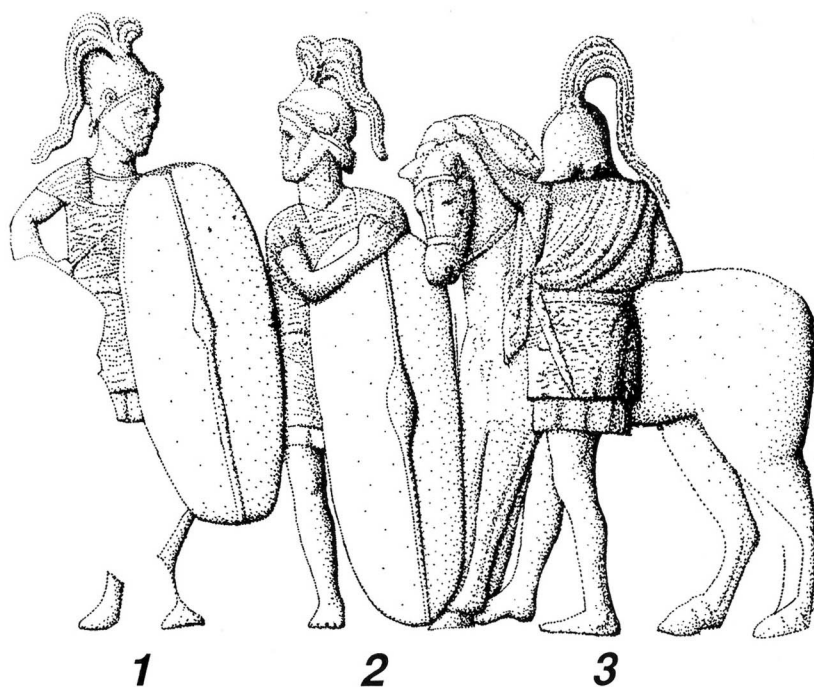
## The Legions

The most important source for the composition and organisation of the legion of this period is the Greek historian Polybius, who devoted a section in the sixth book of his *Histories* to the Roman military system. Although writing in about 160, it is pre-

sumed that he gives a reliable picture of the legion towards the end of the Hannibalic War. However, it is clear that some of the details he describes obtained in 160 and in all probability in 202 but did not necessarily apply to the legions of 218–216.

The annual ritual of raising the legions for service took place in March, traditionally the month in

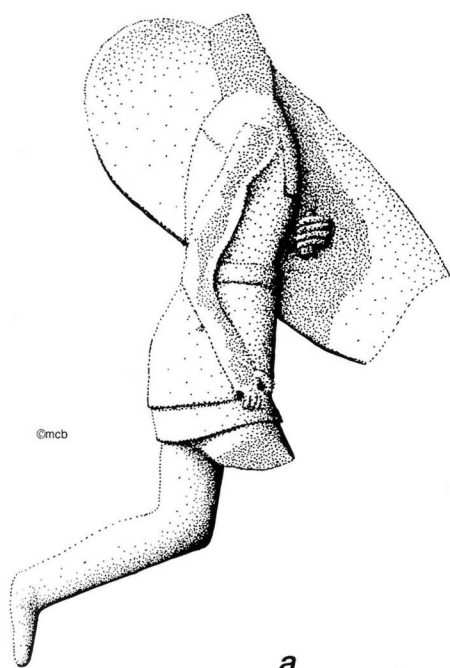
► *Representational evidence for the appearance of Roman soldiers of the middle Republic are very scarce. Images of legionaries of the time of Cannae draw heavily on the two principal sources for the Republican period. These are the Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus and the Aemilius Paullus monument. Both are post-Cannae. It is presumed that legionaries in the battle looked very similar to those illustrated here. Figures 1, 2, 5 and 6 show legionaries that would correspond to principes and triarii. Figure 3 illustrates a cavalryman who may well be more representative of a post-Punic trooper in appearance. Figure 4 represents an officer in distinctively Hellenistic style of dress. The design of the cuirass may indicate a tribune. (Courtesy of Dr. M. C. Bishop)*



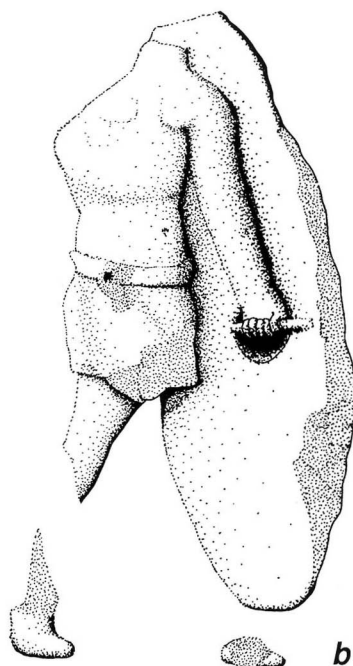
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©mcb

◀ This plate depicts the appearance of Roman infantry at the time of Cannae. Figure 1 shows a triarius, distinguishable from the princeps by virtue of the long spear or hasta that he carries. He is shown in the traditional pose struck by these troops when deployed for battle at the rear of the Roman battle line. Figure 2 illustrates the appearance of the princeps. Like the triarius, he wears the heavy mail lorica, which weighed about 15kg; in common with the hastatus, he carries a light and a heavy pilum. Not illus-

trated is the hastatus, who at the time of Cannae would have been equipped with everything worn by the princeps save the mail shirt. Armour protection for the hastatus was confined to a brass breastplate or pectorale. Figure 3 represents a velite much as he would have appeared following the reform of 211. His skirmisher progenitor at Cannae would have been poorly armed with a number of javelins and would have been devoid of any form of personal protection. (Painting by Richard Hook)

▲ The images from the Aemillius Paullus monument at Delphi in Greece. Both are wearing mail shirts cut to emulate the Greek linen cuirass and show well the carriage and hand hold of the scutum. (Courtesy of Dr. M. C. Bishop)

▲ Representation of a Republican centurion from the tombstone of Minucius at Padova. He is not wearing armour but is armed with a gladius and carries a vine stick as the symbol of his rank. (Courtesy of Dr. M. C. Bishop)

the Roman calendar that marked the beginning of the campaigning season. The whole process was initiated by the two newly elected consuls (or supreme magistrates) of the Roman state. It was they who by virtue of the *imperium* or authority vested in their office were responsible for raising the four new legions and commanding them on campaign during the coming year. Having taken office, the consuls

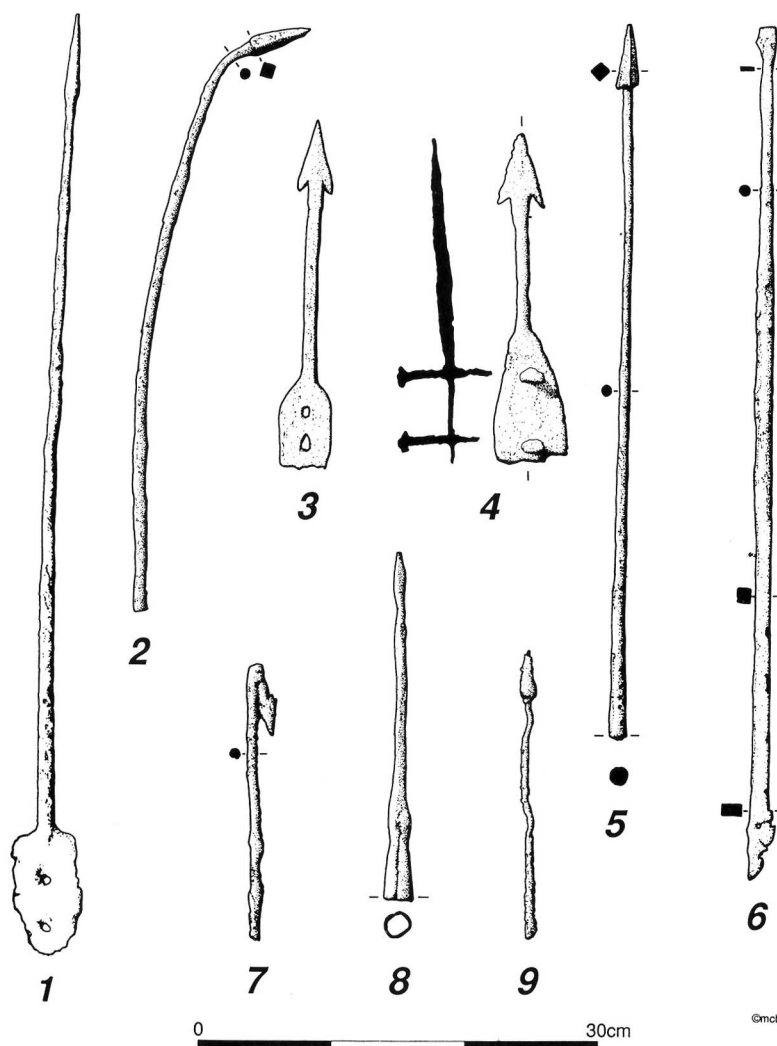
presented themselves before the popular assembly and there announced the date on which all citizens of appropriate age were to present themselves for selection and re-enrolment. In the early days of Rome this would have been carried out on the Capitoline Hill, but by the late third century this same process was carried on throughout the territories that formed the *ager Romanus*. Orders from the consuls were also dispatched at this time to the leaders of allied cities in the confederacy, detailing the numbers of infantry and cavalry to be raised for service alongside the legions.

### The Cavalry

According to Polybius, some 1,200 of the richest citizens were chosen by the censors before the general

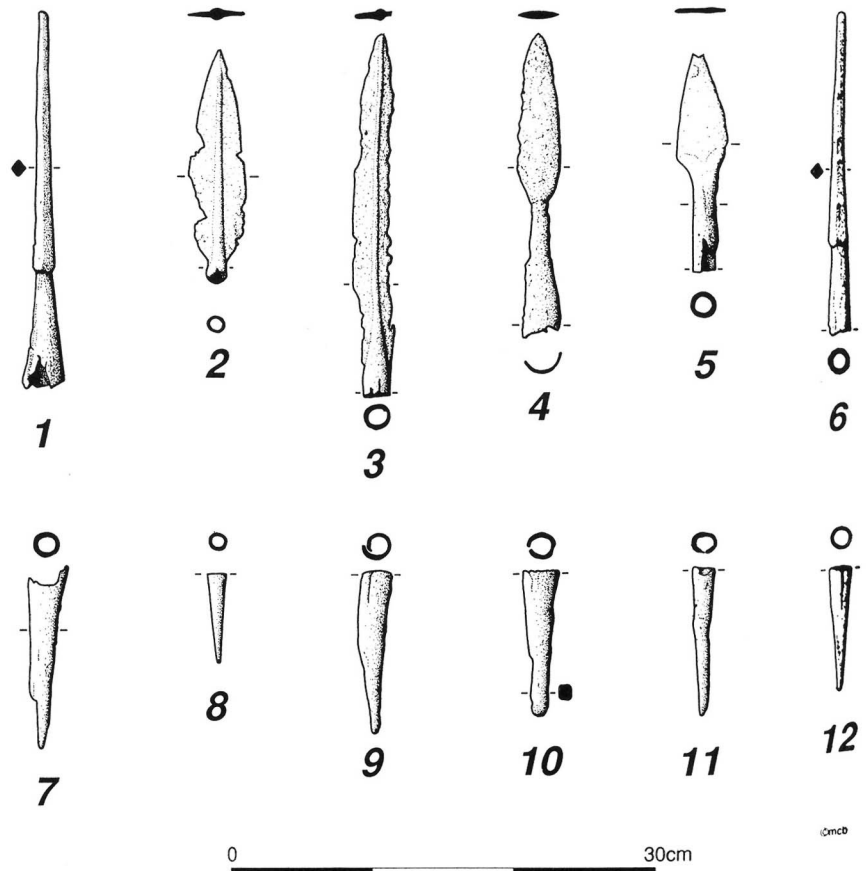
*dilectus* (selection or choosing of the best candidates) to serve in the cavalry (the *equites*). This may well reflect practice introduced following the Hannibalic War when the superior, and in many cases decisive, performance of the 'Carthaginian' cavalry drove home to the Romans the importance of this arm. Hannibal was to prove a harsh teacher and the power and expertise of his cavalry were to prove the decisive factor in all the encounters and battles with the Roman army up to and including Cannae. Certainly the Roman cavalry made very poor showing in the early period of the war. Without doubt this was a reflection of the lack of a real cavalry tradition in the Roman military, whose expertise was grounded in their citizen-based heavy infantry. This can be clearly discerned in the very low ratio of cavalry to

infantry in the Roman forces of this period. A paltry 300 cavalry were all that were allocated to each legion at the beginning of the campaigning season. Thus when Publius Cornelius Scipio (the elder) departed for Spain in 218 he took with him just 2,200 horse and 22,000 foot – a ratio of just 1 to 10. By comparison, even after his desperate trek across the Alps, the ratio of Hannibal's cavalry to infantry lay in the region of 3 to 10. The consequences for Roman military fortunes were profound. A major contributory factor to a number of Rome's defeats, particularly at Lake Trasimene, can be ascribed to poor scouting by the cavalry. While such was directly attributable to a lack of numbers, the problem was also compounded by the dubious quality of Rome's cavalry. This applied as much to the skills of



◀ These drawings illustrate Republican *pila* excavated from a number of sites. The earliest yet discovered date from the third century and come from Telamon in Italy. Numbers 1 and 5 to 9 come from Numantia; 2 from Caceres el Viejo; 3 from Kranj; and 4 from Entremont. (Courtesy of Dr M. C. Bishop).

► By the time of Cannae only the triarii used spears – an anachronism dating from the time of the Roman phalanx. 1 to 6 are spearheads while 7 to 12 are spear butts. All were recovered from Numantia and Caceres in Spain. (Courtesy of Dr. M. C. Bishop)



the Roman horsemen as it did to the quality of the horses they rode. It is not altogether surprising to find that the Romans turned to her allies to make good her weakness in this area with the *socii* supplying a disproportionate share of the cavalry Rome deployed on campaign. It says much for Rome's own perception of her weakness and need to compensate in this area that P. Scipio the Younger moved body and soul to seduce the Numidian Prince Masinissa and his formidable light cavalry away from their allegiance to Carthage to serve the cause of Rome towards the end of the conflict.

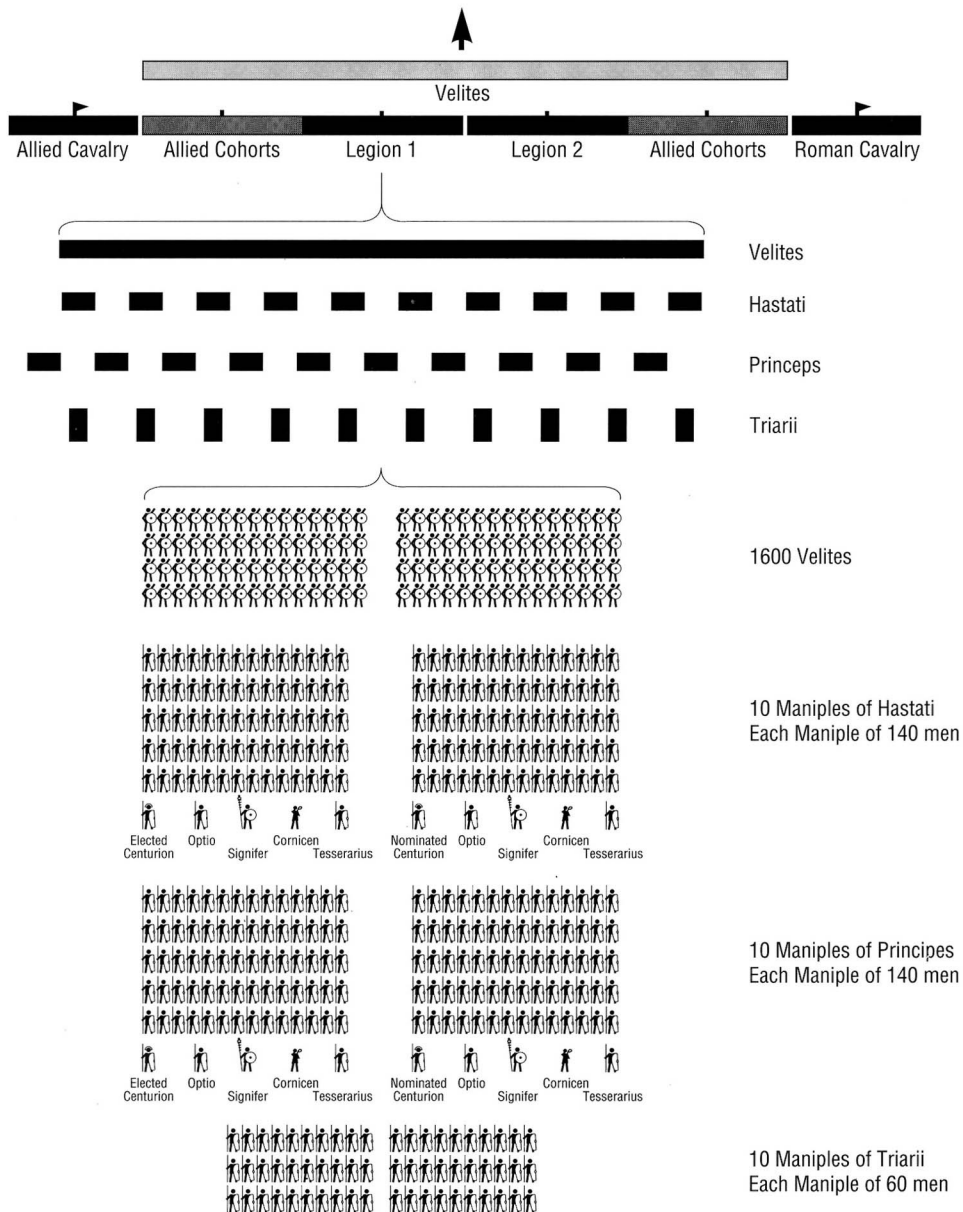
### The Infantry

Upon the day nominated for the general *dilectus* of the *pedites* (infantry), all male citizens between 17 and 46 would present themselves at the designated assembly areas throughout the *ager Romanus*. For many, this may have been the first experience of the *dilectus*; others may have come to re-enrol in order

to complete the required term of six years' service in the ranks. In times of conflict this period of service was likely to have been served continuously – with the traditional campaigning season of March to the end of October going by the board – as the legions were deployed beyond Italy to service the exigencies of war. Indeed as continuous service frequently became the norm over the next century the prolonged absence of the small peasant farmers who formed the bulk of the manpower in the legions was to have profound social and economic consequences for the Roman state. In peacetime, with his six-year term complete, the legionary could anticipate a discharge but with the possibility of being 'called out' in times of emergency for a period of up to sixteen years. It must be assumed that this *evocatus* was rigorously applied in 216 when the decision was taken to field an unprecedented number of eight legions – four more than the annual norm. While most of these citizen farmers were more than content to return to their fields on the completion of their term



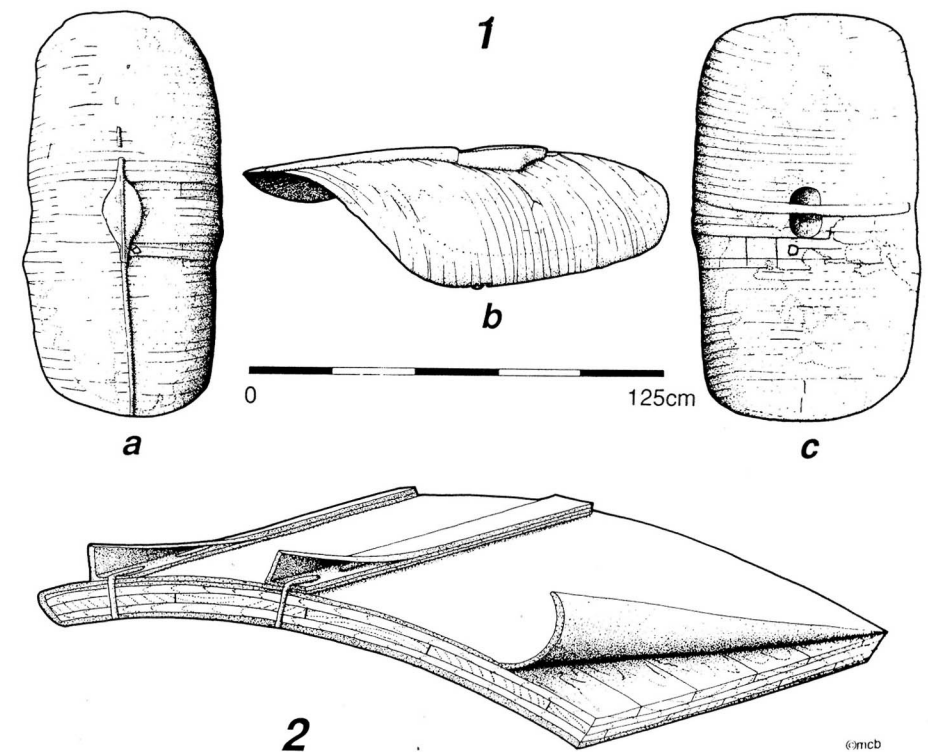
## TWO-LEGION CONSULAR ARMY



*Illustrated here is a two-legion consular army. The legion is of 5,000 men, as at Cannae. Two centuries of legionaries formed a maniple; 30 maniples plus velites and 10 turmae of cavalry constituted the legion. A Roman army of this period always comprised the two citizen legions plus Allied units of equivalent size. These were organised as maniples*

*which then formed cohorts, the latter grouped together to form the equivalent of Roman legions. The Allies supplied more cavalry – up to 30 turmae. Two of these consular armies combined to fight at the Trebbia. Eight legions, the equivalent of four consular armies fought at Cannae, where Hannibal destroyed at least six legions.*

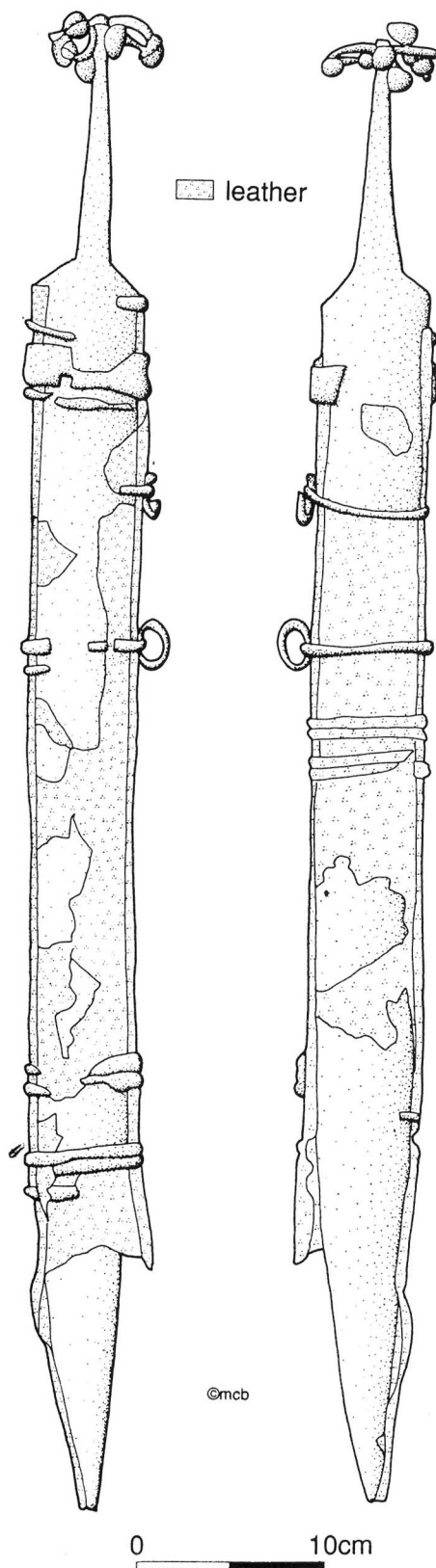
► The scutum illustrated here is based upon the example found at Kasr el-Harit in Egypt. Though not Roman it is very similar to that shown carried by the legionaries in the Domitius Ahenobarbus altar and the Aemilius Paullus monument. Polybius describes it thus: 'the surface is convex; it measures two and a half feet in width and four in length, and the thickness at the rim is a palm's breadth. It consists of two layers of wood fastened together with bull hide glue; the outer surface is then covered first with canvas and then with calf skin. The upper and lower edges are bound with iron to protect the shield both from the cutting strokes of swords and from wear when resting on the ground. In the centre is fixed an iron boss which turns aside the heavy



impact of stones, pikes and weighty missiles in general.' (Courtesy of Dr. M. C. Bishop)

of service, there were individuals who chose for a variety of reasons to re-enlist and volunteer beyond the six-year requirement. In doing so they provided a cadre of long term and experienced soldiers who, as the most likely candidates for the centurionate, provided the backbone of the legion and gave the legions the necessary continuity on a year-to-year basis. Although we possess literary evidence for such individuals from 200 onwards, none has been found dating to the time of the Second Punic War. Nevertheless it seems reasonable to infer that the large numbers of legions raised during the sixteen years of the Hannibalic War would have seen the emergence of long-service, almost professional, soldiers whose experience would have made them prime candidates for the centurionate. In the absence of a professional officer class, it was upon these men that the consuls and tribunes depended to foster the 'professional' attitudes of discipline and expertise that was the hallmark of the non-professional citizen legions of the middle Republic.

The greater mass of the citizens presenting themselves at the *dilectus* would belong to that group classed as *capite censi* or belonging to the 'head count' – these were Roman citizens who were disqualified from service in the legions because they owned no property. Without property it was presumed that one lacked the motivation possessed by the propertied man who, in fighting for Rome, was also fighting to protect his own. The citizen farmer, unlike the man of the 'head count', thus had a vested interest in serving well and fighting hard. Furthermore, those of the *capite censi* lacked the wherewithal to purchase their own arms and equipment – and Rome had yet to accept the notion of the state arming and equipping its soldiery. Denied service in the army, the fate of the unpropertied citizenry was to serve in the navy. At the time of the outbreak of the Hannibalic War the property assessment for the fifth and poorest class of eligible citizens stood at 11,000 *asses*, a figure tradition ascribes as having been fixed by Servius Tullus in the sixth century. Polybius, however, is quite clear in stating that by about 160 the minimum qualification for this same class was fixed at the much lower figure of 400 *drachmae* or 4,000 *asses*. This remarkable drop in the



◀ This graphic is a rendering of the only Republican gladius yet uncovered. It was found on the Greek island of Delos and dates from the 1st Century BC. The

length of the weapon including the tang is 760mm and it is 57mm wide. It was still in its scabbard, thought to be of leather. (Courtesy of Dr. M. C. Bishop).

value of the property qualification probably dates to 214 and was directly attributable to the catastrophic losses inflicted on the Roman army by Hannibal. By way of illustration, it has been conservatively estimated that between 218 and 215 some 50,000 citizens may have been killed. This represents perhaps as much as one sixth of all adult males, equal to five per cent of the citizen population of the Republic (a figure considerably higher in proportion to the losses of the main combatant nations during the First World War). Under such circumstances there was no alternative but to lower the assessment for the fifth class, thereby making good such losses by inducting manpower from the *capite censi* into the ranks of the legions. Indeed so great were the losses at Cannae that the Roman authorities were forced to abandon the qualification altogether in 216 and take unprecedented measures to fill the manpower vacuum in the wake of battle.

From those citizens of the five classes, sufficient *pedites* would normally be levied to man four consular legions of 4,200 men each. This figure could be raised to 5,000 men in emergency or when needed to service a specific strategy, as occurred in 216. Apart from those selected to serve as *velites*, the criterion for appointment as *hastati*, *principes* or *triarii* was by this time no longer solely wealth. Other factors such as age, physical fitness and experience were now also of importance.

The youngest and poorest 1,200 chosen for service in the legion became *velites*. It is quite probable that the appearance and armament of the *velites* as described by Polybius and detailed below is not representative of the Roman light troops that served at Cannae. Livy implies that a major reform of these troops took place in 211, formally instigating the *velites* in the fashion later portrayed by Polybius. Prior to that date it would seem that light troops were armed and equipped in a far more *ad hoc* fashion (which may well mirror their poor performance in the face of their Carthaginian opposite numbers).



*This page: It is very probable that the Montefortino helmet was the most popular type worn by Roman legionaries of this period and was certainly worn by the hastatus and princeps. That shown here was recovered from Canusium (Canosa di Puglia) and probably dates from the time of Cannae. The top-knot of the helmet held the plume of three 45cm-high purple or black feathers described by Polybius. The two cheek guards are hinged and provide excellent protection for the cheekbones and jaw without inhibiting the wearer's vision. A double ring centrally located on the helmet rear allowed two retaining straps to pass under the chin, and fix to the two hooks on the base of each cheekpiece to hold the helmet firmly in place. (Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe)*







◀ *The Hellenistic panoply of the figure on the right was commonly worn by consuls and pro-consuls throughout the Hannibalic War. Paullus, Varro Geminus and Minucius would have probably been dressed as such at Cannae. The figure being addressed on the left is a tribune serving his five- or ten-year period in the rank. Each manipule in a legion had a signifer who carried a standard surmounted by an emblem, in this case of a hand. (Painting by Richard Hook)*

▶ *Third-century helmet of 'Montefortino' type. This type of helmet was worn by the majority of Roman soldiers during the Punic Wars. This example is in the British Museum. (Photo: N. V. Sekunda)*



As described by Polybius, these *velites* were very lightly equipped as befitted their role as skirmishers operating in the van of the advancing heavy infantry. Weapons carried included a number of four-foot long javelins and a sword. Personal protection was minimal, being confined to that provided by their cloaks and lightweight three-foot diameter hide covered wicker shields. They were distinguished from

the heavy infantry by wearing wolf- or bear-skins over their helmets.

In contrast, *hastati*, *principes* and *triarii* all wore body armour, the extent of their protection reflecting the personal wealth of each individual legionary – at this time each soldier was still expected to purchase his own equipment. The 1,200 strong *hastati* were the ‘flower of the young men’ selected for ser-



*Left and opposite page: The Italo- or Etrusco-Corinthian helmet was still in use by legionaries and is associated with the triarii. Two examples are illustrated here, and both are without cheekpieces. The Italo-Corinthian helmet illustrated on the side of the Amazons sarcophagus from Tarquinia is being worn without them. The small holes on the base of the helmet probably held a retaining strap when cheekpieces were not worn. Note the different shape of neck guards. The helmet recovered from Melfi in Apulia still retains the crest holder and the two feather holders characteristic of the design. (Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe)*



vice in the front rank of the legion in battle. While in peak physical condition, they had yet to make their mark in the world and their meagre body armour was due to their limited financial means. Most wore a square breastplate or *pectorale* that offered a modicum of protection to the chest and vital internal organs. Polybius does observe that if a *hastatus* belonged to the first class he was entitled to purchase and wear an iron mail shirt of the sort worn by most if not all of the *principes* and *triarii*. It was unlikely therefore that when the *hastati* drew up for battle they revealed the uniformity of appearance so beloved of contemporary artistic reconstructions.

These mail *loricae* were very heavy, weighing as much as 15kg. Indeed, many of the legionaries who waded out into the water at Lake Trasimene to escape Hannibal's pursuing troops were pulled down to a watery grave by the weight of their mail *loricae*. Testimony to their protective effectiveness, however, is indicated by Hannibal's instruction to strip the Roman dead of their mail shirts after the battle in order to equip his own men.

In the second line of the legion were an equal number of *principes* – men described by Polybius as being 'in the prime of life'. They, along with the *hastati*, were each armed with two *pila* of varying weights. This javelin was designed so as to employ



the weight of the weapon once it had been thrown to impart sufficient momentum to enable its long iron shank to penetrate the enemy's shield and continue through to wound the body. It was also a feature of this weapon that the iron shank bent upon impact, so rendering it impossible to be re-used by the enemy. Quite a number of examples in this state have been recovered from sites in Spain and France, although these date from the period after the Hannibalic War. Once the *pila* had been thrown, the legionaries became swordsmen for close combat.

The standard side-arm of all ranks in the legion in Polybius's day was the *gladius hispaniensis*, but it is still a matter of debate whether this was the weapon that was employed by the legionaries at Cannae. This Spanish cut-and-thrust sword was certainly in widespread use by 200, and it seems very probable that it was employed prior to that date. Almost certainly the Romans would have come across this weapon in the hands of Spanish mercenaries in the First Punic War, suggesting that its adoption probably dates from that time. It has been described by



*Left and below: This Hellenistic bronze helmet, now in Berlin, is of a similar shape to those shown on representations of Roman generals from Republican times, and may have also been similar in shape to helmets worn by the Carthaginians. (Berlin Antikenmuseum, Inv. 10481)*

► *A Roman cavalryman and two infantrymen from the so-called 'Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus'. Though this monument, now in the Louvre, is late second century in date, the details of dress and equipment of the Roman army will have changed little. (Paris, Louvre)*

Robert O'Connell as 'the most deadly of all weapons produced by ancient armies, and it killed more soldiers than any other weapon in history until the invention of the gun'. Livy graphically described its effect in battle against the Greeks in the Macedonian Wars, who were horrified at the appalling injuries this weapon inflicted – 'arms torn away, shoulders and all, heads separated from the bodies with the necks completely severed and stomachs ripped open'.

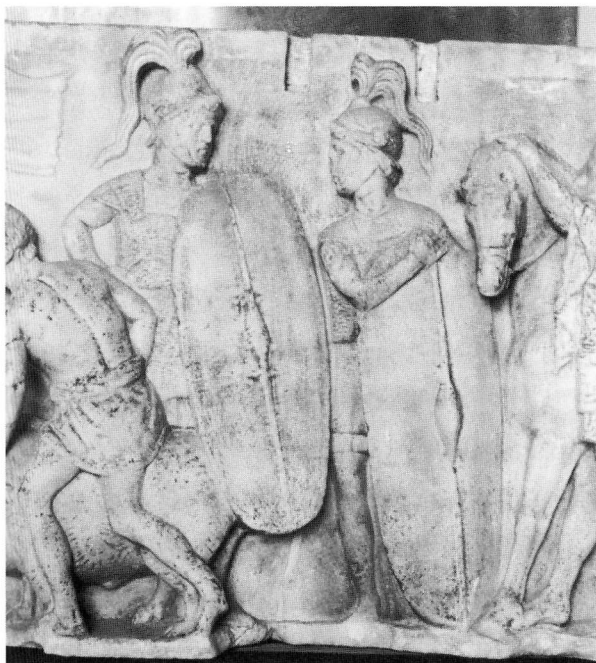
With the *gladius* always carried in the right hand, the left was used to carry the oval shield or *scutum*. This measured 4 roman feet long by 2 feet wide and was the main defensive item carried by the legionaries. One bronze greave was worn on the left leg so as to 'protect the leg which was thrust forward for fighting'. All three ranks wore bronze helmets based on Etrusco-Corinthian, Attic or Montefortino designs. These were commonly surmounted by crimson or black feathers some 45cm high and were designed to intimidate the enemy by making every legionary look greater than his actual height.

The *triarii* formed the third and last line of the legion. Numbering just 600, they comprised veteran soldiers who would not enter the battle unless its outcome were in doubt. Indeed, the Latin '*Inde rem*



*ad triaros redisse*' meaning 'the last resource is the *triarii*' passed into contemporary Latin parlance as indicative of a desperate situation. *Triarii* were distinguished from the two front ranks by their employment of the long thrusting spear known as the *hasta* in place of the *pilum*. In that sense they





represent all that was left of the original Roman phalanx. In all other respects they were virtually indistinguishable in appearance from the *principes*. In a well known passage Livy describes them waiting in reserve and kneeling ‘with the left leg advanced, their *scuta* leaning on their shoulders, their spears fixed in the ground and pointing obliquely upward as if their line were protected by a bristling palisade’. On occasions they were not deployed in the battle line at all, being charged to defend the legionary camp, which is where they served during the Battle of Cannae.

### The Socii

The *dilectus* within the territories of the *ager Romanus* had its counterpart in the towns and cities of the Socii. Under the terms of the respective bilateral treaties with the Roman Republic, these Latin and Italian allies were required to furnish military forces to serve beside the citizen legions. It would seem, however, that the bulk of the allied forces raised were drawn from the *socii Latini nominis*, the Latin colonies spread through Italy. Livy comments how in 217 the allied troops Rome used were the heavy infantry and cavalry of the Latin Confederacy. It has been stated elsewhere that the numbers raised equalled as much as half, if not more, of the total

manpower Rome deployed in the field. Indeed, for the two legions under the command of a consul there was a minimum of two allied legion equivalents serving alongside.

Some indication of the number of allied troops serving with the legions can be gauged by the troop numbers deployed at the outbreak of war. Alongside the six legions raised for the year 218, 40,000 infantry and 4,400 cavalry had been levied from the allies. Consular command of these allied units was exercised through the appointment of three high-ranking Romans as *praefecti sociorum* to each *ala*. In battle these were deployed on the left and right wings of the legions – hence their designation as *ala sociorum* (*ala* meaning ‘wing’). Each *ala* numbered approximately 5,000 infantry, subdivided into ten cohorts. These in their turn comprised maniples of *hastati*, *principes*, *triarii* and supporting cavalry, thus mimicking the structure of the much larger legion. Most cohorts carried a name or title to identify regional origin and identity. From among these allied troops it was common practice for the Romans to select the best to form an élite unit of 1,600 infantry and 600 cavalry called the *extraordinarii*. These were organised into four cohorts and provided the consular bodyguard as well as screening the army on its line of march. It was these who first made contact with Hannibal’s light troops at Lake Trasimene.

## 218: TICINUS AND TREBBIA

The allocation by the Senate of Spain and Africa to Publius Cornelius Scipio and Tiberius Sempronius Longus as the elected consuls for 218 serves to vindicate Hannibal's belief that the Romans intended to prosecute the war against Carthage by initiating an offensive strategy overseas. That they were tardy is derived from their conviction that the strategic initiative lay in their hands. Of more immediate consequence was the delay to the timetable of Cornelius Scipio brought about by a rebellion in Cisalpine Gaul. This arose in consequence of the two new colonies of Cremona and Placentia whose 6,000 colonists were barely established when the Celts of the region revolted. Roman military strength in the Po valley stood at one legion under the command of the *praetor* Lucius Manlius.

There is clearly a degree of confusion as to the origins of this legion. Its designation by Polybius as the fourth suggests and contrary to his own belief that it was the fourth legion raised in the 219 levy and not of the 218 levy. In taking the view that the fourth legion had wintered in Gaul this text takes its lead from Connolly, whose reasoning on this matter seems eminently sound. His method of re-designating Polybius' fourth as Legion 1 owing to its being the first legion actually mentioned in respect of this new war leads to all those that follow being numbered in sequence. This method will be employed in this text from hereon.

Whether or not Hannibal had arranged with the Celts that they revolt at this time is uncertain. If not, the outcome of events was decidedly to his advantage. Abandoning Placentia and Cremona, the colonists retreated to Mutina followed by the vengeful Celts. Manlius brought up his legion to relieve the town but was ambushed. The survivors withdrew into the settlement of Tannetum to await relief. In the absence of any reserve units, the Romans had no choice but to draw upon those raised by Scipio

for service in Spain. The Senate detached Legion 2 (first raised in the 218 levy) from his command and sent it to the Po valley forthwith supported by 5,000 allied troops under the command of the *praetor* Gaius Atilius. Scipio experienced a delay of some months while he raised and trained a replacement legion. In the meantime Sempronius had already taken his own forces southwards to Sicily and at Lilybaeum proceeded to assemble a fleet with a view to transporting his army to Africa.

It was in late August that Scipio finally embarked his army for Spain. His fleet sailed along the coast of Etruria and Liguria, finally landing at the eastern mouth of the Rhône just past Massilia. Why he did this is uncertain, for we must presume that Scipio was still under the impression that Hannibal was operating to the south of the Pyrenees. Livy implies that Scipio's troops were suffering quite badly from sea-sickness so that his halt may have been completely unplanned. His surprise, therefore, at being informed that Hannibal's army was reportedly attempting to cross the Rhône some days' march to the north of his landing place must have been profound.

Whatever the explanation, Scipio's reaction was prompt. He dispatched cavalry northwards to scout Hannibal's position: it was this detachment that ran into the force of Numidians sent south by Hannibal. Following a sharp fight the survivors turned and returned to report to their respective commanders. With confirmation of Hannibal's presence, Scipio ordered the baggage to be loaded back on to the ships and marched his army northwards in the hope of catching him. When he arrived at the crossing point he found Hannibal's abandoned camp and was informed by local Celtic tribesmen that the Carthaginian army had moved off northwards some three days previously. Polybius says that Scipio was clearly 'astounded to find that the enemy had pressed on' and it was only now that he

divined the true objective of Hannibal's march. As the implications of a Carthaginian descent on Italy sank in, 'Scipio could be sure of only one thing, namely that he must adjust his own movements to the actions and strategy of his enemy'.

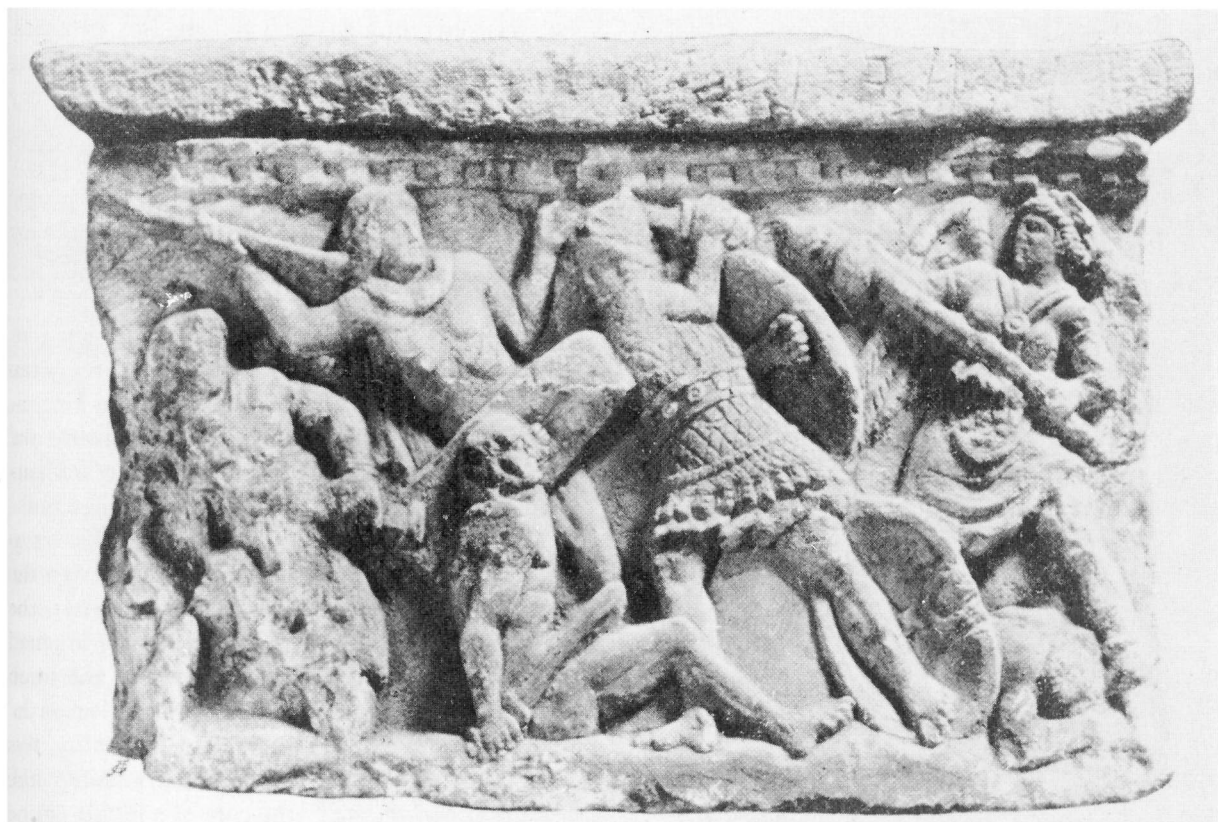
Returning quickly to the mouth of the Rhône, Scipio now determined on a course of action that was to have profound strategic consequences for the longer term conduct of the war, even if its benefit were not immediately apparent. He transferred command of the army to his younger brother, Gnaeus, and ordered him on to Spain with the injunction to protect old allies and win over new ones and drive Hasdrubal from Spain. That he chose to return to Italy – but without his army – suggests that Scipio was fully aware of the strategic benefit to be obtained from having his army con-

tinue on to Spain rather than return with him to Italy. In the first instance, it would cause a dilution in the resupply effort from Carthage, forcing it to concentrate on maintaining the war effort in Spain at the expense of resupplying Hannibal. Secondly, a Roman army operating in northern Spain would also preclude Hasdrubal reinforcing his brother via the land route, which Hannibal had already made such efforts to protect.

Returning forthwith to Pisa, Scipio sent word to the Senate of Hannibal's intentions. They immediately recalled Sempronius from Sicily, and by prodigious efforts the consul managed to transfer his army to the eastern Adriatic port of Ariminum (Rimini) by early December. Marching north-west to join Scipio, he arrived during the second half of the month in time to participate in the Battle of the Trebbia. In the meantime, Scipio had taken command of Legions 1 and 2, which had been operating in the valley of the Po. It would seem his original intention had been to march with this army westwards to block Hannibal from entering Italy by facing him in the pass by which he was crossing the

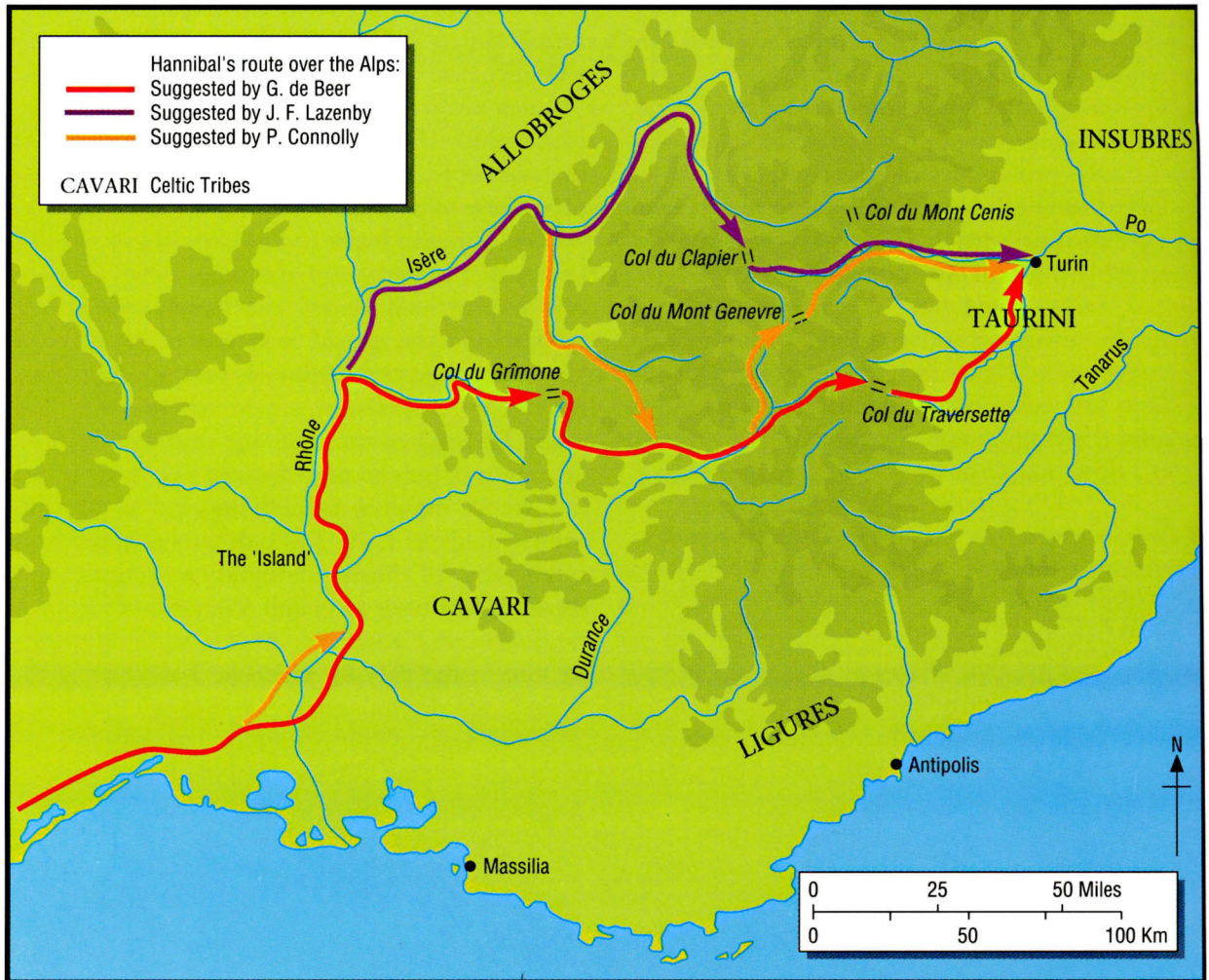
▼ *Etruscan alabaster cinerary urn showing a combat between a group of Celtic warriors and an Italian infantryman. The winged female figure to*

*the right can presumably be identified as Vanth, one of the Etruscan daemons of the underworld. (Chiusi, Mus. civ. no. 980)*





## Possible Routes for Hannibal's Army over the Alps



Alps. But it was becoming ever clearer that the mood among all the Celtic tribes of Cisalpine Gaul was becoming decidedly more hostile to Rome. Determining that discretion was the better part of valour, Scipio decided to forego that plan and await the descent of the Carthaginian army into the plains of Northern Italy.

### First Blood: Ticinus

When, during the first or second week of November, Hannibal's army finally arrived on the plain, they were cold, hungry and totally exhausted from their ordeal. The 20,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry that had survived were but a pale shadow of the

great army that had left New Carthage just five months before. Polybius cites these figures with confidence, their provenance deriving from Hannibal himself, who had them inscribed for posterity on a bronze tablet and placed on a promontory at Capo Calonne, near Croton in southern Italy. They indicate that Hannibal had lost nearly half the army with which he began his ascent in the fifteen days he took to cross the Alps. That even the Celts now looked askance at this pitiful force is clearly implied by the failure of Hannibal's overtures to the local tribe of the Taurini. But what Hannibal lacked in numbers he had managed to retain in quality. He possessed in his African and Spanish infantry and markedly superior cavalry the core of a highly effec-

◀ *Hannibal's ascent of the Alps began between early to mid-October 218 (according to a number of commentators; there is no universal agreement on the matter). Thereafter his route has become the object of much informed debate with different academics and specialists interpreting Polybius's and Livy's information in different ways. Such exegesis is demonstrated on this map where three alternative routes can be traced – and there are others. It is certainly not*

*in the domain of this text to enter into the debate over such matters. The crossing took fifteen days, Hannibal losing in the process nearly half the army with which he began the ascent.*

flocked to his cause. What was needed now, Hannibal appreciated, was to remove any residual doubt in their minds by a decisive victory over the Romans.

On receipt of the news of Hannibal's arrival in Cisalpine Gaul, Scipio departed Placentia and, having bridged the Po, marched into the territory of the Insubres. Throwing a second bridge across the River Ticinus, Scipio and Hannibal met in combat for the first time near the modern town of Lomello. While the ensuing combat was less a battle than a large cavalry skirmish, it nevertheless presaged much of what was to come in the main engagements. Hannibal's cavalry was decisive, showing a marked superiority over the Roman and allied horse. Scipio was wounded in this action, and according to tradition his life was saved only by the quick thinking of his son, the 17-year-old future Scipio 'Africanus'. The Roman army withdrew at speed to Placentia, destroying bridges as it went. News of the victory prompted further Celtic tribes to join Hannibal. Then, when Scipio's own Celtic levies deserted his army and went over to the Carthaginians, he prudently abandoned Placentia and withdrew south into the foothills of the Apennines to await the arrival of Sempronius and his legions. It was mid- to late December when Sempronius finally arrived.

▶ *It was amid the deep valleys cut by the River Trebbia that Hannibal inflicted his first great defeat on the Romans in late 218. The Roman losses of some 15,000 men were sufficient to bring the uncommitted Gauls of the Po valley flocking to his cause.*







▲ *Alabaster Etruscan funerary urn, found near Citta della Pieve. The figure in the centre is presumably meant to represent the deceased, an Etruscan. In the background Italian cavalry and infantrymen fight, but note the shield held by the figure on the extreme left, who must be a Celt. (Florence, Mus. arch. no. 16 M; Photo: Alinari)*

◀ *Roman lamp, probably of Imperial date, showing a Celtic horseman. Note the long hair sticking out. Some Celtic warriors stiffened their hair with lime to make their appearance more fearsome. (Athens, National Museum)*

► *A Spanish scutatus is here shown wielding the formidable Spanish sword, the gladius hispaniensis, which was also adopted by the Romans (Paris, Louvre)*

► *A single shekel coin the reverse of which shows an elephant with the Punic letter aleph in the exergue. (Hirmer Fotoarchiv, Munich)*







Hannibal was now encamped just six miles away on the other bank of the River Trebbia. A major battle was clearly imminent; but Hannibal would not offer battle except on his own terms.

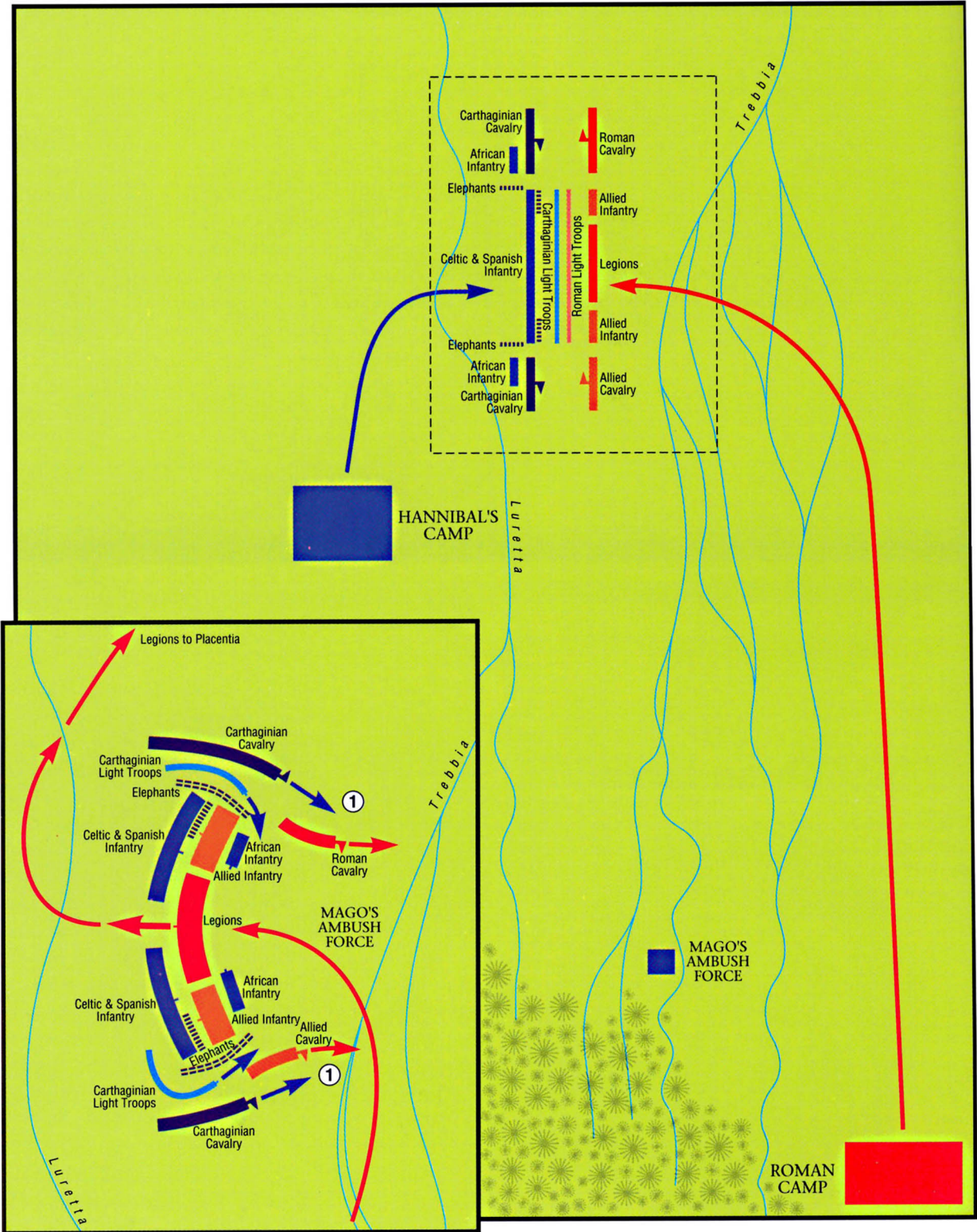
### Trebbia

The first major battle between Hannibal and the Romans occurred in December 218 near Placentia. With the two forces encamped in close proximity, Hannibal, mindful of the fickle allegiance of his Celtic allies, wished to offer battle and set out quite deliberately to draw the Romans into one. Knowing of their sensitivity to ambush amid woods, he determined to entice them to fight on ground on which they would hardly suspect such a possibility. Hannibal had seen an area of flat terrain between the two encampments and Rivers Trebbia and Luretta, which being devoid of woods would allow the Romans to accept battle free in their own minds of the fear of ambush. Yet the perceived 'safety' of the open terrain for the Romans was more apparent than real. Hannibal intended to take advantage of the bushes and other vegetation that lined the steep banks of the water courses near the flat terrain to hide a force whose task was to effect that very ambush the Romans would not suspect. Selecting an equal force of 1,000 cavalry and infantry, Hannibal placed them under the command of his youngest brother, Mago, and sent them to hide with the strict instructions that they were only to emerge from cover and ambush the Romans at the crucial moment of the battle.

As dawn broke on a bone-chillingly cold morning, Hannibal sent his Numidian light horse across the Trebbia to attack the Roman encampment. Unable to tolerate what was a carefully designed provocation, the consul Sempronius ordered out his own cavalry then followed up in short order with his skirmishers and finally the whole army (see map overleaf). That this was done on the spur of the moment is suggested by the fact that the Roman force deployed without eating breakfast. Although initially buoyed up by the prospect of battle, Roman ardour faded as, amidst snow showers, the whole army forded the Trebbia which was in full flood with the water running breast high. Sempronius drew his wet and freezing army up in standard Roman fashion



# The Battle of the River Trebbia





with legions in the centre flanked by the allied infantry and the cavalry on the wings. Polybius states that there were 16,000 Roman infantry and 20,000 allied foot. The 1,000 Roman cavalry were on the right wing and the 3,000 allied drawn up on the left. In the meantime, Hannibal had his men fed and warmed by large fires as they rubbed their bodies with oil to insulate themselves from the cold. With the Romans fully arraigned for battle he deployed his own army on the right bank some 1,400 metres from his camp. He placed his 20,000 Celtic, Spanish and African infantry in one long line with the elephants at the front of each wing of the infantry line. His 10,000 cavalry was split equally and placed opposite their Roman and allied counterparts.

Combat began with a clash of skirmishers in which the Romans came off worst. As Sempronius recalled his own skirmishers, Hannibal attacked (1) with his numerically superior cavalry and drove the Roman and allied cavalry from the field, thus stripping the flanks of the infantry of their protection. In the meantime the two infantry lines in the centre had closed and at once became embroiled in heavy and vicious combat. Hannibal now launched his African heavy infantry and his re-formed light troops and Numidian light horse against the exposed Roman flanks. The inexperience of the allied levies on the legionary flanks already assailed and pinned down by the elephants to their front now told as, unable to about turn, they broke in the face of this assault. The dire situation of the Romans was compounded as Mago, sensing that the crucial moment of the battle had arrived, led his 2,000 troops out of their hiding place and fell on the Roman rear. The triarii about faced to combat this fresh assault, but to no avail. Attacked on all sides and amid driving rain and poor visibility, the Romans were pushed back towards the swollen Trebbia. Only in the centre did they achieve any success, for the legions had finally managed to cut their way through the Celts. Here Sempronius believed he had secured victory but then found himself isolated and cut off from the rest of his army. In the midst of what had now become a storm, the Carthaginian elephants and cavalry killed many of those attempting to escape as the Roman army disintegrated.

As many as 15–20,000 Romans were killed. Hannibal's losses were light and confined mainly to the Celts. Sempronius withdrew his survivors to Placentia, where they were joined later by Scipio and those stragglers who got back to the camp. They wintered in Placentia, then in early spring broke out and moved to Ariminum. However, it had not gone unnoticed by the Romans just how successful their legions had been in breaking through the enemy line, and it was this precedent against Hannibal's army that was to provide the basis for their tactics at Cannae.

The Battle of the Trebbia was engineered by Hannibal so as to take advantage, not just of the lie of the land, but of the overwhelming desire (so Polybius assures us) of Sempronius to seek battle and take sole credit for defeating Hannibal. As Scipio was still injured, Sempronius was in command but, out of deference to his colleague, sought his council. Polybius tells us that Scipio advised Sempronius to avoid battle and 'let the situation remain as it was'. That Sempronius nevertheless chose to fight was due, according to Polybius, to the fact that 'the engagement was dictated not by the facts of the situation but by his personal motives' and that in consequence 'his judgement was bound to be at fault'. In his absolution of Scipio for any responsibility for defeat at the Trebbia we see the emergence of a theme that forms the major subtext running through all of Polybius's recounting of major events in the war against Hannibal up to and including the battle of Cannae: he will not allow any blame to be apportioned to the ancestors of his patron, Scipio Aemilianus. Thus his detailing of the activities of the powerful Aemilii and Scipio families in the Hannibalic War is so written as to show them in the best possible light, even when he has need to re-write history in order to do so. While Livy in his account of the Hannibalic War does the same, his motivation is less specific, being more concerned to deflect any opprobrium for the conduct of the war attaching itself to the Senatorial class and upholding its reputation.

Hannibal's defeat of the Romans at the Trebbia in the first major battle of the war saw over half of their army destroyed. Now that the cold season was far advanced, Hannibal chose to winter in the Po valley where his Celtic allies could supply his army; he would bide his time until the spring before moving south.



## 217: LAKE TRASIMENE

To realise his primary objective of forcing the disintegration of the Roman confederacy required that Hannibal carry the war into southern Italy. It was there he believed he would find support among cities whose defection would do much to harm the cause of Rome. To get there required that his army breach the great natural barrier of the Apennines. In 217 only two routes were available to him, and in each case the disposition of the Roman forces in the late spring was designed to block his progress. The first and easier of the two lay in an advance through the valley of the Po to Ariminum and thence across the mountains into the valley of the Tiber. It was at Ariminum that the Romans had deployed an army under the command of one of the new consuls, C. Servilius Geminus. He had brought with him from Rome the standard consular army of two legions, the 12th and 13th, plus allied troops. He was joined during the early spring by the veterans of Legions 1 and 2, who broke out of Placentia and made their way to Ariminum.

Hannibal chose the other route, which led down into the valley of the River Arno in Etruria. The most obvious advantage to him of this approach was that it allowed him to select one of half a dozen passes across the mountains into the region. He knew that a second Roman army was based at Arretium under the command of the other consul for 217, C. Flaminius. However the uncertainty of the route he would choose made it unlikely the Romans could react quickly enough to block his descent. For this reason he selected the route that Flaminius would least suspect, notwithstanding that the route from Bologna to Pistoia via the Passo de Collina was one of the most direct into Etruria. Flaminius knew, as did Hannibal, that the valley of the Arno, though which Hannibal and his army would have to make passage after crossing the Apennines, was still flooded from melting snows and heavy spring rains. While Flaminius presumed

it to be impassable, Hannibal was informed by his guides that the ground under-foot was firm. It was during early to mid-May that Hannibal's army passed over the mountains and entered the flooded valley. For four days they waded through the waters and laboured through marsh. He had taken particular steps to prevent the faint-hearted Celts from deserting at the first sign of difficulty. Indeed they suffered most severely of all from the privations on this part of the march. Conditions were bad, with soldiers resorting at night to sleeping on the bodies of pack animals that had succumbed in the waters. Hannibal contracted ophthalmia and lost the sight of one eye. But after four days and three nights the Carthaginian army emerged from the swamp on to dry land near Fiesole.

As described in both Polybius and Livy, the moves prior to the Battle of Lake Trasimene are heavily conditional on their depiction of the personality of Flaminius. He emerges from their pages as an arrogant anti-Senatorial demagogue elected to office while riding on the back of 'popular' support in the assembly. He clearly upset many who were sticklers for the proprieties surrounding the investiture of new consuls by entering into his office not in Rome but at Ariminum. While this has been employed particularly by Livy to indicate his disdain and contempt of the Senate, it was in reality the actions of a man who believed such ritual niceties irrelevant in the circumstances, and that his overriding concern was preparing the army to face Hannibal. It was as consul in 223 that Flaminius had acquired the military experience that saw him re-elected, for in that year he had defeated the Insubres in Cisalpine Gaul. The manner in which his victory was achieved suggests that he was no incompetent, so when the accounts of what transpired before and at Trasimene are read in the accounts of the ancient historians a degree of discrimination is required; for without doubt

Flaminius, like Sempronius before him and Varro after him, have all fallen victim of the need for scapegoats and the re-writing of history.

It was undoubtedly Hannibal's intention to draw Flaminius into battle at the earliest opportunity. The area of Etruria he now entered was rich and fertile and Hannibal proceeded to ravage and pillage the whole area with a view to flushing the consul Flaminius out of his quarters in Arretium and bring him to battle before he could rendezvous with the army of the consul Geminus. The consul was not drawn and made no move out of his encampment even when Hannibal had the temerity to march his army past within easy viewing distance.

▼ *Hannibal's spectacular ambush and defeat of the Roman army under Flaminius took place somewhere along the northern shore of Lake Trasimene. One of the*

*more likely sites is in the vicinity of Passignano, which lies to right of the smaller of the two islands in the lake. (Italian Tourist Board)*

The consul's subsequent decision to strike camp and follow the Carthaginian army has become so embellished by Polybius and Livy as to disguise what was in all probability a perfectly reasonable decision. Livy has an enraged Flaminius determined to follow Hannibal even though 'at a meeting of his staff all his officers urged a policy of caution: any spectacular move would, they declared, be dangerous'. Livy then disingenuously places into the mouths of the tribunes the very justification for Flaminius deciding to follow Hannibal in the first place! They told him that he should 'wait for the other consul so that the two of them might join forces and co-operate in the coming campaign'. Indeed, this would seem to have been Flaminius's intention, for we know that Geminus was already preparing to march towards Flaminius. The Roman plan was in all probability to crush Hannibal between the two consular armies. Thus Flaminius needed to follow Hannibal, but at a distance safe enough to avoid being drawn into premature battle.



Clearly Hannibal cannot have been unaware of the Roman intention and, now that Flaminius had moved to follow him, sought a suitable location to bring him to battle and defeat him before the arrival of the other consular army.

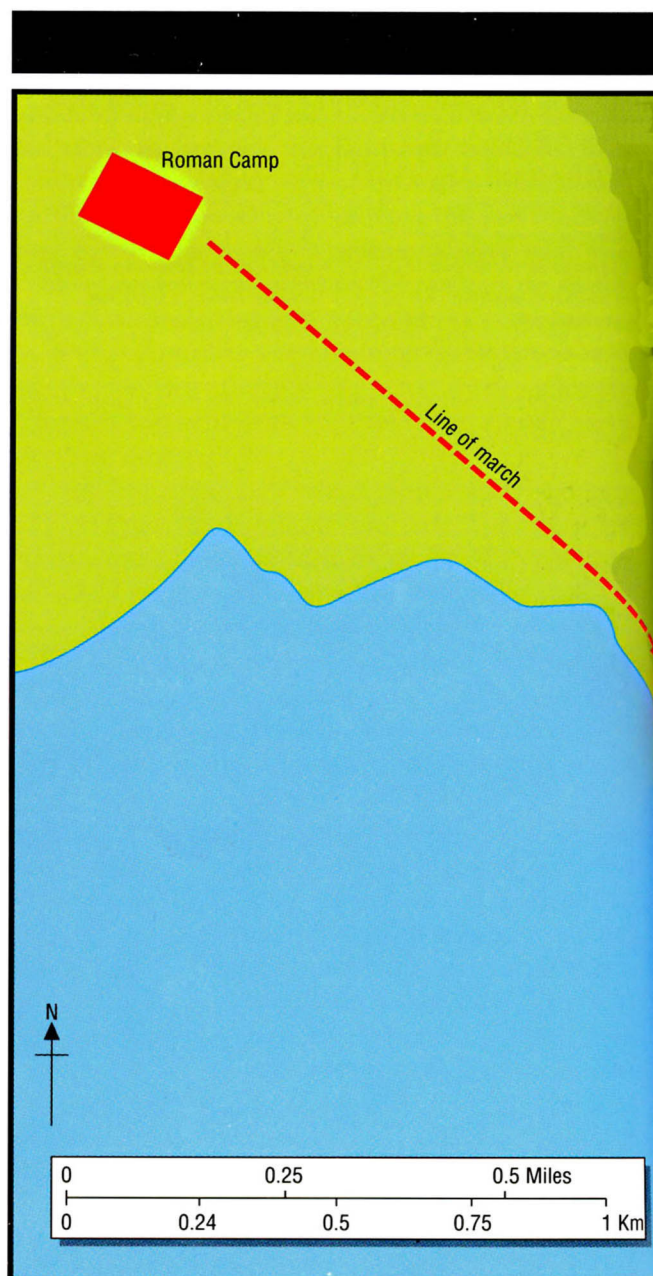
Marching past Arretium, Hannibal headed south towards Lake Trasimene. Flaminius moved his army out with the intention of following Hannibal at a distance. Taking the ancient road along the northern shore, Hannibal identified an ideal position to ambush Flaminius's force in the hills above the modern settlement of Passignano. On 20 June he established his camp on one of the hills above the lake. In the meantime Flaminius had encamped on the plain to the west.

During the night and with the aid of bright moonlight, Hannibal deployed his troops along the hilltops and in the defiles. The following morning Flaminius broke camp and marched along the ancient road along the edge of the lake. A heavy mist had quite fortuitously for Hannibal arisen in the

night, severely restricting Roman visibility of the hillsides. Hannibal's forces, arraigned as they were along the hillsides below which the Romans were now marching, were thus completely hidden to Roman eyes. Flaminius had negligently failed to provide himself with adequate reconnaissance of Hannibal's movements. Normally the task of the allied *extraordinarii* it was only when they in the van of the long and winding Roman column blundered into

▼ This coin, a double-shekel, may represent Hamilcar Barca, the father of Hannibal, who was

responsible for the expansion of Carthaginian power in Spain. (Hirmer Fotoarchiv, Munich)



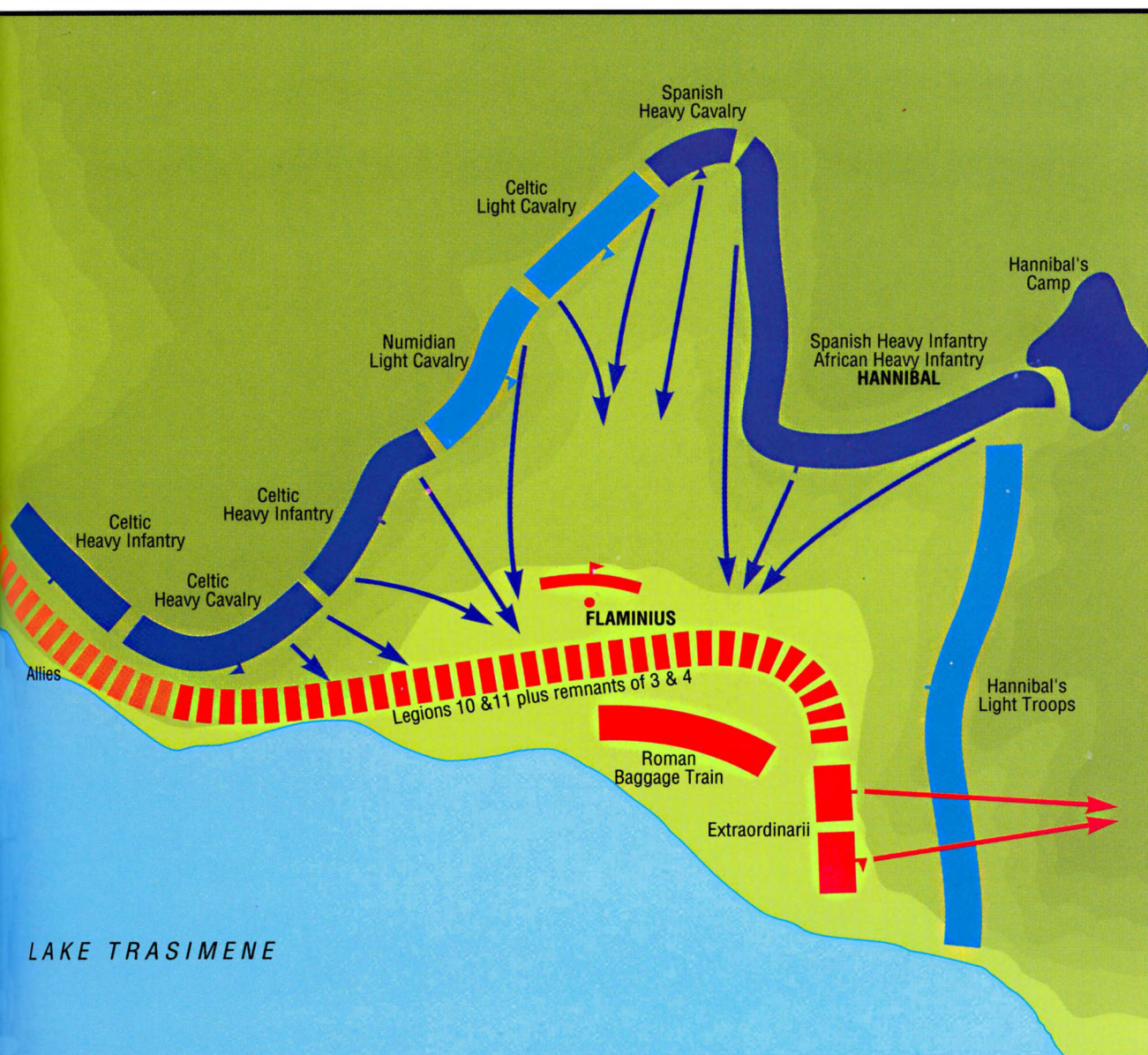


Hannibal's line of blocking light infantry did they realise that Hannibal's army was not marching miles to their fore but present in force and drawn up for battle. Even as the signal trumpets at the head of the line sounded the warning, a mighty cry reverberated around the hills as Hannibal ordered his forces down off the hillsides and on to the flabbergasted and completely surprised Roman army below.

So overwhelming and sudden was the attack

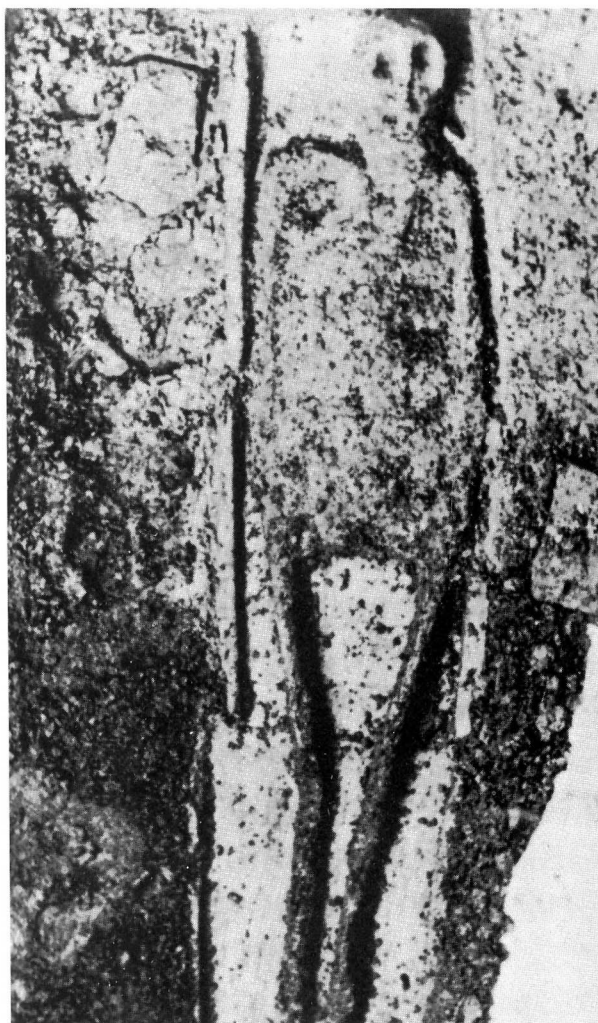
that the Romans were unable to draw their forces into line of battle. The column was assailed along its entire length by Hannibal's cavalry, who rode down the legionaries where they stood. Only at the front of the column were 6,000 troops of the Roman vanguard able to cut their way through the blocking troops. From the vantage point of the small hill to which they retreated they turned back to see the desperate plight of their comrades being pushed

## Battle of Lake Trasimene, 21 June 217 BC









◀ *Top: Lake Trasimene seen here from its western shore. The battle is presumed to have taken place beyond the promontory of Borghetto, seen left, off centre in the photograph and lying in the north-western corner of the lake. (Italian Tourist Board)*

◀ *A general photograph showing the terrain beyond the immediate vicinity around the lake. It is characterised here by rugged and undulating hills and the cones of extinct volcanoes. (Italian Tourist Board)*

▲ *In the vicinity of the villages of Sanguinetto and Tuoro, incineration pits up to twenty feet deep have been discovered; these are believed to contain the cremated remains of the Roman dead. Livy states that Hannibal ordered that the bodies of his own men be 'picked out from the heaps of enemy dead and given burial'. One of these Carthaginian dead is shown here. The graves are empty of any weapons or equipment.*

back into the lake. Little quarter was given by either side. The Celts and in particular the Insubres took the opportunity to vent their spleen on the Romans in revenge for the defeat inflicted on them by Flaminius in 223. Indeed it was one Decurius of the Insubrian cavalry who killed Flaminius by hacking his way through the *triarii* drawn up around him and running him through with his spear. For many a Roman soldier a watery grave was his fate. Either pushed farther into the water or just desperately trying to evade the enemy cavalry chasing in after them, many of the legionaries lost their footing on the slippery, muddy lake floor beneath their feet and were dragged down by the weight of their mail *loricae*. Even so, it took Hannibal's men three bloody hours to effect the destruction of the Roman army. By midday it was all over; 15,000 Romans were dead and about 10,000 made prisoner. Allied troops were released and told that Hannibal's quarrel was with Rome and not them. The following day even the 6,000 that had escaped surrendered. For the loss of 1,500 of his own men, Hannibal had inflicted a devastating defeat on the Romans.

Much debate has been expended on the size of the Roman army: in addition to Legions 10 and 11 raised in the 217 levy and associated allied troops, Flaminius had serving with him the veterans of Sempronius's two legions that had survived the Trebbia. In all he disposed of a force of about 30,000 men – some 25,000 of whom were killed or captured. 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 effecting the break-up of the Roman confederation. Crossing the Apennines once more, this time moving from west to east, he led his army into southern Italy. For it was there, among the Samnites and other peoples whose opposition to Roman rule was still a thing of recent memory, that he sought his potential allies and the means to secure Rome's undoing.



*Iberian warriors of the late 2nd century BC, reconstructed from a ceramic bowl found at Liria (Valencia). Their armour and equipment indicates that these would have been élite troops, the warrior with the crested helmet being probably a chieftain. (Painting by Angus McBride)*



# 217-216: THE FABIAN STRATEGY

News of the disaster at Trasimene reached Rome almost immediately, and ‘terror and confusion’ swept the city. The *praetor* Marcus Pomponius addressed the crowds from the steps of the Senate hall and without embellishment stated: ‘We have been beaten in a great battle.’ Within days there were further bad tidings. A force of Roman cavalry had been ambushed while en route to join Flaminius: all 4,000 were killed or taken prisoner. Matters were deemed to be so dire that the Senate resorted to the ancient device of appointing a *dictator* to ensure the most efficient co-ordination of the war effort. This office combined the *imperium* of two consuls, and the nominated individual would thus supersede all the other magistrates for a period of six months.

It was normally the case that one of the consuls would nominate a suitably experienced individual, but with Flaminius dead and Geminus unable to reach Rome, owing to Hannibal’s eastward march across the Apennines blocking his route to the city, tradition was dispensed with and the *dictator* was elected by popular vote. The choice fell on Q. Fabius Maximus. However, his new strategy was clearly anathema to powerful elements in the Senate who still believed, notwithstanding the disasters at the Trebbia and Trasimene, that Hannibal could be defeated in pitched battle. They connived to restrict Fabius’s freedom of action by denying him the right to choose his own second in command. Instead they succeeded in foisting upon him as *Magister Equitum* (Master of Horse, or second in command) one of their own in M. Minucius Rufus, the former consul.

Replacement of the losses at Lake Trasimene required an emergency levy of four new legions. It is possible that two of these may have been *legiones urbanae* (city legions). Composed of older men and very young men, they were raised for the specific task of providing Rome with a defensive garrison. These have been tentatively identified in the order

of battle in this book as Legions 16 and 17. We must assume that Legions 14 and 15, which, according to Livy, Fabius took with him to rendezvous with Geminus, were still in the process of being trained ‘even as they marched’. This interpretation is employed in preference to Polybius’s account that he took all four new legions with him. It was upon the orders of the new *dictator* that Geminus had marched south from Ariminum with his own four legions. These comprised Legions 12 and 13 in addition to the now reinforced Legions 1 and 2. Then, having given Geminus command of the navy, Fabius took command of all six legions and set out after Hannibal.

In the weeks following Lake Trasimene, Hannibal had led his army through Umbria and via Picenum to the Adriatic coast, where they arrived late in July. Here they rested and recovered from the great exertions of the last year. Once fully restored, the Carthaginian army struck south, burning the crops as they went. Fabius caught up with Hannibal in Apulia, where the latter immediately drew up his army for battle. Fabius in accord with his new strategy ignored the challenge – he quite deliberately kept his army to the mountainous terrain above Hannibal’s line of march. Although he periodically sent out small detachments to attack Carthaginian foraging parties, he would be drawn no further; this served not only to deplete Hannibal’s forces but also, gradually, to rebuild Roman military confidence. Such strategy was a new development and clearly not at all in accord with Hannibal’s need to draw the Romans into another battle. Above all, he needed to force battle as frequently as possible so as to exploit the tactical superiority of his own army and prevent the situation developing into an exhausting war of attrition.

Hannibal clearly appreciated the implications to his own fortunes if the Romans continued with this new strategy. He was determined to force Fabius

into battle by facing him with so great a provocation that he would have no choice but to fight. He thereupon took his army westward and once more crossed the Apennines. Marching via Beneventum, he descended into Campania and moved into the immensely fertile region known as the *ager Falarnus*. In ordering his army to sweep the region of supplies and then burn and destroy all that remained, he wanted to cause alarm among Rome's allies. For if Fabius did nothing to prevent this deliberate destruction it would demonstrate Rome's impotence to prevent Hannibal ravaging lands anywhere in the confederation. His expectation that this should encourage them to throw off their allegiance to Rome was to be disappointed, as was his hope of battle. Even though the *ager Falarnus* burned, it was not enough to bring Fabius down from the hills. He was, however, under very great pressure from an irate Minucius and other officers who wished to seek battle. Fabius would have none of it.

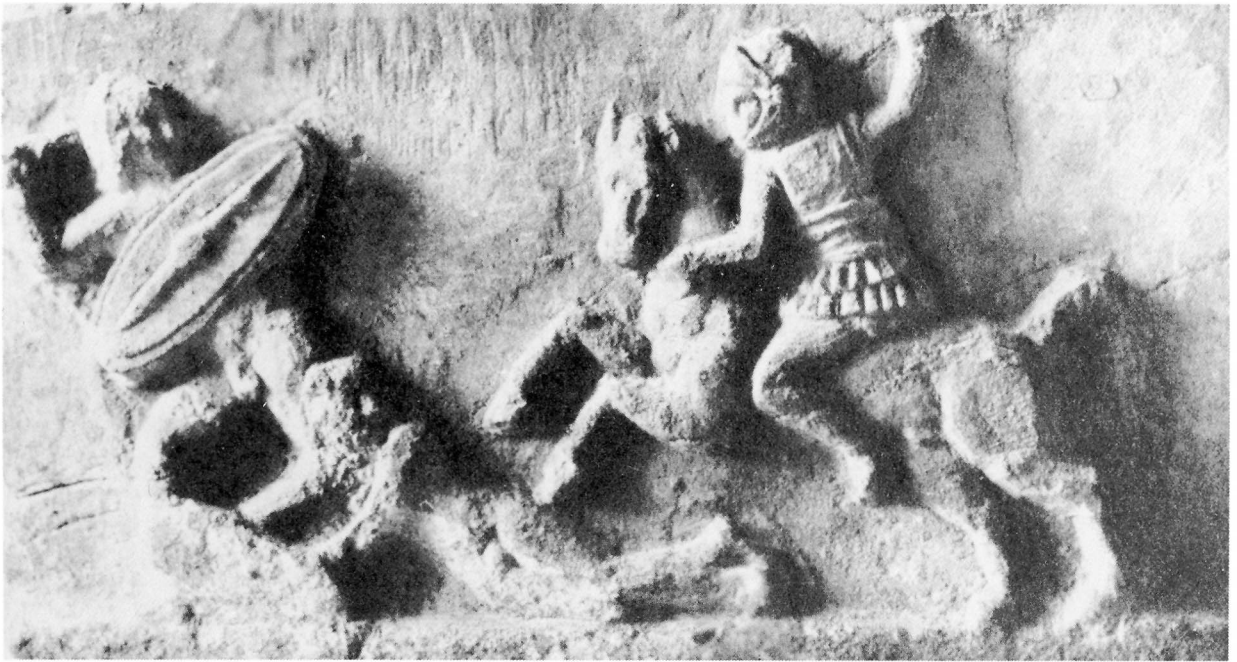
This failure placed Hannibal in a quandary. Although replete with much booty and food, it was clear that he could not winter in the *ager Falarnus*. He needed to go elsewhere, but Fabius had already occupied the pass, through which ran the road to Allifae, whereby Hannibal intended to exit. Fabius had placed 4,000 troops in the pass itself and had so disposed of the rest of his troops that he could ambush Hannibal's army as it took its leave, as he knew it must. Hannibal was penned in. His solution to the problem is one of the most celebrated subterfuges in all military history. Having collected some 2,000 cattle, he ordered that bundles of wood be tied to their horns. 'As the third part of the night was coming to an end' he ordered that the wood be set alight and the cattle driven up the spur that paralleled the pass. The 4,000 Roman troops who were blocking the pass saw the mass of lights and, just as Hannibal intended, concluded that somehow the Carthaginian army was outflanking them. Abandoning the pass, the Roman force moved up and around to confront the enemy 'army' and prevent their escape. With their departure, Hannibal took his army through the pass. Although Fabius was alerted by the news of the passage of the Carthaginian army through the pass, he nevertheless chose to keep his army in camp and await daylight before following Hannibal.

Hannibal struck out for northern Apulia, having been informed that the region around the town of Gerunium was highly suitable as a site in which to winter. Fabius had in the meantime been summoned back to Rome ostensibly on religious matters but in reality to face a Senate becoming vocal in its condemnation of his strategy. It was at this time that the pejorative epithet '*cunctator*' or 'delayer' was first used of him. Minucius had been left to trail Hannibal's army, which occupied Gerunium after massacring its inhabitants. Leaving just one third of his army to guard the town, Hannibal sent the rest far afield to bring in supplies and forage for the winter. With the arrival of Minucius, however, Hannibal allowed himself to be uncharacteristically drawn into a severe skirmish, which netted the Roman Master of Horse a minor victory. By the time the news reached Rome it had become inflated into a major success. To a population grown weary of defeat and disenchanted with Fabius's strategy it was seized upon, particularly by those who had advocated an offensive policy all along, as evidence that Hannibal *could* be defeated on the battlefield. As a reward, and no doubt as a deliberate attempt to impair Fabius in the exercise of his authority in the closing months of his dictatorship, the *imperium* of Minucius was raised to equal that of Fabius. The latter was therefore placed in a predicament over the matter of command of the army. On his return to Apulia, he suggested to Minucius that either they each took command of the whole army on alternate days or they split it, each taking command of one half. Minucius opted for the latter. However, in a unilateral attempt to take on Hannibal near Gerunium, Minucius and his half of the army were nearly destroyed, being saved only by the timely intervention of Fabius. A humbled and contrite Minucius agreed to the reunion of the army. As the year was now advanced beyond the end of the campaigning season, both armies retired to their fortified camps for the winter.

## 216: Factions and Strategy

In December 217 the six-month period of the dictatorship came to an end. Command of the legions reverted to the two consuls for that year (M. Atilius Regulus having been elected to take the place of the





▲ *Etruscan alabaster cinerary urn showing two Gauls being attacked by an Italian cavalryman. The Gauls carry their distinctively bossed and spined oval shields, while*

*the cavalryman seems to wear a precursor of the lorica segmentata worn by the Roman Imperial army. (Cortona, Mus. d. Accademia etrusca)*

dead Flaminius). Rome now became a hot-bed of intrigue as factions within the Senate manoeuvred to ensure their candidates would be elected to the consulships for the following year. At issue among these factions was the strategy to be sanctioned by the Senate for 216. Indeed, it is clear that as the war progressed the military strategy adopted by the Senate and exercised through the consuls was very much linked to whichever faction held sway in that body at the time. In the face of the general disenchantment with the Fabian strategy and the false optimism generated by Minucius's minor victory, it is hardly surprising that support would go to those who espoused a return to an offensive strategy to defeat Hannibal. Such a view was in all likelihood endorsed by the majority within the Senate. That with hindsight this was recognised to have been a profound error not only tarnished the prestige of a number of Rome's leading senatorial families who championed the policy but also served to bring discredit on the Senate itself. It was in defence of their

interests and reputations that later senatorial histories sought to deflect blame by making one of the newly elected consuls for 216, Gaius Terrentius Varro, the scapegoat for what later transpired. This slant on events is also embraced by Polybius and Livy in their own accounts. It is Livy, however, who develops the theme in a robust fashion by heaping such odium on Varro that he appears almost solely responsible for the dire events of 216. As the distortion of persons and events brought about by this rewriting of history would seem to extend even to the accounts of Cannae itself, the matter falls within the purview of our own more specific concerns and is thus deserving of examination.

As portrayed by Livy, Varro is a man of mean origins 'the son of a butcher' who is swept to power by employing his demagogic skills to pander to the political prejudices of those loosely identified as the 'popular party'. Varro is ably assisted in his efforts by one Baebius Herennius, into whose mouth Livy places highly derogatory anti-Senatorial speeches. Indeed, Livy is at pains to make clear that this election 'aroused the bitterest controversy between the senatorial order and the populace'. Nevertheless the 'popular party' triumphs over the *nobiles* when Varro is elected sole consul, having in the process defeated three patrician and two plebian candidates, all of whom Livy pointedly remarks had 'risen in

the social scale by holding offices of state'. While this is a résumé of what Livy has to say, it is sufficient to demonstrate that his account when examined dispassionately defies credulity.

The notion of a 'popular' party contending with the Senate is at variance with an accepted view of where the real power lay in Rome at this time. One can only presume that Livy's employment of the term 'popular party' is meant to imply some powerful plebian grouping at work within the assembly. This contrivance cannot, however, disguise that it was amongst the *nobiles* in the Senate that the real decisions were made and in a fashion unhindered by any opinions expressed by the *plebs*. While in theory the Senate was an 'advisory' body, it was in practice, by virtue of the nature and scope of the decisions it took, the *de facto* 'government' of the Roman people. Livy certainly presents the Senate as if it were such throughout his history of the Hannibalic War. While consuls were elected by the whole citizenry of Rome voting in their centuries in the *comitia centuriata*, in practice such was the power and prestige of the Senate that none could be elected to the office

without the backing of powerful elements within it. Even if Terrentius Varro was prepared to appeal to a wider franchise in the assembly in order to manipulate their support for his candidacy as a 'new man', he would still have needed the patronage of one or more of the powerful patrician families to support his cause. The *patron* would employ their influence and wealth in smoothing the course of their *client* as he ascended the political ladder. In return there was an expectation that the *client* would represent and further the interests of his *patron* when he achieved high office. To have attracted such patronage and become consul in wartime is testament in itself that Varro must have been a man of no mean ability and certainly no butcher's son or revolutionary as depicted by Livy. Indeed, Livy himself describes a career for Varro that shows a conventional ascent of the *cursus honorum* whereby he was first *quaestor plebeian* and *curile aedile* and then *praetor*. While we possess no direct evidence of his military experience, we can presume that he could never have made consul without such a qualification. This is further implied for the suspension of the *Lex Genu-*

► *Hannibal's army entered Italy after crossing the Alps in the first half of November 218. First contact with the Romans came in a large cavalry skirmish at the River Ticinus (1), which was a Carthaginian victory. The first major battle took place on 22 December when the Romans were defeated at the River Trebbia (2) losing between 15,000 and 20,000 men. Hannibal wintered in the Po valley (3). In the spring he crossed the Apennines, in all probability via the Passo della Collina (4) into Etruria. Making passage through the flooded Arno valley, he marched past the army of the consul Flaminius at Arretium. Flaminius followed and, on 21 June, Hannibal successfully ambushed the Roman army on the shores of Lake Trasimene (5). The consul was killed and the Romans lost about 15,000 dead; Hannibal took a similar number captive. Resuming his march south, he re-crossed the Apennines and marched his army to the coast of the Adriatic. At Pescara they rested and recouped. Later in the summer they resumed their march and moved south into Apulia, devastating the fertile countryside as they went. The arrival of Fabius and his unwillingness*

*to engage in battle when Hannibal offered it prompted the Carthaginian to change his line of march. Moving westwards up into the Samnite hills, he moved through the territory of Beneventum and by an unknown route descended into Campania and the plain of Capua (6). Hannibal began deliberately to pillage and burn the area so as to provoke Fabius into coming down from the surrounding hills and fight. But he would not oblige. With the campaigning season coming to a close, Hannibal needed to move his army back to Apulia to winter, but with the Roman army on the hills overlooking his position he could not break out of the plain to recross the Apennines. By a clever ruse, Hannibal was able to fool Fabius, and his army escaped. Recrossing the mountains, he made for Gerunium (7) in northern Apulia to take advantage of the late wheat crop. Wintering in Gerunium with a Roman army of six legions under the proconsuls Geminus and Regulus nearby, he finally left his winter quarters in June 218. He headed directly south for Cannae (8). It was here in August 216 that Hannibal defeated a Roman army of eight legions.*



# Hannibal's Campaign in Italy, 218–216 BC





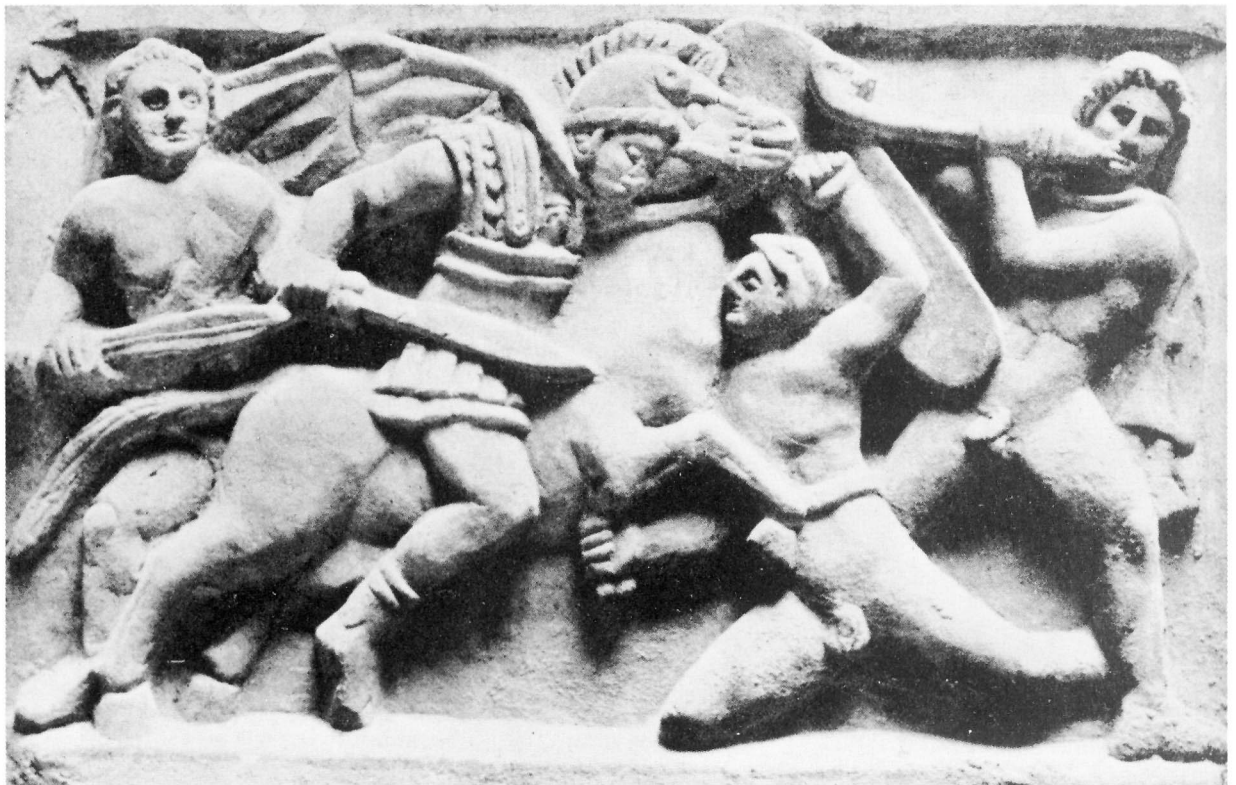
*cia* in 217 would have made it almost impossible for a consular candidate devoid of military experience to have been elected notwithstanding the influence and prestige of his patrons. The favourable manner in which he was received by the Senate after Cannae and his continued employment both in a military and diplomatic capacity down to 200 are testimony to the confidence that body must have retained in the man.

Livy first mentions Varro when as *praetor* he supported the bill to equalise the *imperium* of the *dictator* Fabius Maximus and his *magister equitum* M. Minucius Rufus. This has been interpreted as a device employed by the anti-Fabian faction to limit Fabius's powers in the execution of his strategy against Hannibal and implies that Varro was 'one of their own'. Minucius was for resuming the offensive strategy that had dominated Roman operations since the outbreak of the war, and in this matter he clearly had the support of Varro. It is significant that when Varro himself stood for office as consul those *patres* in the Senate who opposed him were pro-Fabian, for his main attacks were directed against the former dictator. Varro's

own champion in his quest for the consulship, the tribune Baebius Herennius, came from a family with long established links to the patrician Aemilii. Together with the Scipiones they probably constituted the most vocal and influential faction in the Senate in support of resuming the offensive against Hannibal. Behind the very singular nature of the consular elections for 216 and attendant political machinations it is possible to discern a very determined attempt by the Aemilii/Scipionic faction to prevent the re-appointment of Fabius as consul at any cost. Their overwhelming conviction that Hannibal could only be defeated in the field explains their support of Varro who was undoubtedly fronting their cause. Their victory was further enhanced by the election of one their 'own', the purportedly reluctant L. Aemilius Paullus as fel-

▼ *Alabaster funerary urn showing combat between Italian cavalryman and Gauls. The Gaul being ridden down has attacked the belly of the horse with his sword. Note the dis-*

*tinctive Celtic double-pommel to his 'Latene' sword. In the background to the right stands a Gallic trumpeter sounding his carynx. (Chiusi, Mus. civ. 981)*



low consul. With Varro and Paullus in place, the Fabian strategy was promptly abandoned and, with the support of the majority in the Senate, the decision taken to resume the offensive against Hannibal with a view to forcing a decisive battle with him in 216.

### **'A step which the Romans had never taken before'**

The strategy of Fabius had derived from his perception that in Hannibal the Romans were faced with a military genius whom he was convinced they were unlikely to decisively defeat in open battle. For the Aemilii/Scipionic faction that now held sway in the Senate, such a view was unacceptable, and the decrees that went forth from that body for the raising of new legions gave tangible form to that conviction. Deliberate steps were taken to ensure that when Rome came to do battle in 216 she would have the initiative. The extension of the *imperium* of Cn. Servilius Geminus and M. Atilius Regulus was decreed by the Senate along with the injunction they should not under any circumstances attempt to engage Hannibal in battle. Such a decision when it came would be at a time and on a ground of Rome's choosing – a situation unlike that of her two previous defeats. The step the Senate now took, and which they believed must surely resolve the issue in Rome's favour, can only be understood as a collective decision to seek and fight Hannibal in that 'decisive' battle that Fabius believed they could not win.

In 'a step which the Romans had never taken before' the Senate moved to put eight legions in the field for the specific task of doing battle with Hannibal and crushing the Carthaginian army by overwhelming force. The losses of the previous eighteen months had been grievous, and the emergency levy of four legions in the wake of Trasimene can only have been achieved by drawing upon many of those who would have joined the colours for the first time in the levy of 216. How much more rigorous then must the trawl of 216 have been in order to muster the required manpower to service eight legions! It seems reasonable to presume, particularly in the light of the unprecedented steps taken by the Senate after Cannae to scrape together any troops at all,

that in early 216 the property qualification was put to one side. Although Livy implies that this occurred after Cannae, it is not inconceivable that the process began prior to the battle. The *socii* were required to furnish infantry on a one-for-one basis, and in cavalry the Romans levied three allied cavalry to every two of their own.

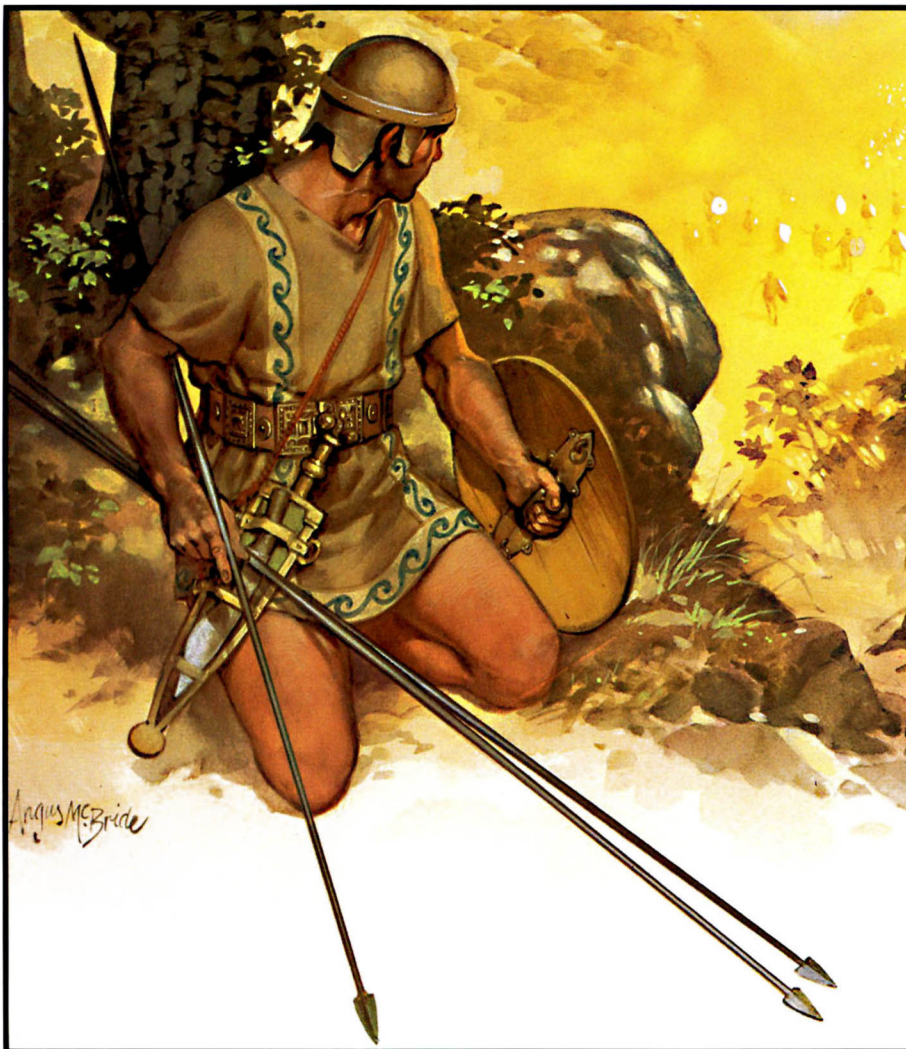
In total Polybius claims that this prodigious effort allowed the Romans and allies to field 80,000 men for the battle of Cannae, although not all were actually engaged on the day. This figure has been the cause of much learned speculation, not the least because Livy proffers figures at variance with those of Polybius. However, there would seem to be little reason to doubt Polybius's total. The manner in which he stresses the unprecedented size of this army Rome was fielding is supported by a number of significant confirmations. The recovery of the bodies of 29 tribunes after the battle indicates that at least five legions were present; other tribunes survived, indicating that more legions than just five were present. There is really little reason to accept a lower figure and this account proceeds on the assumption that Polybius was indeed correct.

It is not possible to know exactly how many troops the Romans levied to field the eight legions. The four additional legions raised for 216 would have required 20,000 infantry and 1,200 cavalry. Assuming the table of legionary deployments presented in this book to be correct, probably none of these four new legions served in the battle. Legions 18 and 19 were dispatched northwards with a watching brief to oversee the Celts in the Po valley and prevent any possible reinforcement of Hannibal's forces from that quarter. It is doubtful whether these two or Legions 20 and 21, which were left at Rome to protect the city, were sufficiently well trained to engage in the sort of battle with Hannibal the Senate envisaged, particularly as this body had itself identified the poor training of the legions as one of the main reasons for Rome's defeats by Hannibal. The rest of the levy was intended to bring up to full strength the six legions at present observing Hannibal's winter camp at Gerunium. It is most probable that a number of these, particularly Legions 1 and 2, were quite severely depleted and therefore in need of major reinforcement to bring them up to the 5,000-man norm for the campaign. In the case of the other

legions we can also assume the need to replace losses brought about through combat and natural wastage. By the time of the full reinforcement of the six legions at Gerunium, the manpower total would have been raised to at least 30,000 legionaries and 1,800 cavalry. To this figure we can add a similar reinforcement of allied troops drawn almost exclusively from the Latin confederacy, to raise their heavy infantry figures to equal that of the Romans, with the addition of at least 2,700 cavalry. The only exceptions would seem to have been inclusion of 1,000 bowmen and slingers sent by Hiero of Syracuse. With the six legions and their associated allied forces raised to full strength, we can presume that the Roman forces at Gerunium numbered 60,000 infantry and approximately 4,500-plus cavalry. This

latter figure would include a small but uncertain number of cavalry that it seems reasonable to suppose the Romans possessed at Gerunium.

The final reinforcement came when Legions 16 and 17, raised in the emergency levy after Trasimene and having completed their military training, were brought south from Rome by Varro and Paullus to join the main body of the army some days before the battle. These forces would have added a further 10,000 legionaries and 600 Roman cavalry and an equivalent number of allied infantry and 900 cavalry. Such an analysis offers a credible picture as to how the figures of 80,000 infantry and slightly more than 6,000 horse that Polybius asserts were available to the Romans at Cannae could have been secured.



*Hispanic warrior based upon a bronze votary figurine. He is armed with several all-iron soliferrum javelins, a straight sword with 'atrophied antennae' hilt and a curved knife stowed on the face of the scabbard; he carries a caetra and wears a characteristic, broad, metal-furnished belt. The helmet may be of leather, with a metal reinforcing band. (Painting by Angus McBride)*



# THE APPROACH TO CANNAE

Hannibal waited until early June before abandoning his winter quarters at Gerunium. He had quite deliberately delayed his move out of these quarters in order to take advantage of the early wheat harvest in the region. Moving with characteristic speed, Hannibal abandoned his camp and headed directly for Cannae, a ruined citadel lying some 120km to the south. Cannae was employed as a food magazine by the Roman army, wherein grain oil and other provisions were stored. Furthermore, the ripening crops in the plain below his new encampment provided Hannibal with excellent and much needed forage. While his men were no doubt gratified by their commander's attention to their welfare, they were probably unaware that by occupying Cannae Hannibal had deliberately provoked an inevitable Roman response. Even though the Senate had been prompted by Fabius's strategy to procure corn supplies from alternative sources in Sicily and Sardinia, Rome was still heavily dependant at this stage of the Hannibalic War on grain grown within Italy and in particular from the region of Apulia. Much of the early summer wheat came from there, and the Roman army drew extensively on the magazines in the region that stored the crop. Ever mindful of the

need to use 'every means in his power to force the enemy to fight', Hannibal had little doubt that the Romans would bring their army south to give battle.

That the Senate had determined the moment had arrived to seek battle is indicated by their response to the news that Hannibal had departed from Gerunium. According to Polybius, the Senate instructed Geminus and Regulus to await the arrival of the two consuls and their accompanying forces. They had decided on their own initiative to follow Hannibal's army, but, mindful of the need to avoid combat, they trailed his line of march by sufficient a distance to avoid the possibility of ambush. Varro and Paullus set out from Rome at the head of some 20,000 infantry and 1,500 cavalry to rendezvous with the proconsular army. According to Livy their departure was accompanied by dire warnings of impending disaster from the lips of Fabius. In the light of Livy's interests, it is not surprising that such is also voiced in the form of a personal attack on Varro: 'If Varro plunges, as he swears he will, straight into action then (mark my words) there will be in some place another and yet more terrible Trasimene or I am no soldier and know nothing of this war nor of Hannibal.' While Fabius may have

► *The citadel of Cannae as seen from the air. It stands on a hillock amid a range of low hills on the southern edge of the plain of the River Aufidius.*





*Left and right: Then as now, Cannae was a ruin. It was subsequently rebuilt in later Roman times and was still inhabited during the early medieval period. In 216 the site was employed as a magazine by the Roman army to store grain and other supplies for the legions. Its attraction to Hannibal was that it lay firmly astride the strategically important grain growing region of Apulia. Occupation of the site and domination of the surrounding region was bound to bring the Romans to battle. (Author)*

spoken out against the consul, it is likely to have been less an attack on the man himself than as a diatribe against the strategy he and those who supported him espoused. Such vehemence would none the less have been in keeping with Fabius's character. We can hardly believe he would have been content to remain a passive and silent observer when his fellow senators were taking decisions he was convinced were utter folly. As employed by Livy, however, the speech is clearly employed to 'set Varro up' so as to make his subsequent blame for the defeat at Cannae all the more plausible. It is clear – and contrary to whatever Livy wishes to imply – that it was the Senate as a whole which took the decision to move against Hannibal at Cannae.

The two consuls finally joined forces with Geminus and Regulus some two days' march from Cannae. The next day the immense army broke camp and headed south, following a line of march that took it through the Plain of Foggia. What Polybius now has to say can indirectly be employed to help resolve the vexed question of the location of Hannibal's camp. 'On the second day [29 July] they arrived within sight of the Carthaginians and pitched camp about five miles away.' At that distance the camp of the Roman army lay in the plain probably located in the area of the present-day village of Trinitapoli. For Hannibal's camp to be seen at about five miles distance suggests that it was

above the level of the surrounding plain, for heat haze and the fine dust raised by the south-east wind known as the Volturnus can hamper visibility over a greater distance at this time of the year. Although it may be just possible to see the hillock on which Cannae itself is located in the far distance on a very clear day at about five miles distance, the eye would be more naturally drawn to the higher and slightly nearer spur on which is found the modern town of San Ferdinando di Puglia. Such is the site that, for this and a variety of other reasons, suggests itself as the best candidate for Hannibal's camp.

The inference to be drawn from the words Polybius attributes to Paullus as they encamped 'within sight of the Carthaginians' is that the Romans knew exactly the sort of terrain they were searching for whereon to give battle. From the vantage point of their encampment on the plain, 'Paullus noted that the surrounding country was flat and treeless and his view was that they should not attack the enemy there since the Carthaginians were superior in cavalry but should try to lure them on by advancing to a terrain where the battle could be decided by the infantry'. Herein lies the essence of the Roman battle plan and one which it would seem was clearly established prior to their arrival on the battlefield. Indeed, such a plan was the very *raison d'être* for fielding the unprecedented eight legions. The prerequisite for its successful execution was the selec-



tion of appropriate terrain on which the Carthaginian cavalry could be neutralised, while the overwhelmingly more numerous Roman heavy infantry crushed their Carthaginian opposite numbers. Their intended battle plan can hardly be described as revolutionary and differs not at all in concept from standard Roman practice. Only in the scale of the manpower used being far and away above that ever before deployed for one battle do we see a difference. As such, its conceptual simplicity should have been comprehensible even to one who according to Polybius and Livy had as 'small military experience' as Varro. If, however, that small military experience included service in some capacity with Paullus three years previously in Illyria, then we must assume that it lay well within the capacity of Varro's intellect to understand such a plan. Are we also to presume that Varro and Paullus had never discussed the possible battle plan? Both authors imply as much, for they have the two consuls falling out over exactly these matters within sight of the enemy and Varro once more being portrayed as the villain of the piece. Indeed this bickering between the inexperienced and headstrong Varro set against the cautious and reticent Paullus is the motif both writers employ as the necessary backdrop to the battle and their concern to absolve Paullus of any responsibility for its outcome. With command of the army being exercised on alternate

days (for such was the convention when two consuls were present) it is important to explore the validity of this portrayed breakdown of relations. For the way in which both historians draw their accounts sees the errors and disaster of the battle itself always falling on those days when Varro is supposedly in sole command of the army.

We have already had cause to question the notion of Varro as a military tyro. However, the great lengths to which both authors go to vilify his name seems to imply a deeper motive than those already stated. Could it be that this was the only way they could deflect attention from the real truth of Cannae? Was it that Paullus and not Varro was the commander of the Roman army on the day of the battle? If so, then the disaster of Cannae would rest on his shoulders and in consequence have profoundly tarnished the prestige and honour of his family name – the preservation of which was one of Polybius's concerns. There are a few pointers which could substantiate such an interpretation. Although Livy depicts Paullus as a very reluctant consular candidate, it is surprising to find Polybius describing how he rather than Varro enrolled the soldiers and brought the legions up to strength for the campaign. Later Polybius tells us it is 'to Paullus all eyes were turned and upon his abilities and experience that the most confident hopes were founded'. The clinch would seem to come on the day of the battle.





▲ *This picture taken in late June amply illustrates the importance of the area. The wheat harvest from this field in the plain of the Aufidius (modern River Ofanto) has already been cut. Hannibal's army was able to exploit the stores in Cannae and also forage in the fertile plain where the pickings were very rich. Of note in the back-*

*ground, and uplifted above the plain, is the modern settlement of San Ferdinando di Puglia – which was in all probability the site of Hannibal's encampment. The picture illustrates very well how the gradual gradient on the south-east side allowed his troops easy access to the plain.*  
(Author)

state what it seems he may have wished his readers to infer – that Varro had led out the whole Roman army with a view to seeking battle with Hannibal. Certainly Paullus's reported reaction in the light of his earlier observation about the unsuitability of the terrain for Roman purposes would be meaningless unless this were the case. However, the credibility of this interpretation turns wholly on the notion we have previously explored and dismissed that Varro was a military inadequate. We must therefore reject the notion that Varro was leading the Roman army out to offer battle. What then was he doing?

Although both Polybius and Livy state that Varro was in command, they both report that it was Paullus who led the Roman cavalry – one of the two positions of honour always reserved for the commander of the army on the day of battle. The difficulty to be resolved lies in explaining how Paullus could have been in command on the day of the battle when from an examination of Polybius's text it is possible to derive a rota for consular command on alternate days that shows Varro in that role. A possible solution presents itself in the events that occurred on the day after the Romans encamped on the plain, that is on 30 July, and when, according to Polybius, 'Varro happened to be in command'.

Polybius tell us that Varro 'broke camp and ordered an advance with the object of approaching the enemy' and that he did this 'in spite of strong protests and active opposition on the part of Paullus'. Interestingly, Polybius does not explicitly

The alternative explanation is that Varro was moving the whole army much closer towards Hannibal's position in order to establish the two encampments which Polybius attributes to the action of Paullus on the following day. That this is a more likely proposition is indicated by the nature of the Roman reaction to the Carthaginian attack as they advanced. According to Polybius, Hannibal sent 'light armed troops and cavalry' to fall on the Romans while they were on the march. Varro responded by bringing forward his heavy infantry who were then supported by *velites* and cavalry. This is highly suggestive of standard Roman procedure whereby the two leading legions deployed in line of battle providing a screen behind which the others entrenched their camp. Polybius also speaks of this combat only ending with the onset of darkness. Such is also likely, given the size of the camp Varro's men were entrenching – it was required to house two-thirds of the army and its building would

► *Balearic slingers, wearing simple tunics and minimal equipment. They normally carried three slings, for different ranges. The knife is characteristic of finds in the Balearics and faintly similar to the falcata shape. (Painting by Angus McBride)*



probably have taken the better part of the day.

In creating two camps so close to Hannibal's own, the larger on the northern bank of the river and the smaller on the far side of the river, the Roman intention was to prevent his troops from gaining access to the plain in order to forage. With his supply situation seriously impaired, Hannibal would very soon have had no recourse but to seek battle. The corollary was also true – Roman supplies were also beginning to run low. What mattered to Varro and Paullus was that battle be offered and accepted on *their* terms. Significantly, it must be the case that Varro and Paullus were in complete agreement about this decision. We can finally drop the contrived hostility between the two consuls. It is

only by assuming a coincidence of viewpoint between them can we make sense of what transpired. The consequence of advancing Polybius's timetable forward by one day lies in the change to the consular command 'rota'. If it was on the third day after establishing the camps that the battle was fought, this would place Paullus, and not Varro, in command.

### Whither the River?

Other problems arise when determining the site of the battle. The topographical information Polybius gives us turns wholly on the actual course of the River Aufidius in 216. He asserts that the battle took

place on the southern bank of the river. Indeed, both the greater part of the Roman force and Hannibal's army had to cross the river to give battle. But the length of the respective battle lines would preclude the battle being fought on the *southern* side of the river if we presumed that its course in 216 followed that of the modern river, now named the Ofanto, which abuts almost the full length of the low hills that run along the southern end of the flood plain. The solution arises from the recognition that the Ofanto has changed its course many times over the years. Certainly study of contours of the plain of the Ofanto suggest several older river beds and that in former times the course of the river tracked across the northern part of the plain much closer to the low ridge on which the aforementioned settlement of San Ferdinando di Puglia now stands. We can therefore presume that Polybius was accurate in his account of the battlefield. The site of San Ferdinando established atop the spur would have offered Hannibal the optimum position on which to establish his encampment, being easily defensible, with a flat top eminently suitable for encampment. Most importantly the gentle slope on the north-east side allowed easy access to the river, the plain and Cannae for the foraging parties from Hannibal's camp. We can therefore see how the larger of the two Roman camps was designed to prevent Carthaginian foraging parties entering the plain.

On the following day (31 July) Hannibal passed the word for his troops to prepare themselves for battle. One day later, 1 August, the whole of his army deployed for battle on the *northern* side of the river. The Romans remained in their camp. It is

clear that it was on this day that the consuls ordered their soldiers in both camps to prepare for battle the following day.

▼ *In this montage of three photographs, an attempt has been made to give the reader a picture of the plain of the Aufidius as seen from the citadel of Cannae. In the light of the case argued in the text, it is believed that the major points of reference on and near the battlefield are approximately located as follows. A, which is the site of the modern town of Ferdinando di Puglia, was probably the site of Hannibal's encampment. It is sufficiently high above the plain to give protection to the Carthaginian army as well as allowing easy access to foraging parties moving on the plain. The River Aufidius in 216 would have flowed much nearer to the northern edge of the plain than it does now (see D, which marks the passage of the present river from west to east) allowing Hannibal's men easy access to a good source of water. The larger of the two Roman*

*camps is likely to have been in the general vicinity of B, perhaps even a little closer. This would have been on the northern bank of the river. The smaller of the two camps under Geminus would have been on the southern bank of the river in the area of C. This would have allowed the Romans to range over the plain in order to disrupt any of the Carthaginian foraging parties coming down from the encampment. E marks the likely battle line of the Roman legions on the day of the Battle of Cannae. (See the bird's eye views.) This would have allowed the allied cavalry to anchor their left flank on the low hills on which Cannae is built. The Roman cavalry would have then rested its own right flank on the River Aufidius. The Romans would have thus fought with their backs to the sea with the wind from the west blowing the fine dust into their faces. (Author)*





# THE BATTLE OF CANNAE

It was shortly after sunrise on 2 August that the Roman army moved out simultaneously from both camps, the larger of the two forces crossing the Aufidius to reach the southern bank. Some 10,000 troops, the number corresponding to those of the *triarii*, were left behind to guard the larger camp. Approximately 70,000 Roman troops now drew up on ground that the consuls had carefully chosen and in a fashion that best allowed them to exploit the terrain that lay between the River Aufidius and the low line of hills to the south on which Cannae itself was situated. On the right of the line was drawn up some 1,600 Roman cavalry under the personal command of Paullus, who was also commander in chief. He had chosen this position with the river lying on the cavalry's right to deny Hannibal's cavalry the opportunity of exploiting open terrain. On the left of the Roman line Varro had drawn up the more numerous 4,800 strong allied cavalry. With its left resting on the base of the hills, it too had closed off the possibility of an outflanking move by the Carthaginian cavalry. As was Paullus's intention, this would limit Carthaginian cavalry tactics to frontal assaults on both wings of the Roman deployment. The Roman and allied cavalry had thus been tasked with holding the might of the Carthaginian

## DEPLOYMENT OF ROMAN LEGIONS AT THE TIME OF CANNAE, AUGUST 216 BC

Immediately prior to the Battle of Cannae the Romans had no fewer than 17 legions (with an equivalent number of allied troops as well) in the field. Total citizen manpower deployed would have exceeded approximately 150,000 men. A similar quantity of allied troops was also deployed, making a total Roman and allied deployment in excess of some 300,000 men. It is a measure of the catastrophe of Cannae that at least one-sixth of this total number, approximating to 50,000 men, were wiped from the Roman order of battle in a day.

Location	Legions
At Cannae	1, 2, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17
In Spain	5 and 6
In Sicily	7 and 8
In Sardinia	9
In the Po valley	18 and 19
At Rome	20 and 21

cavalry and prevent them effecting a breakthrough at any price. To help realise that objective, the cavalry would have been drawn up in depth and in lines at least ten deep. Presuming that the approximate distance of two metres between each horse was retained and that the gap between each *turmae* was



**1** The Romans deploy behind their skirmish line of light troops. Behind the Carthaginian line, Hannibal adopts the

unusual device of throwing his infantry line forward to form a concave shape in order to break

the flow and slow the advance of the numerically superior Roman infantry.

10,000 Triarii guarding Roman main camp

Carthaginian Camp

River Aufidius

C  CELT & SPANISH  
HASDRUBAL

African heavy infantry

**2** Battle begins with Hannibal launching his heavy cavalry against the Roman right wing. Here Paullus has so deployed his cavalry, with his right anchored on the Aufidius, that the Carthaginians have no choice but to assault his closely drawn up and deeply echeloned cavalry frontally. His task is to prevent a Carthaginian breakthrough at all cost before the Roman legions in the

centre have broken Hannibal's line. Conversely, Hasdrubal knows that the success of Hannibal's battle plan turns on a rapid demolition of the Roman right. The fighting on this wing is brutal and very bloody.

**3** On the Carthaginian right, Maharbal is to pin down the Allied cavalry.

C  HANNIBAL  
(40,000 infantry, 10,000 cavalry)

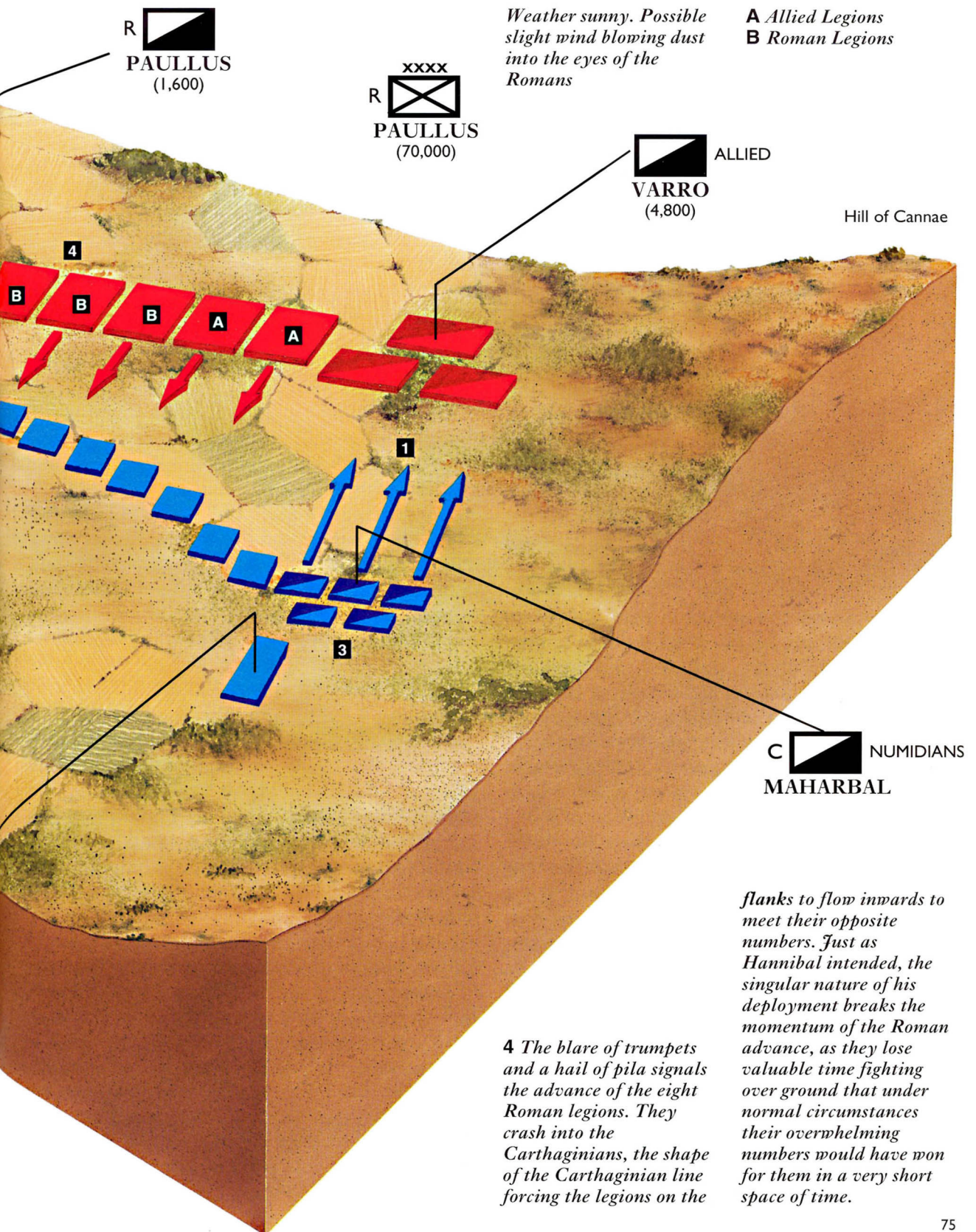
Employing the harassing tactics of the Numidians, he 'encourages' Varro to remain in place while inflicting increasing casualties.

African heavy infantry

## THE BATTLE OF CANNAE

**2 August 216 BC: Phase One**







also maintained, then the cavalry on the right wing would have occupied a restricted frontage of between 575 and 600 metres and that on the left wing about 1,725 metres. Movement would thus have been very difficult and the constricted nature of their deployment most apparent. This would have been acceptable to Paullus if, in holding back the dangerous Carthaginian cavalry on the wings, the Roman horse could grant the legions the necessary time to employ their overwhelming numerical preponderance to break through the Carthaginian centre and carry the day.

That this was undoubtedly the Roman intention can be inferred from the highly unusual deployment of the infantry *maniples*. Polybius not only speaks of them being placed much closer together than was the norm but says that each *maniple* also had its depth increased so that they were 'several times greater than their width'. As each legion was at its maximum strength (apart from the absent *triarii*), this would have required each *maniple* of *hastati* and *principes* to be drawn up 5 men wide and 30 deep. Drawn up as they were in such close order, the individual legionaries would have stood just three feet apart, each *maniple* occupying a mere fifteen-foot frontage. Allowing for the normal gaps between *maniples*, this would give each of the eight legions deployed a frontage of just 300 feet. If we then add the frontage of the allied troops predicating their deployment on identical lines, we can arrive at a figure, including the cavalry, of about 3,000 metres for the whole length of the Roman battle line. A conventional north-to-south deployment could not then have been accommodated by the width of the plain. The length of the battle line could therefore only have been accommodated if we presume it was drawn up diagonally across the plain. This seems to be implied by Polybius's observation that the Roman army was drawn up for battle facing south. It seems reasonable to infer that Paullus had placed his most experienced troops in the very centre of the Roman line, for here lay the point on which the battle would turn. It would therefore come as no surprise to find the seasoned veterans of Scipio's legions here, as they already had experience from the Trebbia of the very manoeuvre they were now being asked to execute. The newer levies would have flanked the experienced troops in the centre, with

the allied heavy infantry posted beyond the Roman forces on each wing. Command of the infantry forces lay in the hands of Geminus and Minucius. Approximately 55,000 infantry and cavalry were thus drawn up in the main Roman battle line with a further 15,000 skirmishers to the fore.

Descending from his encampment, Hannibal sent his army across the Aufidius with the main body deploying behind a protective screen of Balearic slingers and African heavy infantry. It is clear from the figures quoted by Polybius that Hannibal's army of 40,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry was markedly inferior to the Romans in the former arm but superior to them in the latter. Although we are given no figures that afford a definitive breakdown of his army by contingents, it is nevertheless possible to offer some plausible suggestions. It is apparent that Hannibal had done his utmost to preserve the 12,000 African and 8,000 Spanish troops that had survived the Alpine crossing by always employing his more expendable Celtic allies in their stead. There had nevertheless been a steady reduction in the former since the Trebbia, owing to combat and wastage, so that by the time of Cannae it is estimated there were perhaps just 10,000 Africans and 6,000 Spaniards left. Thus the bulk of the infantry fielded by Hannibal for the battle were Celts. As nearly one-third of all his infantry were light troops, it has been inferred that the remainder, comprising the phalanx of African heavy infantry, numbered about 8,000 men with some 5,500 Spanish troops and about 14,000 Celts making up the rest of the line infantry. Among his cavalry it is estimated that perhaps 4,000 Numidians and 2,000 Spanish remained from his original force with the remaining 4,000 deploying for battle being Celtic heavy cavalry.

It is apparent that more than a few of Hannibal's officers were clearly perturbed by the massive array of Roman military might deploying for battle before their eyes and of their own numerical inferiority. It was Gisgo who put voice to these sentiments only to have a bemused Hannibal turn to him and say 'There is one thing, Gisgo, that you have not noticed.' 'What is that, Sir?' 'In all that great number of men opposite there is not a single one whose name is Gisgo.' The roars of laughter that broke forth from the group were quickly noticed by the



▲ *The road from San Ferdinando di Puglia, which follows the gradual gradient down to the plain, follows a similar line of march used by Hannibal's army as it marched down into the*

*plain of the Aufidius in order to deploy for battle. Then as now, the whole plain was extensively cultivated with vineyards, olive groves, fruit trees and grain fields.*

rank and file and did much to calm and gird their spirits for the coming contest. More importantly, it gives us an insight into Hannibal's own emotional disposition on the eve of the greatest battle of his career and reveals above all his great self-confidence. We can only surmise that he had divined Roman intentions even before the battle so that, given his knowledge of their strength and the predictability of their tactics, he already had the measure of this army in his mind. His final dispositions no doubt reflected a 'fine-tuning' based upon his own rapid appraisal of their battle line.

That this was so can be deduced from the very singular arrangement of his battle line. He grouped together all his heavy Spanish and Celtic cavalry under the command of Hasdrubal (not his brother)

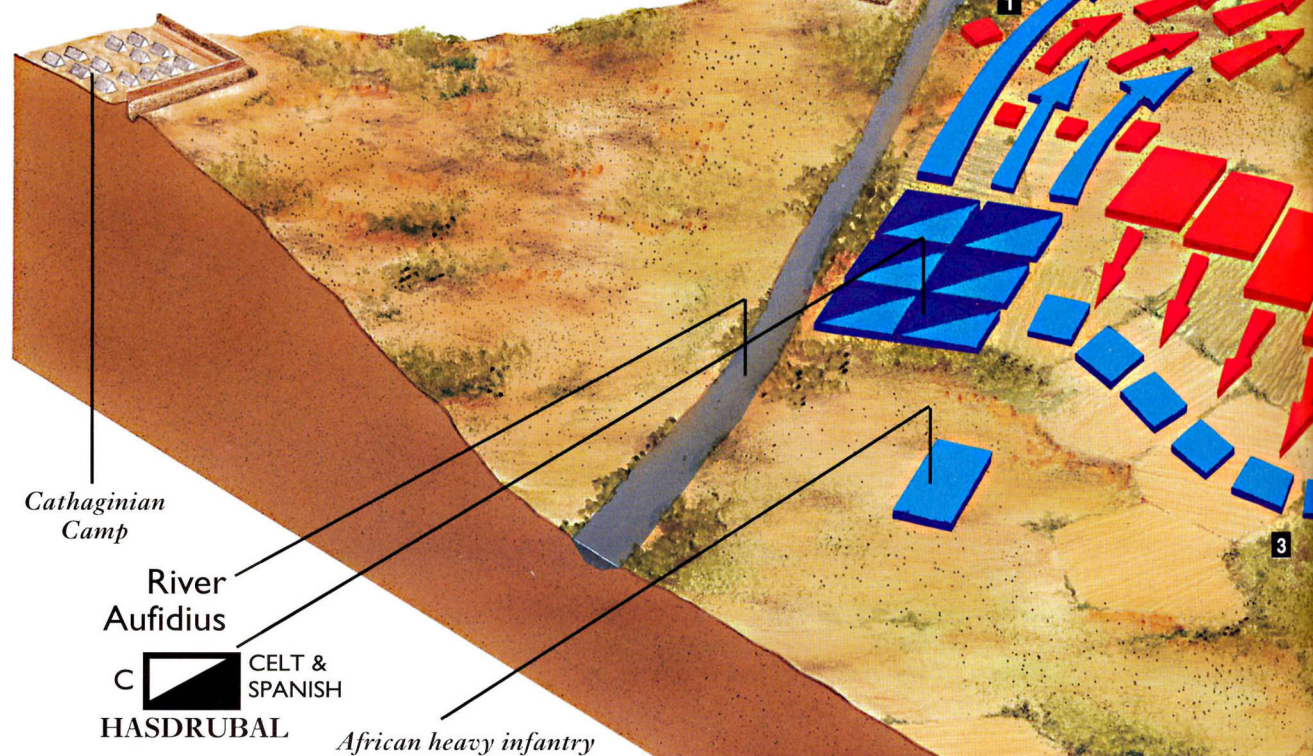
on his left wing facing Paullus. In placing such a weight of heavy horse here, Hannibal had clearly ordered Hasdrubal (and as a matter of urgency) to clear the Roman cavalry from this wing in spite of the negligible room for manoeuvre owing to the proximity of the river on their flank. The Numidian light horse under Maharbal he placed on his right wing opposite the allied cavalry. It would seem their orders required that they employ their idiosyncratic fighting methods to pin down the Italian horse. The Spanish and Celtic infantry he drew up in a long line and in alternate companies with the bulk of his more expendable Celtic troops occupying the actual centre of the line. Once so arranged, Hannibal then advanced the whole infantry line forward so as to form a convex crescent-shaped formation, the density of troops greater at the centre and progressively thinning out nearer to its points. The sole purpose of this novel formation was to break the forward momentum of the Roman heavy infantry and slow its inexorable advance before other developments elsewhere on the battlefield allowed him to play his own 'trump card' in the form of his heavy African infantry. As timing was absolutely critical to the



**1** After a bitter fight, Hasdrubal's heavy cavalry hacks its way through Paullus's horsemen. As the Roman force disintegrates and the survivors turn to escape, a

gap appears between the Roman cavalry and the advancing legions, through which Hasdrubal now leads his heavy cavalry.

10,000 Triarii guarding Roman main camp



**2** By now the irresistible pressure of the Roman infantry has forced back the Carthaginian centre. Sensing that the Carthaginian line is beginning to give way, the legions surge forward, those at the centre advancing more rapidly than those on the flanks, thus creating a rapidly growing salient. But this compacts the mass of the legionaries behind the front ranks, preventing

them employing their weapons.

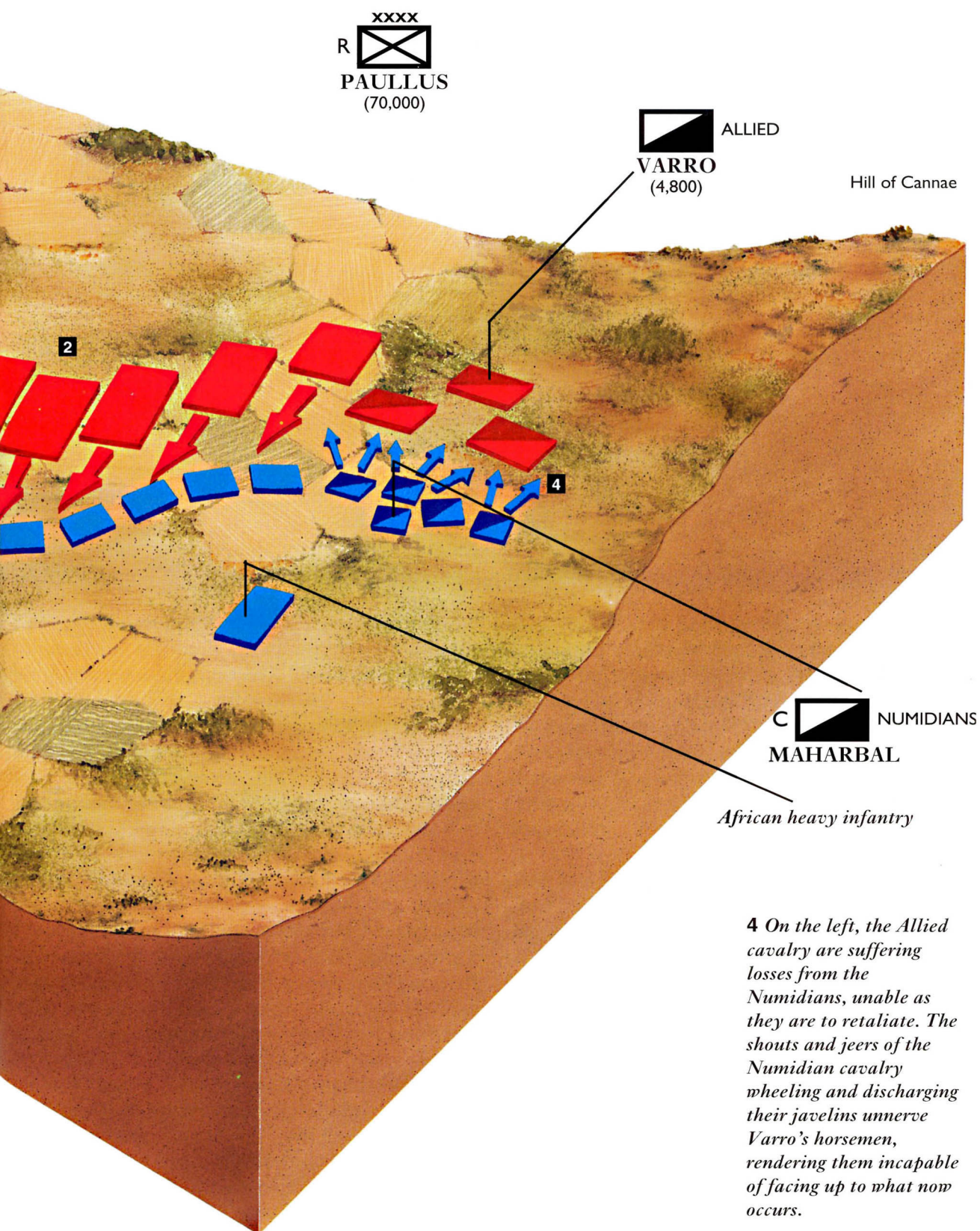
**3** As the Roman pressure grows, Hannibal rides along the battle line exhorting his men to give ground slowly so as to allow Hasdrubal the time he needs. Just as he has foreseen, the salient being formed in his own line is serving to constrain the fighting power of the Romans in a way they had not anticipated.

XXXX  
C   
**HANNIBAL**  
(40,000 infantry,  
10,000 cavalry)

## THE BATTLE OF CANNAE

**2 August 216 BC: Phase Two**



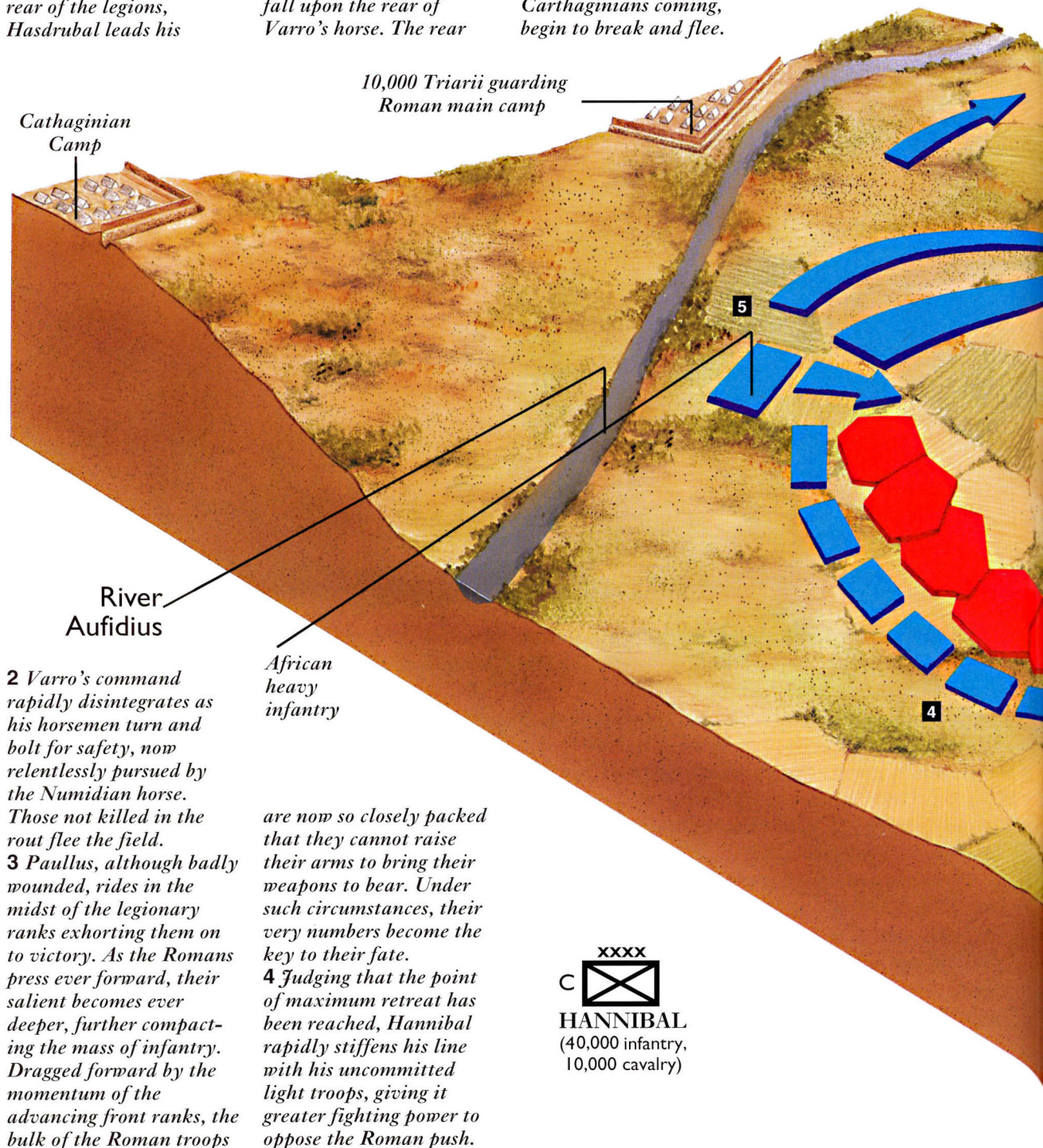




**1** Galloping around the rear of the legions, Hasdrubal leads his

heavy cavalry forward to fall upon the rear of Varro's horse. The rear

ranks, seeing the Carthaginians coming, begin to break and flee.



**2** Varro's command rapidly disintegrates as his horsemen turn and bolt for safety, now relentlessly pursued by the Numidian horse. Those not killed in the rout flee the field.

**3** Paullus, although badly wounded, rides in the midst of the legionary ranks exhorting them on to victory. As the Romans press ever forward, their salient becomes ever deeper, further compacting the mass of infantry. Dragged forward by the momentum of the advancing front ranks, the bulk of the Roman troops

African heavy infantry

are now so closely packed that they cannot raise their arms to bring their weapons to bear. Under such circumstances, their very numbers become the key to their fate.

**4** Judging that the point of maximum retreat has been reached, Hannibal rapidly stiffens his line with his uncommitted light troops, giving it greater fighting power to oppose the Roman push.

XXXX  
C   
**HANNIBAL**  
(40,000 infantry,  
10,000 cavalry)

## THE BATTLE OF CANNAE

**2 August 216 BC: Phase Three**

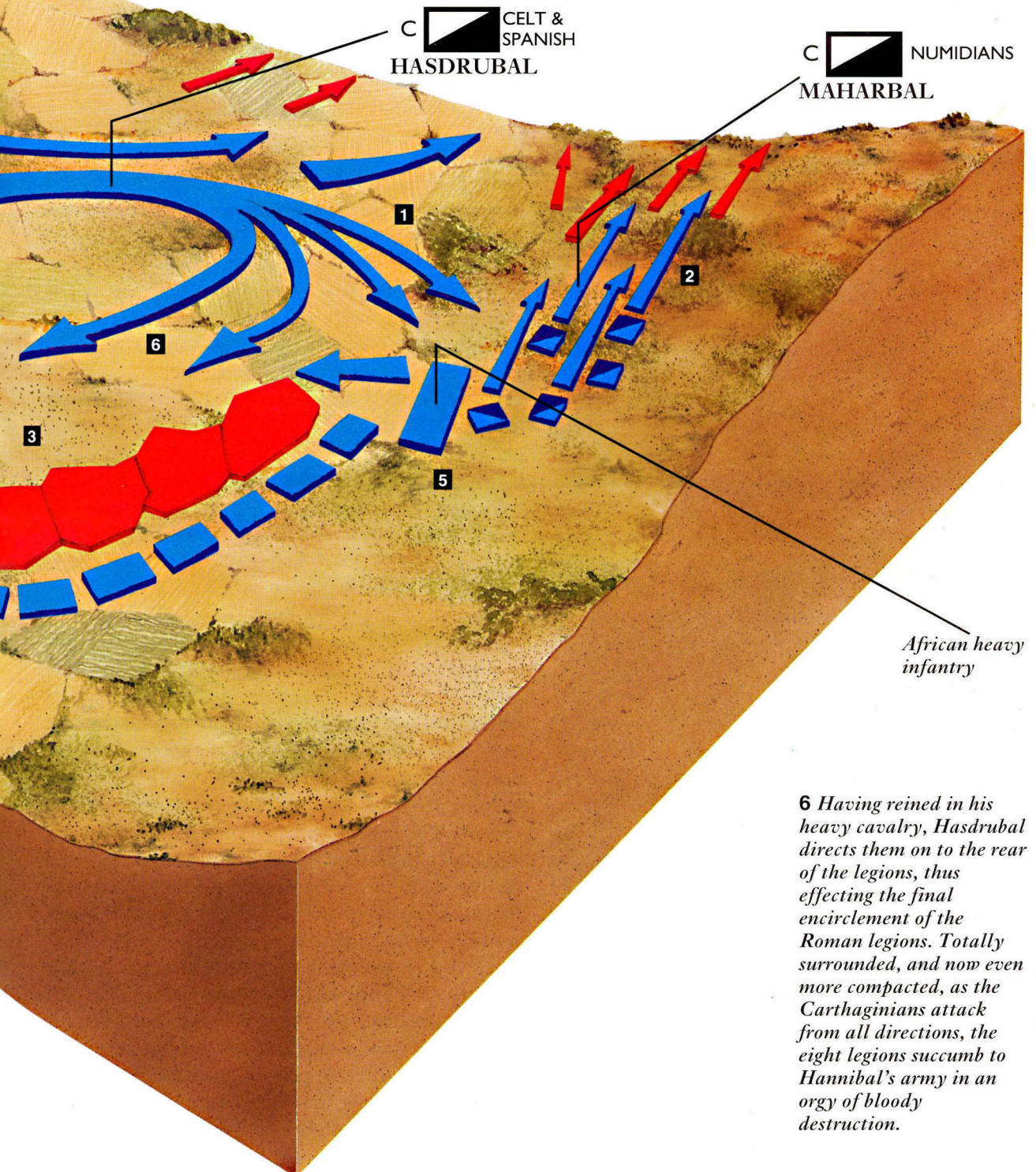


**5** At this point Hannibal also determines that the Roman advance has passed beyond the as yet uncommitted African

heavy infantry lying on each flank of the deep salient. He now signals these to turn inwards. Lowering their pikes, they

form two phalanxes, which advance and crash into the unsuspecting Roman legions. The Roman advance hesitates

along the whole line as the legions attempt unsuccessfully to adapt to this new menace.



**6** Having reined in his heavy cavalry, Hasdrubal directs them on to the rear of the legions, thus effecting the final encirclement of the Roman legions. Totally surrounded, and now even more compacted, as the Carthaginians attack from all directions, the eight legions succumb to Hannibal's army in an orgy of bloody destruction.



the crescent, those further along from them both to the left and right naturally moving further forward to accommodate themselves to the shape of the Carthaginian formation. Shields locked as the Celts and Spanish joined combat with Roman and allied infantry. A ferocious hand-to-hand *mêlée* began along the whole length of the crescent.

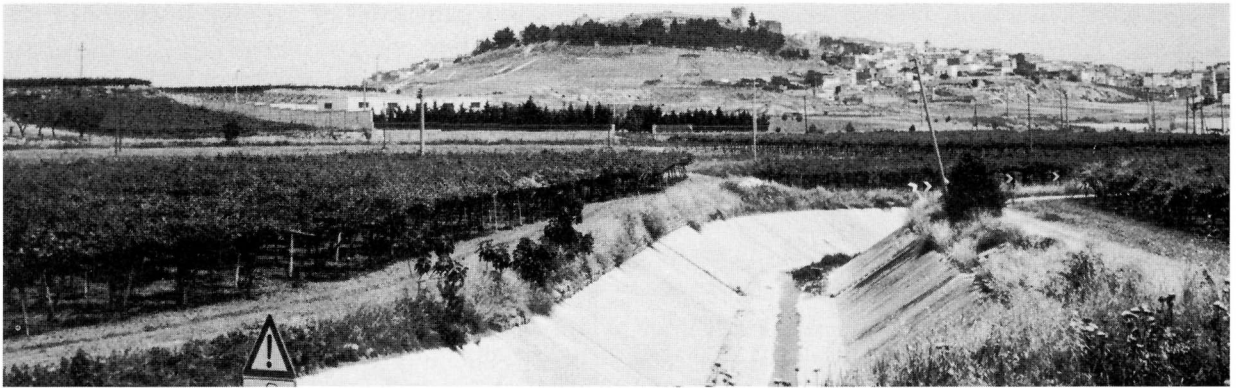
The initial Roman advance was slowed, just as Hannibal had intended. The crescent formation forced the legionaries to cover more ground in the process of pushing back the Celts and Spanish, thus becoming fatigued in the process, while their own mode of fighting was itself disconcerted by Hannibal's stationing of the alternate contingents of these two nationalities. Whereas the Celts used the *slash*-ing sword, the Spaniards employed the *stabbing* sword, and, while either could be used to do both, the Roman legionaries had to vary their fighting style to accommodate the two types of enemy. It was in order to gain every second that Hannibal and his younger brother Mago rode along the inside of the slowly flattening crescent shouting encouragement and urging his men to resist for as long as they could. The fighting was ferocious, but inevitably the Celtic and Spanish troops had to give ground as the Roman infantry colossus inexorably pushed forward. The wounded Aemilius Paullus, having survived the rout of his cavalry, rode in amidst his infantry shouting encouragement and willing his legionaries on to victory.

The Carthaginian crescent-shaped battle line changed as the Romans in dense close formation pushed forward: first it buckled and straightened, and then, as the pressure of the legions continued to build, the line quickly assumed a *concave* shape as its centre began to collapse – just as Hannibal knew it would. Scenting victory, the legions in the Roman centre surged forward, pulling more and more legions in with them so as to fill the rapidly forming salient. But in pressing so far forward in their desire to destroy the retreating and collapsing line of Spanish and Celtic troops, the Romans had ignored the African heavy infantry that stood uncommitted on the projecting ends of this now reversed crescent. Dressed in the mail *loricae* stripped from the dead bodies of *principes* and *triarii* at Lake Trasimene, they were described by Livy as looking more like Romans than Africans. Their columns

now turned inward and, lowering their pikes, the Africans formed a phalanx on either flank of the advancing Roman infantry. Both phalanxes then charged straight into the mass of Roman infantry that lay directly in front of them. The shock of the twin assault on the Roman advance was instantaneous. Halted in its tracks the densely packed legions attempted unsuccessfully to turn and face this new and completely unexpected menace. In those moments of hesitation and confusion Hannibal proceeded to rally the survivors of his Celtic and Spanish infantry and with the assistance of his light troops sent them back to assault the front of the Roman battle line.

On the left wing of the Roman line the allied cavalry under Varro had been pinned down since the opening of the battle. They had been subjected to almost continual attacks by the Maharbal's Numidians employing 'their own peculiar method of fighting' since the beginning of the battle. Groups of these African light cavalry had ridden up to the allied horse, approaching each time from a different direction before launching a barrage of javelins. Wheeling away, they then repeated the process. While this caused many casualties and was clearly unnerving to the allied cavalry, Varro had nevertheless managed to maintain a coherent line – until Hasdrubal's heavy cavalry appeared in their rear. The allied cavalry, seeing that he was about to charge, panicked and broke in headlong flight. Hasdrubal now revealed his true mettle as a cavalry commander by handling his men with great skill and judgement. Amidst the chaos of battle and with the heady scent of victory in the air, he successfully reigned in his Celtic and Spanish cavalry. He sent Maharbal and his Numidians to follow the retreating allied cavalry, most of whom were killed or dragged from their mounts. Hasdrubal meanwhile led his heavy horse back to the main battle and launched them against the rear of the now severely constricted legions.

Caught between the 'vice' of the twin African phalanxes on their flanks and assailed to the fore and rear, the encircled Roman legions tried desperately to fight their way out of the trap that Hannibal had sprung. It was to no avail. So compressed had their ranks become that many were unable even to raise their swords before they were cut down by the advancing enemy. Stepping over the dead and dying,



▲ After the battle many survivors fled to the town of Canusium (modern Canosa di Puglia). The town is set on a hill that dominates the surrounding plain and provides an excellent defensive position. At the time of the battle the town was confined more towards the summit than it is today. Of note is the channel in the foreground, which helps draw off the snow-melt from the River Ofanto (ancient Aufidius). The high volume of water from this source

helps account for the frequent changes of course of the Ofanto across the flood plain from ancient through to modern times.

► A view of the ruined stone pillar erected on the edge of the hillock of Cannae overlooking the battlefield. It is a silent testimony to a killing ground as awful as that experienced by the British Army more than two thousand years later in northern France on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

the encircling Carthaginian forces drew the net ever tighter on the diminishing Roman force. Polybius put the seal on the battle when he related how 'as their outer ranks were continually cut down and the survivors were forced to pull back and huddle together they were finally all killed were they stood'.

As the killing ended, Hannibal could have been in no doubt that he had inflicted a devastating defeat on the Romans. There is much argument to this day about the actual number of Roman casualties, and in this matter Polybius may be less reliable than Livy. The latter claimed that the Roman dead amounted to 47,000 infantry and 2,700 cavalry; the Carthaginians also took 19,300 prisoners. Among the dead on the battlefield lay Paullus, Geminus, Minucius, the consuls' *quaestors*, 29 military tribunes and more than 80 men of senatorial rank. According to Livy, this great victory had been realised at a cost to Hannibal of just 8,000 men.



# AFTERMATH

News of Cannae shook Rome to its very core. Even so the Senate moved rapidly to assert social discipline and forbade public mourning or demonstrations of distress within the city. Taking the defeat as evidence of divine disfavour, a Celtic male and female and a Greek male and female were buried alive in the cattle market to placate the gods.

Of most immediate concern thereafter, particularly as the political repercussions of Cannae rapidly became apparent, was the need to create a new army. Certainly Hannibal could have been in no doubt that Rome would now fight to the very death. His own peace envoy had returned to his encampment only to relate how the *lictor* of the newly appointed *dictator* had relayed the same words to him that the Romans had given to Pyrrhus sixty years before – ‘Rome will not discuss terms of peace with a foreign enemy on Italian soil.’ Even when he offered to ransom Roman prisoners taken at Cannae, the Senate stated that it had no use for such men. Unprecedented steps were now taken to provide troops for a new army. Two new legions were raised from an emergency levy, two more being manned with purchased slaves; and 6,000 debtors and criminals were released from prison, their military service to be taken in lieu of sentence. The equivalent of two legions were recovered from the survivors of Cannae who had retreated to Canusium. These were then marched to join a legion of marines which had been despatched earlier to guard northern Campania and act as a blocking force should Hannibal choose to move to attack Rome – since Cannae there had been an unspoken expectation that it was only a matter of time before the cry ‘*Hannibal ad portas*’ would be heard in Rome. Why did he not come?

It was on the day after the battle that Maharbal asked Hannibal to be allowed to ride on Rome.

When he demurred, Maharbal reputedly turned to him and said, ‘Truly the gods have not bestowed all things upon the same person. You know how to conquer, Hannibal; but you do not know how to make use of your victory.’ Such was indeed the view of Livy, who spoke of his decision as that which ‘saved the empire’ and has been a judgement endorsed by most commentators down to our own time. On deeper reflection it is most unlikely that Rome would have succumbed. Saguntum alone had taken eight months to reduce, and the defences of Rome were of a completely different order of magnitude. Hannibal was not unaware of this. A long siege would have been the antithesis of his whole military strategy, predicated as it was on a war of movement that always allowed him to exploit his own command expertise and the professional superiority of his army. Nor was he unaware that, despite the outcome of Cannae, Roman military potential remained profoundly impressive. Indeed it had

► *In spite of the devastating military defeats of the Trebbia and Lake Trasimene and Hannibal’s policy of releasing allied prisoners and declaring that his argument was with Rome and not them, he had not until Cannae succeeded in detaching one of her allies. Indeed even after that battle not a single Latin state defected nor any of those of northern or central Italy. In the south, however, it was another matter. Livy expressed the consequences as follows: ‘How much more serious was the defeat of Cannae than those which preceded it can be seen by the behaviour of Rome’s allies: before that fatal day their loyalty remained unshaken; now it began to waver for the simple reason that they despaired of Roman power. The following peoples went over to the Carthaginian cause: the Atellani, Calatini, Hirpini, some of the Apulians, all the Samnites except the Pentri, the Brutti, the Lucanians, the Uzentini and nearly all the Greek settlements on the coast, namely Tarentum, Mesapontum, Croton and Locri, and all the Gauls on the Italian side of the Alps.’ (Livy, The War with Hannibal, XXII. 61)*

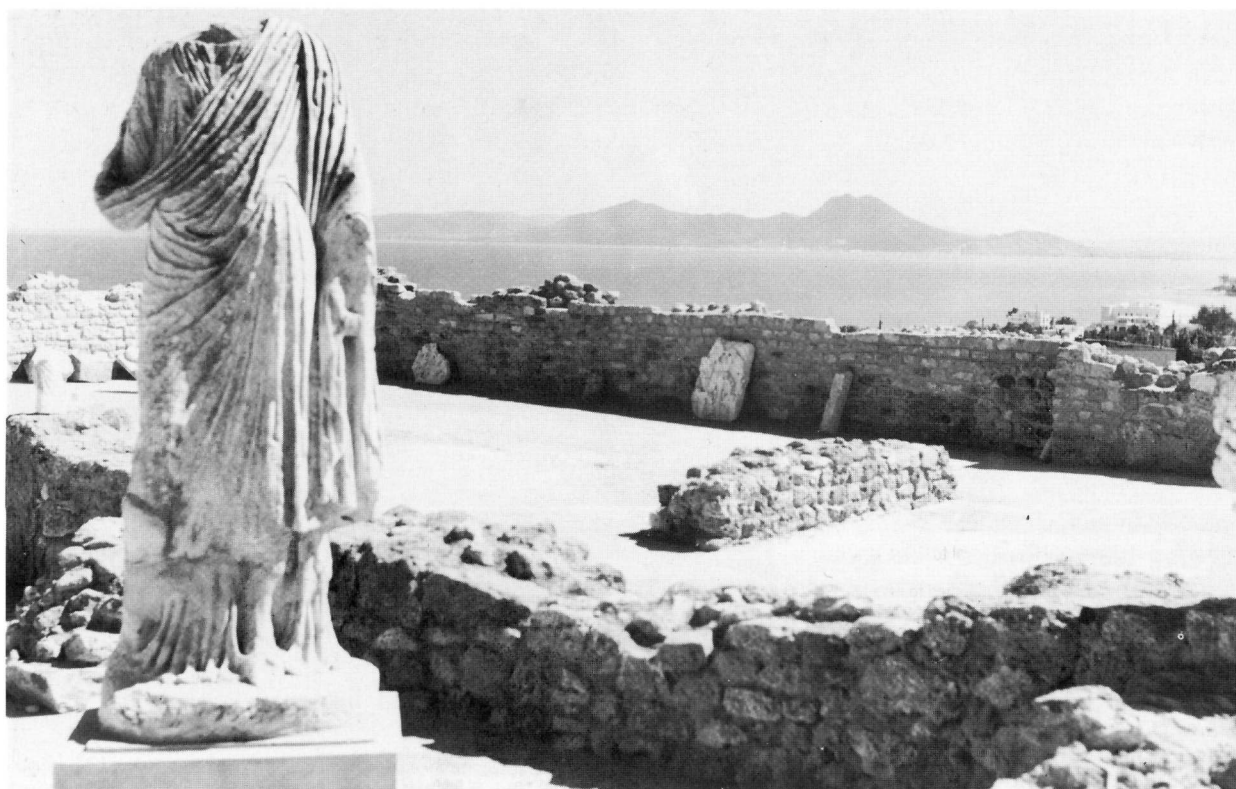
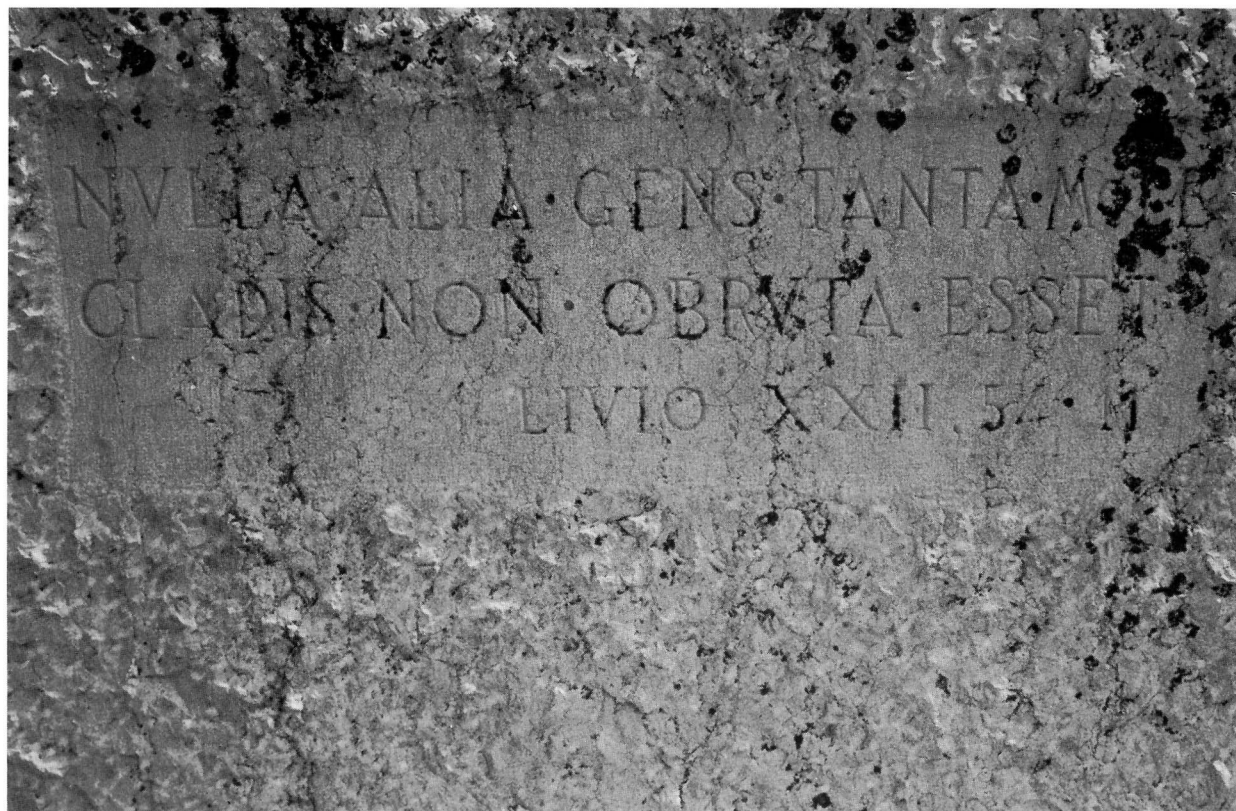


taken the loss of nearly 100,000 Roman and allied troops since 218 to realise even the first defections from the Confederacy. What he really needed were more battles like Cannae. Unfortunately for Hannibal, the Senate was now to disoblige him by making the possibility of this very, very unlikely. The most important consequence of Cannae was to vindicate the Fabian strategy. Indeed, its premise could hardly have received a more baleful verification. The Aemilii/Scipionic faction and their supporters were eclipsed within the Senate, and between 216 and 203 the Romans refrained from fighting pitched battles with Hannibal.

Paradoxically, the very success of Cannae was to mark Hannibal's long and slow undoing. Garrisoning defected cities would reduce his army as would the inexorable wastage among his veterans. In 215 the Carthaginian Suffete showed where its real interests and priorities lay when it sent its limited reinforcements to Spain to bolster up their weakening position rather than to Hannibal. The year 216 marked the apogee of Hannibal's military career, with Cannae the foremost demonstration of his brilliance. It also was the high-water mark of the Carthaginian attempt to subdue Rome. The Hannibalic storm had been weathered.

## Defections to Hannibal after Cannae, 216 BC







# CHRONOLOGY

(All dates are BC.)

**241:** End of the First Punic War.

**237:** Hamilcar Barca lands his army in Spain to carve out a new empire in the peninsula.

**229:** Hamilcar killed in battle; succeeded by his son-in-law, Hasdrubal.

**226:** Romans impose treaty on Hasdrubal limiting his advance in Spain to the River Ebro.

**221:** Hasdrubal assassinated; Hannibal, son of Hamilcar, is proclaimed new commander of the Carthaginian army.

**219:** Siege of Saguntum. The city falls in the autumn. Hannibal begins preparations for invasion of Italy.

**218:** Publius Cornelius Scipio and Tiberius Sempronius Longus elected consuls for the year.

**May/June:** Roman declaration of war on Carthage.

**Early June:** Hannibal's army sets out from New Carthage.

**Mid/Late September:** Hannibal's army crosses the Rhône. Scipio lands at mouth of river. Having missed Hannibal, he sends his army on to Spain and returns to Italy. Senate recalls Longus from Lilybaeum.

◀ *In the light of the terrible losses sustained by Rome between the beginning of the Hannibalic War and the battle of Cannae, the picture shows the words from Livy inscribed in Latin on the base of the column overlooking the battle site.*

*'No other nation in the world could have suffered so tremendous a series of disasters and not been*

*overwhelmed' (The War Against Hannibal, Ch XXII. 54:10)*

◀ *First settled by the Phoenicians of Tyre c.814 BC and was named by them Kart-Hadasht meaning 'new city', which is rendered in Latin as Carthago. Those remains seen on the site of Carthage today date from Roman times and later.*

**Mid October:** Hannibal begins ascent of Alps.

**Approx Nov 8:** Hannibal and his army of 20,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry descend into the plains of northern Italy after a fifteen-day crossing of the Alps.

**Mid/Late December:** Longus joins Scipio near Placentia.

**Late December:** Battle of the Trebbia.

**217:** Gaius Flaminius and Cornelius Servilius Geminus elected consuls for the year.

**June:** Hannibal crosses the Apennines and moves into Etruria.

**June 21 :** Battle of Lake Trasimene. Some days later 4,000 Roman cavalry defeated by Maharbal.

**July onwards:** Quintus Fabius Maximus chosen *dictator*; initiates new 'delaying strategy'. Hannibal moves into Campania and ravages the *ager Falernus*. He escapes Fabius's trap and retires to Gerunium in Apulia to winter.

**216:** Gaius Tarrentius Varro and Lucius Aemilius Paullus elected consuls for the year. The Senate takes the decision to seek decisive battle with Hannibal.

**Spring:** Hannibal departs Gerunium and marches south into Apulia. Occupies the Roman army grain magazine at Cannae.

**Late July:** Consuls leave Rome and join the army of the proconsuls Geminus and Regulus. The army arrives in the vicinity of Hannibal's encampment.

**August 2: Battle of Cannae.** Hannibal defeats Roman army.

**Remainder of Year:** Defections from among Rome's allies in southern Italy. Senate appoints another dictator. Offensive strategy against Hannibal abandoned. The Fabian strategy re-adopted. The Romans fight no further battles against Hannibal in Italy.

**216–207:** Although Hannibal and the Romans undertake military operations in southern Italy, no great battle is fought again in Italy against Hannibal.



His own forces are worn down by failure to receive substantial reinforcements. This in turn prevents him being able to hold the gains that followed the victory of Cannae in the long term.

**207:** His brother Hasdrubal is killed and his army destroyed at the battle of the Metaurus by the Romans while he was attempting to reinforce Hannibal with troops and supplies from Spain. Thereafter, Hannibal becomes increasingly side-lined as the real war is fought in Spain. Under P. Cornelius

Scipio (the Younger) the Romans demolish the Carthaginian position in Spain.

**206:** Scipio secures total victory in Spain.

**204:** The Romans land in North Africa.

**203:** The Suffete recalls Hannibal and his army from Italy.

**202:** At the Battle of Zama, Scipio defeats Hannibal. On Hannibal's advice, the Suffete accepts Rome's peace terms. After sixteen years, the Second Punic War ends in a Roman victory.

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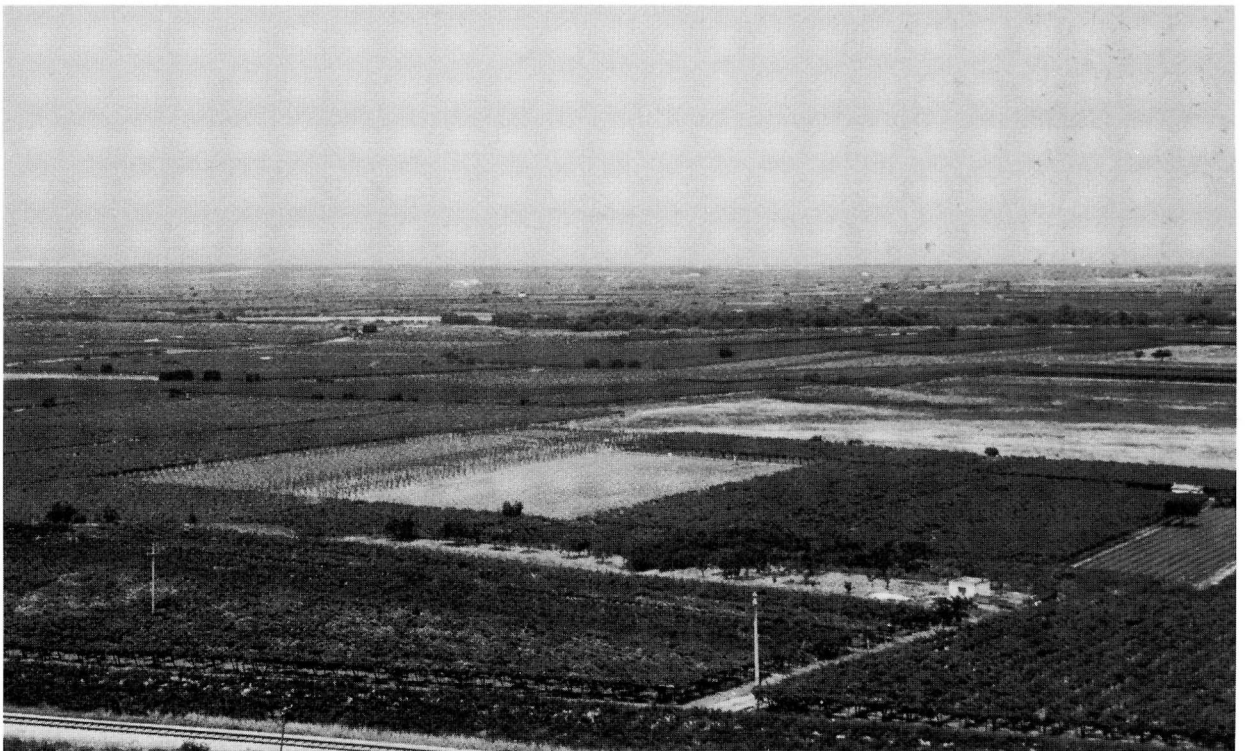
# THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

The most convenient way for the visitor to visit the battlefield is to turn off the Strada Stratale 16 at the *Area di Servizio* clearly signposted for Canne della Battaglia. This takes you on to a road which then runs along the base of the low hills on which the ruined citadel of Cannae is itself located. It is clear that the Italian Tourist Office has begun to appreciate the potential of the site, for a new and much improved museum has just been opened below the hill on which the citadel is sited. A short walk brings you to the entrance to the site and the main road through the settlement. Passage through the ruins is normally accompanied by a chorus of crickets and numerous lizards, which dash madly across your path. Most of the remains date to a period later than the battle. Very quickly one arrives at the crest overlooking the plain on which the column illus-

trated in this title can be clearly seen, and it is from this vantage point that one can obtain the best perspective of the plain on which the battle was fought.

Although now bisected by metalled roads, a railway line and drainage channels, the plain of the Ofanto (modern name for the Aufidius) is given over, much as it was in ancient times, to agriculture. The whole area is a patchwork of olive and fruit groves and larger fields set aside, as in the time when the battle was fought, to the growing of wheat and other grain crops. This position offers the viewer a complete visual sweep of the battlefield. The river, as explained in the text, was clearly much

▼ *Looking out over the western side of the battlefield.*



nearer the escarpment that lies on the other side of the plain and on which the small town of San Ferdinando di Puglia can be seen. This was the probable site of Hannibal's camp. On the right the viewer will be able to see clearly the Plain of Foggia from which direction Varro and Paullus brought their huge army of eight legions. Armed with the bird's eye views in this book and the panoramic photographic shot of the plain enclosed within, the reader will be well placed to identify the probable sites of the Roman encampments and the likely position of the battle line.

It is suggested that late July and very early August may be a good time to visit the site. To experience the dry heat of an Apulian summer and feel the warm breath of Volturnus on one's cheeks is to sense the conditions under which Carthaginians and Romans fought in the plain below. It is possible to cross the plain on one of the roads that virtually bisects what was the site of the battle – although

there is, of course, nothing there to indicate this. This road leads into San Ferdinando di Puglia and follows a track very similar to that used by Hannibal's army when it moved on to the plain for battle. From San Ferdinando, a short drive to Canosa di Puglia brings you to the place where many of the surviving Romans fled for safety after the battle. There is a small museum in the town, but there are no artefacts within that can be dated to the time of the battle. Such a tour of Cannae, the battlefield and other related sites will take the better part of a day. History can be combined with pleasure though – a midday break taken beneath the shade of a tree with good fresh Italian bread, some cheese and a bottle of the local *vino* is a very pleasant way to peruse one of the most famous battlefields in history.

▼ *Looking out over the eastern side of the battlefield.*





# WARGAMING CANNAE

In 216 BC Rome put eight legions into the field to fight Hannibal, 'a step which', as Polybius observed, 'the Romans had never taken before'. That the Roman Republic could muster such an army after the defeats of the Trebbia and Lake Trasimene, and while significant forces were still deployed in Spain, Sardinia and Sicily, reveals the scale of her economic superiority over Carthage. Rome and her allies also maintained a powerful navy that continued to dominate Italian and Spanish coastal waters. It is easy to be wise after the event, and sympathise with Fabius Maximus rather than the brash young Varro. However, to the Senate and People of Rome, it seemed essential to destroy the army of Hannibal. Fabian strategy had shown no sign of driving the Carthaginian army out of Italy, and now the Roman army could go into battle with substantial numerical advantage.

Because wargamers have the advantage of hindsight, it is often difficult to recreate a historical battle in a way that parallels real events. The more famous the engagement, the more likely it is that wargamers can recognise the scenario even if it is disguised in some way. A wargamer realising he is in command of the Roman army at Cannae is likely to order his men back to camp at the double, providing the Carthaginians are not already on top of his forces. At the very least, he would avoid the open plain where the enemy cavalry is at its most effective. Aemilius Paullus reportedly intended to offer battle on broken ground where the Roman infantry could decide the issue.

To reconstruct Cannae on the table-top it is necessary to disguise the true subject of the game, unless the Roman player(s) are entirely ignorant of the Punic wars. The Battle of Cannae has several advantages as a disguised scenario: there are no terrain features that would give the game away (try disguising Waterloo!) and neither side contained any exotic troop types such as elephants or scythed

chariots that would make it instantly identifiable. Indeed, Livy says of Hannibal's Carthaginian infantry, 'To look at them one might have thought the Africans were Roman soldiers; their arms were largely Roman, having been part of the spoils at Trasimene...' Since the rest of the infantry consisted of Gauls and Iberians, and the cavalry was divided into Gallic/Iberian heavy cavalry and Numidian light horse, Hannibal's army could be modelled on the table top with a fairly anonymous selection of model soldiers. Why let on at all that you are re-fighting a battle from the Second Punic War?

In most ancient battles, victorious cavalry usually disappeared from the battlefield in hot pursuit, leaving their infantry to carry on alone. In the wars of the Successors, the cavalry would sometimes return and intervene with decisive effect by attacking the enemy phalanx in the rear. But often the cavalry did little but 'lend tone to what would otherwise be a vulgar brawl'. At Cannae, Hasdrubal's Gallic and Spanish cavalry defeated the Roman horse opposite them, rallied and rode around the enemy army to take the other wing in the rear. Rallying a second time, they then launched the decisive attack on the rear of the legions.

Polybius is surely wrong to claim that the Carthaginian advantage lay in superior numbers of cavalymen alone: few other cavalry forces of the ancient world were capable of this sort of sustained action. The Romans knew the enemy had more cavalry; but they did not know just how superbly disciplined these Gallic and Spanish horsemen had become. After Cannae had revealed the formidable tactical skill of Hannibal's cavalry, the Romans avoided battle in the open field. When they did take the strategic offensive, it was in the form of siege warfare: the steady reduction of Carthaginian-held cities.

Cannae will probably work best as a table-top battle if the players, the Romans at least, believe

they are fighting one of the battles from the Civil Wars of the late Republic. Only then will the stunning superiority of the Carthaginian cavalry come as such a disagreeable surprise. If the Romans believe they outnumber the enemy infantry by nearly 2:1, and the only enemy advantage lies in a slightly larger force of cavalry, then the decision to form a very deep phalanx becomes more understandable. By forming the legionaries perhaps as many as 70 men deep, Varro created a phalanx that would probably crush anything in its path. Even if the Roman and Allied cavalry were unable to hold their own against the enemy horse, surely they would last long enough for the legions to destroy the enemy's close-order infantry and win the battle.

### Battle Tactics in the Punic Wars

The Second Punic War profoundly changed the nature of the Roman army. Until the battle of Cannae it was still a citizen-based militia. While the infantry was far better disciplined than that of any Greek army, it was by no means a professional force; the recruits of 216 expected to be back on their farms the following year. The manipular organisation enabled the Roman infantry to manoeuvre across broken ground with less disorder than Macedonian pikemen, but Roman tactics were not yet fully developed. At the time of Cannae, the Roman infantry were still not capable of independent manoeuvre: there is no sign of the tactical flexibility revealed by Caesar. By the first century BC, groups of maniples under one of Caesar's legates or under his personal command would act as a reserve, or attack an enemy flank. This distinction is the key to understanding what happened at Cannae. Varro had no reserve: all eight legions were drawn up side-by-side in the greatest possible depth. Neither legions, nor maniples were independent tactical formations. The soldiers fought as one unified body. The *principes* were stationed immediately behind the *hastati*, ready to push forward at first contact, to ensure the Romans presented a unified front. The *triarii* were close behind them and did not constitute another echelon or a reserve. All three elements of the Roman phalanx contributed to the 'first push'.

It was precisely because the Roman infantry fought as a single tactical unit that Varro deployed

his men in such a deep formation. He may have been a recently elected 'political general', but his fellow officers were well versed in the Greek/Macedonian art of war. The strength of a phalanx was proportional to its depth: a deep formation maintaining its impetus and driving back a shallower one, assuming the soldiers were of equal courage. It is interesting to note that when Hannibal's brother Hasdrubal was intercepted by a larger army on the Metaurus, he formed his spearmen into a very deep formation, staking everything on a rapid breakthrough.

Hannibal turned the strength of the Roman infantry into a weakness. The cavalry attack on the Roman rear paralysed the entire formation. With no pressure from the rear ranks, the front ranks ceased to make further progress against the Gallic troops holding the Carthaginian centre. Until that point, the Romans had been driving the Gauls back steadily. Now the African infantry assaulted both flanks and the Romans found themselves surrounded. Why were the Roman infantry unable to break out? At the point Hannibal launched the African spearmen into their flanks, the Romans still enjoyed substantial numerical superiority. There are very few examples in military history of a smaller army successfully surrounding a larger one.

Under most published wargames rules, the Roman infantry would be able to break out. They would be able to maintain a defensive stance on the flanks, face the rear ranks about to hold off the Carthaginian cavalry, and complete the destruction of the Gauls to their front. This is because most wargames rules divide close-order infantry into a number of tactical units, giving an ancient army much greater flexibility than is historically accurate. This has to be avoided if a wargame of Cannae is to reproduce the most critical feature of the battle. Although the Roman infantry was organised into a variety of units, at the time of Cannae these were little more than administrative divisions. While their formation was better articulated than the giant phalanxes favoured by some of Alexander's successors, Roman legionaries still fought in a single block. If groups of legionaries broke away from the formation, it was only to escape a disaster. On the Trebbia, up to 10,000 legionaries fought their way out but did not take any further part in the fighting and retreated to Placentia. Even had their morale been

sufficiently high for them to return to battle, the means of tactical reorganisation did not exist for them to do so.

Cannae exposed the limits of a citizen-militia, and there were to be no more set-piece battles for several years. The Roman army gradually developed into a professional force: the nucleus of Scipio's army at Zama was still the two legions formed from survivors of Cannae. It had been reinforced by several large drafts of replacements, but the core of old soldiers and officers remained. At Zama, for the first time, the *principes* were formed up well to the rear of the *hastati*, a deployment that, as Hans Delbrück argued, could only have been attempted by seasoned soldiers who trusted each other. Like that of Caesar, the army of Scipio Africanus could probably have cut its way out of Hannibal's trap at Cannae. The Roman cavalry improved too. At Zama, it showed itself as capable as Hasdrubal's men at Cannae, by defeating the Carthaginian cavalry and then intervening in the infantry battle.

When framing rules for the Punic war, it is important to reflect the marked difference between Roman infantry at the start of the conflict and at its end. The infantry progresses from a single tactical body to a two-echelon formation capable of fighting independently. Commanders are no longer Consuls taking alternate days to lead the soldiers. Direct civilian control of the army is sacrificed to achieve military victory: an interesting portent for the Roman state.

### Hannibal's Strategy

Hannibal's deployment at Cannae was designed to achieve not just a victory but an annihilating one. Why else were his African veterans posted where they were, ready to assault the flanks of the Roman formation? If he had placed them with the Gauls in his centre, the cavalry attack would still have paralysed the Roman legions and probably defeated them; but many Romans would have escaped to fight another day. By stationing the Africans on the flanks, Hannibal was gambling that the Gauls could hold the Roman attack, as they had failed to do on the Trebbia, long enough for the Roman phalanx to lose all cohesion. Once it did, the Romans were doomed, unable to improvise a break-out.

Hannibal may have enjoyed most of the tactical advantages – experienced officers and men, better and more numerous cavalry and his own military genius. But Carthage could deploy only limited resources, and his army could never muster enough men to make an assault on Rome itself. The walls of Rome were more than five miles in circumference, and Hannibal never had more than 50,000 troops under arms. Roman naval superiority made a successful assault on the port of Ostia unlikely to succeed.

Carthage had expanded into Spain and increased its economic strength since the first Punic war, but it could not match the seemingly inexhaustible supplies of men and material possessed by the Roman Republic. It was not lost on Hanno, the Carthaginian leader who had opposed the war from the beginning, that after his triumph at Cannae, Hannibal immediately asked for reinforcements. In the Carthaginian senate, Hanno tellingly asked what Hannibal might have needed if he had lost.

Hannibal calculated that the only way to defeat Rome was to separate her from the Italian city states that provided much of the manpower and most of the Republic's naval strength. Victory at Cannae brought him Italy's second and third largest cities, Capua and Tarentum. As usual, he released all prisoners from Italian cities, only selling the Roman captives into the hands of the slave traders.

If the Carthaginian forces have the odds in their favour during the battle, their victory conditions should be tough indeed: anything less than an overwhelming triumph is effectively a defeat. No city state would defect from Rome if Roman armies could hold their own against the invader. If the Carthaginians were once defeated, then they would have lost the entire campaign, and probably the war.

### Punic Boardgames

Several boardgames cover the Punic Wars as a whole, and tactical games cover several of the major battles. While there have been better-looking packages, the original 1970s Strategy & Tactics 'folio game' *Punic Wars* is a very playable and well balanced game. In the Second Punic War the Carthaginians begin with better commanders, but



capturing Rome is incredibly difficult. The result is a battle of attrition, with the Carthaginians trying to conquer enough Italian cities to undermine Rome's economic power. Meanwhile the shrewd Roman player develops a second front in Spain, where the enemy forces are not led by Hannibal. This game is very basic, but its very simplicity counts in its favour. It can be used as the basis for a miniatures campaign, fighting the battles with model soldiers or on a 'battle board' for extra flavour. Incidentally, there is a scenario for the first Punic War, which is biased in favour of the Carthaginians. However, the designers swallowed Polybius's 'old sailors' tale about the building of the Roman fleet (I.20), and impose restrictions on Roman naval construction. Frankly, the story of the stranded quinquireme should be regarded in the same light as Polybius's claim that Hannibal wore a variety of wigs to disguise himself from Gallic assassins (III.78). If the Romans had not built a fleet previously, it was because their enemies had all been land powers. Since they headed an alliance embracing most major trading ports from Cumae to Tarentum, building a fleet held no terrors for them. So ignore rule 19.14(4) and enjoy a better balanced, more historically accurate game.

For a more detailed boardgame treatment, see Strategy & Tactics' more recent *Hannibal*. The same name was used by Simulations Canada for another Punic wars game. The boardgame magazine *Perfidious Albion* ran an interesting feature on improving the S&T version in issue 86 (January 1994). (PA can be contacted at 75 Richmond Park Road, East Sheen, London, SW14 8JY).

### Missing in Action

The Roman senate notoriously refused to ransom the prisoners taken at Cannae, raising two new legions from volunteer slaves rather than filling the Carthaginian treasury. Hannibal sold the captives to slave traders, who exported them all around the Mediterranean if their families were unable to buy them back. Many prisoners were sold to Greece. The Consul Flaminius found 1,200 in Achaia alone when he offered to buy them in 194, and another group returned from Crete in 188 – 28 years after they were taken! Vietnam was not the first war in which the search for the 'missing' was to last as long as the conflict itself. For an alternative look at Cannae, one could well develop a Carthaginian slave trading game, or a hunt for Roman 'MIAs'.

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