

## The Purple People

From Richard Hooper, *Representative Chapters in Ancient History* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000)

So long as Rome confined herself to expanding in Italy, she was free to engage in what, from the modern standpoint at least, could be called internal politics. But once her merchants expanded outside of Italy, she slammed into the interests of the ancient city of Carthage, the greatest commercial power of the western Mediterranean. We'll be looking at a lot of immediate causes for the war, but this basic commercial rivalry was always a big part of it.

There was racial hatred too. Carthage, actually *Qart Chadasht* (The New City)<sup>1</sup>, was not Indo-European: it had been founded back in 814 by the Semitic Phoenicians, those alphabet inventing merchants from modern Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> As often happens, the outpost ended up being much more durable than the mother city Tyre, for Carthage built up an empire stretching from the Gulf of Gabès westward to Algeria and even beyond the Pillars of Hercules to her allies the Lilyphoenicians.

The Romans did such a commendable job of wiping Carthage off the face of the earth that no Punic literary works have survived. There is a tantalizing fragment in Greek translation called *The Periplus of Hanno*, which supposedly recounts a Carthaginian circumnavigation of Africa some 2,000 years before Vasco da Gamma. It appears, unfortunately, to be a forgery,<sup>3</sup> and thus leaves us with a very one sided view of the people we are about to describe. There is another suspicious story that at the final destruction of Carthage in 146 BC the Romans handed over to "the petty kings of Africa" Carthage's great libraries so that the cultural heritage of their enemy could be preserved. The scene is very difficult to imagine and perhaps only shows that a small minority of literate Romans felt some twinge of remorse if not for the murder of people, then at least for the loss of books.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sicilian coins issued by Carthage in 410 bear the inscription QRTHDST. *CAHVII*. 2 pp. 506-7.

<sup>2</sup>Serge Lancel, *Carthage: A History* (London: Blackwell, 1995) pp. 1- 34. Lancel points out that archaeology has so far dated burials to about a century later than the traditional date of Carthage's founding. For a good discussion of the transformation of the Phoenician into the Greek alphabet, see pp. 351-356.

<sup>3</sup>Al. N. Oikonomides, ed., *Hanno the Carthaginian: Periplus* (Chicago: Ares, 1977). Mr. Oikonomides believes (p. 39) that the work is genuine, but Lancel pp. 102-109 takes a closer look at the strange story of gorillas which concludes the work. We're told by Hanno that on an island (which appears to be in Sierra Leone) his men caught and skinned 3 wild and hairy women whom his interpreters called *gorillas*. This gruesome tidbit has long been recognized as a probable reference to Perseus's battle with the three Gorgon sisters. Indeed, the Greek word *Gorgadas* could easily have turned into *Gorillas*. Curiously, as Mr. Oikonomides also points out at p. 37, modern gorillas were first named in a direct reference to this passage by the American missionary and naturalist Thomas Savage (*Boston Journal of Natural History*, 1847).

<sup>4</sup>Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 18. 22-23. At the same time the Senate also directed the 28 books of Mago's treatise on agriculture to be translated from the Punic into Latin. The work was completed and influenced later writers on farming like Varro, Columella, and Pliny himself, but it has also been lost. The story of the library's rescue reminds me of the tale (Plutarch, *Antony* 58 [p. 1137]) that Antony, some years after Caesar accidentally burned down the great library of Alexandria, gave Cleopatra the 200,000 volumes of the library of Pergamum. I rather doubt that too; however, the story at least brightens Caesar's reputation among book lovers.

Both Polybius and Aristotle compare Carthage's government with Sparta's, for both were ruled by two "kings" riding herd over a boisterous Assembly and the predictable Council of Elders. These kings were actually annually elected officials called *suffetes* who, like the Roman consuls, came from a select group of upper class families. Aristotle complains that wealth was such a factor in the selection of the *suffetes* that the office was virtually for sale. Although open debate was allowed in the Assembly, a narrow oligarchy seems to have kept pretty strict control both of the legislative and the judicial branches of the Carthaginian government. Polybius complains that by the time of the Second Punic War the balance of power in Carthage was shifting to the public assembly, a "democratization" which he saw as a sign of weakness.<sup>5</sup>

Plutarch seems to have been correct in his assessment of the Carthaginians as "bitter, sullen, subservient to their magistrates, harsh to their subjects, most abject when afraid, most savage when enraged, stubborn in adhering to their decisions, disagreeable and hard in their attitude towards playfulness and urbanity." Modern excavations of the Tophet, or sacrificial enclosure, of Carthage have proven that their priests regularly sacrificed human infants to Baal Hamon, just as the prophet Jeremiah thundered in the Old Testament:

For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the Lord: they have sent their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it. And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire...

More than two hundred urns containing their charred bones have been uncovered in the ruins of the city.<sup>6</sup>

Rome fought three wars with the Carthaginians. They're always called "The Punic Wars," which is to say "The Purple Wars," after the purple dye for which the Phoenician traders were famous.<sup>7</sup> The first war (264-241 BC) was fought over the possession of Sicily. It went on for so long because the two cities were so evenly but oppositely matched: Carthage, the merchant power, was at first unbeatable on the sea, while Rome's citizen militia of farmers was far superior to the mercenary armies employed by Carthage. At the conclusion of the first war Rome seized Sicily and then stuck Carthage with a huge fine. The fine so drained the Carthaginians of cash that they couldn't pay off their mercenaries, who promptly revolted and nearly captured the city of Carthage itself. Taking advantage of this distraction, Rome seized the Carthaginian colonies of Sardinia and Corsica and calmly offered to restart the war if Carthage dared complain.

To complete our picture of the Roman constitution, I should point out that Sicily and Corsica-Sardinia were organized into the first two Roman provinces so that we have here the official beginning of the Roman Empire. Each year the Senate appointed ex-consuls or ex-praetors to serve as governors, and as the number of provinces increased it became necessary to raise the number of praetors to take up the slack. After the Second Punic War the number of praetors was doubled to four; by the reign of the first emperor Augustus it varied between ten and sixteen. As we'll see, the scramble for

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<sup>5</sup>Aristotle, *Politics* 2. 11; Polybius,

<sup>6</sup>50-51; Howard H. Scullard, *A History of the Roman World 753 to 146 BC*. (London: Methuen and Co., 1980) pp. 157-161; Lancel, *Carthage* pp. 110-120. 6. Plutarch, *Moralia* 799D (Harold North Fowler, tr.); Jeremiah 7:30-31; See *CAHVII* .2 pp. 512, 514-517; Lancel, *Carthage* pp. 227-256. See also the highly colored account of infant sacrifice in the 4th century by Diodorus Siculus 20. 14.4-7, and the railings of the church father Tertullian (*Apologeticum* 9. 2-4) against secret continuation of the practice even under the early Empire.

<sup>7</sup>Even in the Linear B tablets *po-ni-ki-ja* means red. *DMG* p. 91.

choice provinces became one of the major focuses of a Roman political career.<sup>8</sup>

The defeat of the First Punic War left a particularly bitter taste in the mouths of the Carthaginians. This was especially the case for Carthage's general Hamilcar Barca (Hamilcar "the Lightning Bolt"), who had negotiated the unfavorable treaty, but whose own troops had never been defeated in Sicily. The wily Hamilcar decided to make up for the loss of Sicily and Sardinia-Corsica by conquering the interior of the then Celtic Iberian peninsula. He died in Spain trying to accomplish that goal. Before leaving on his last campaign, however, he brought his young son Hannibal up the steps of the altar of Baal-Moloch. As Hannibal later told the Seleucid King Antiochus of Syria, "He took me by the right hand and led me up to the altar and bade me lay my hand upon the victim and swear that I would never be friends with Rome."<sup>9</sup>

In 229 the Carthaginian army elected the twenty-five year old Hannibal as its general, a choice which was subsequently confirmed by the Assembly back home. For expediency's sake Hannibal honored a treaty his brother-in-law Hasdrubal had made with Rome not to march north of the Ebro River; it suited his purpose and conformed to his father's advice not to get into war with Rome until he had secured Spain as a base of operations. Hannibal conquered all of Spain south of the Ebro except the semi-Greek city of Saguntum, which was a recent ally of Rome.

By the winter of 220-219 the people of Saguntum were very nervous and were sending to Rome for help. Further north the people of Massilia were getting nervous too. Massilia (which name the modern French have slurred into "Marseilles") had been founded by Phocaea way back in 600 and had been at odds with Carthage ever since. Some time before 218 Massilia signed a formal alliance with Rome, who was probably more concerned with the Gallic threat on her northern frontier than with Carthaginian expansion into Spain or dominance over the markets of the Western Mediterranean.<sup>10</sup>

In response to this pressure from her allies, Rome sent a senatorial commission to Hannibal in Spain. He was furious: Pointing out that Rome had recently put down a political uprising in Saguntum and executed its ringleaders, he not only accused Rome of meddling in Saguntum's affairs, but even threatened to come to her aid! The Romans sailed off in a huff, Hannibal forthwith attacked Saguntum, and the city fell after an 8 month siege. Hannibal used loot from Saguntum to consolidate his political position back home.<sup>11</sup>

The Roman Senate sent an embassy to Carthage with a choice: Hannibal's head on a platter, or war with Rome. Rome cited a clause in the First Punic War Treaty which stated, "The allies of neither of the parties to the treaty shall be attacked by the other." Carthage countered by pointing out that at the time of the treaty, Saguntum was not yet an ally of Rome. The Romans called that quibbling; of course the treaty had implied "all subsequent allies too." Carthage retorted that the language wasn't in the treaty. The Romans turned to Hasdrubal's treaty which stated, "The Carthaginians shall not cross the Ebro with arms." Carthage replied cleverly that the treaty in question had not been ratified

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<sup>8</sup>The story of the First Punic War is told brilliantly by Polybius in the first book of his history. If you like historical novels, one of the best is Gustave Flaubert's *Salammbô*, an imaginative reconstruction of the mercenary revolt.

<sup>9</sup>Polybius, 3. 11 (Shuckburgh, tr.); Livy, 21. 1.

<sup>10</sup>CAH VIII pp. 24-25.

<sup>11</sup>Polybius, 3. 15-3.17.; Scullard pp. 34 and 159; Mommsen II.116- 118; Serge Lancel, *Hannibal* (London: Blackwell, 1998) pp. 46-51.

and so was invalid.

If we join Polybius and look behind this bickering, it's clear that neither side was innocent in this war. Carthage clearly had no right to attack Saguntum—especially since Hannibal didn't come as a liberator, but rather as a looter—but by the same token Rome had had no right to seize Sardinia-Corsica during the Mercenary War and then slap Carthage with an additional fine to boot.

The precise cause for such a war, however, is incidental. Given the hopelessly contrasting commercial interests and the deep seated cultural hostility of the two great cities, war was inevitable. So the Roman ambassador told the Carthaginians that he carried in the folds of his toga both peace and war. The suffete told him to bring out whichever he chose. He chose war and the Carthaginian Senate shouted back that they accepted it.<sup>12</sup>

Like any good general, Hannibal proceeded to do the unexpected. Since the Romans had expected to fight the war in Spain, Hannibal decided to invade Italy by marching across the Riviera and then onward through the Alps. He cleverly sent agents into North Italy to encourage the Gauls, only recently conquered by Rome, to join with him in a revolt against their hated conquerors. He then set out from Spain with 50,000 infantry, 9,000 cavalry, and 32 elephants equipped with Indian mahouts. Meanwhile the Romans, thinking that they were well prepared, had dispatched the consul Tiberius Sempronius Longus to Africa with a fleet of 160 ships to terrify the Carthaginians. The other consul, Publius Cornelius Scipio, was sent off to Spain.

Scipio made a stop-over in Marseilles and received the shock of his life: Hannibal, rather than cowering in Spain and awaiting his arrival, had already crossed the Rhône River and was proceeding on to Italy. Scipio tried to force a battle, but Hannibal thumbed his nose, put his cavalry and elephants to the rear for protection, and marched on to Italy. Scipio had no choice. He dispatched his brother Gnaeus to Spain, sent word to Tiberius to get back to Italy, and hastened himself to Etruria, where he could await Hannibal's descent into the Po valley.<sup>13</sup>

From New Carthage, the Carthaginian base in South Spain, to the Po Valley is a distance of 1,125 miles. Hannibal made the trip in 5 months. The passage of the Alps took 15 days. He lost a lot of men from native attacks and bad footing on the treacherous mountain passes, but as a monument he left behind stated, he survived with 12,000 Libyan troops, 8,000 Spaniards, and 6,000 cavalry.<sup>14</sup>

Hannibal first met the waiting consul Scipio at the Ticinus River, a northern tributary of the Po, in November 219 BC. Hannibal's cavalry was always his strong point, and even in this first engagement he used it to outflank the unwary consul. Scipio was severely wounded himself and, as Polybius swears was the case, was only rescued by the heroic actions of his 17 year old son Scipio Jr., a lad who was destined to meet Hannibal again.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Polybius, 3. 20-30 (Shuckburgh, tr.) and 33; Livy, 21. 18.

<sup>13</sup>Polybius, 3. 34-49.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.* 3. 56 and 35. Scholars and tourists have for centuries tried to retrace Hannibal's route across the Alps, but as Lancel remarks (*Hannibal* p. 72), "Crossing the Alps with Livy and Polybius in one's hand is an even more fanciful enterprise than trying to find the true site of the battle of Alesia by matching Caesar's text with an Ordnance Survey map." The famous but ridiculous story of using heated vinegar to crack rocks is at Livy, 21. 37.

<sup>15</sup>Polybius, 10. 3. See also Livy, 21. 46 where Livy added, however, that the historian Coelius Antipater gives credit for the rescue to a Ligurian slave.

Scipio limped off to Placentia, where all his Gallic cavalry revolted to Hannibal, bringing with them the heads of their Roman guards as an initiation fee. The following month the other consul Tiberius joined up with Scipio at the Trebia River, a southern tributary to the Po. Tiberius had marched up from Rome with a good deal of ballyhoo. The consular elections were at hand, and he was anxious to knock off Hannibal on his watch. He was, unfortunately, too anxious: Hannibal set up an ambush on his side of the Trebia and then enticed Tiberius across the icy river before his soldiers had eaten breakfast. As the tired and numb Roman soldiers tried to advance out of the river and through a sleet storm, Hannibal sprung his trap and won a great victory. There was, to put it mildly, consternation at Rome.<sup>16</sup>

When the new consuls took office in 217, the story was repeated. The two consuls marched through Etruria to Ariminum and Arretium, where they could block the two major roads leading south. Of course Hannibal left the roads and marched 4 days through the swamps towards Arretium where Gaius Flaminius was stationed. Hannibal chose Arretium because his intelligence sources had told him that Flaminius was “a mere mob-orator and demagogue with no ability for the actual conduct of military affairs.”<sup>17</sup> By this time, after the rigors of the Alpine crossing and the icy battle at the Trebia, Hannibal had only one elephant left. He rode this through the swamps himself and eventually lost an eye from a bothersome swamp infection.

Hannibal laid waste the territory around Arretium to dare Flaminius to come out and attack; the consul’s colleagues told him to wait for Gnaeus Servilius, the other consul, who was coming with cavalry reinforcements, but Flaminius wouldn’t listen. On the misty morning of June 22, 217 he chased Hannibal into a narrow valley bordering Lake Trasimene. Shielded by the mists, the Carthaginians had occupied all the hills overlooking the valley. As soon as Flaminius was inside, they sprang the trap and rushed down upon him. 15,000 Romans, including Flaminius, were killed and 6,000 captured. When Servilius later arrived with his reinforcements, that column was cut apart too.<sup>18</sup>

All of these battles show a fundamental flaw in the executive branch of the Roman government. If the two consuls didn’t agree on tactics, the army was rendered completely ineffective. Worse, if one of the consuls was an idiot, the only possible outcome was disaster. Of course, the Roman constitution had a provision for just such an emergency, and in the panic following Lake Trasimene the people took that option and replaced the surviving consul with a dictator. They chose a respected but cautious soldier named Quintus Fabius.

Fabius, realizing that he had neither trained troops nor sufficient cavalry to defeat Hannibal in a pitched battle, resorted to guerrilla tactics. He consistently kept the high ground above Hannibal’s

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<sup>16</sup>Polybius, 3. 65-74

<sup>17</sup>Polybius, 3. 80-82 (Shuckburgh, tr.). Cf. Livy, 22. 3. We should, however be careful about accepting this very negative picture of the unfortunate Flaminius. As a military expansionist he was a consistent enemy of Carthage. When he decided to establish Roman colonists south of Ariminum as a bulwark against the pesky Gauls, he angered the Senate twice over. First he went over their heads by passing a *plebiscitum* through the Concilium Plebis; then he had the audacity to propose full Roman citizenship for his colonists. These imperialist policies brought him into conflict with Quintus Fabius “the Delayer” (whom we’ll meet in a moment), who was related to the early Roman historian Fabius Pictor (who wrote in Greek). Writers are always biased, so I’m afraid that historiography is filled with conspiracy theories like this. See *CAH*. VII pp. 432- 436, 451-453; *CAH* VIII P. 69; Lancel, *Hannibal* pp. 51-52, 88-89; and Michael Crawford, *The Roman Republic* pp. 53-55.

<sup>18</sup>Polybius, 3. 82-86; Livy, 22. 4-7.

army. Carthaginian scouting parties started to disappear. Fabius, however, refused to fight a pitched battle. Unfortunately, he could not simultaneously stop Hannibal from looting. The Carthaginians passed into Campania, the richest farmland of Italy and uncomfortably close to Rome, but still Fabius, remembering Flaminius's mistake, wouldn't engage.

When an ambush set up by the dictator failed and Hannibal escaped into winter quarters with plenty of loot and food, popular opinion started turning against Fabius and his methods. He picked up the nickname *Cunctator*, "the Delayer," and Roman citizens started to speak of his cowardice.<sup>19</sup> When his six-month term ran out and it was time for new consular elections, the electorate was fed up with caution.<sup>20</sup>

The elections of 216 were ugly. The common people supported Gaius Terrentius Varro, a demagogue of the Cleon type who bragged in his electioneering speeches that he would end the war the day he caught sight of the enemy. He was elected along with an experienced soldier of the upper classes named Lucius Aemilius Paulus, who had served as consul before, but whose former term in office had been tainted by an economic scandal involving his colleague. These two consuls from opposite sides of the tracks seem to have hated each other on sight, and their disagreements paved the way for a disaster even worse than Lake Trasimene. It had been precisely to avoid this sort of foolishness that Fabius had been appointed dictator in the first place.<sup>21</sup>

During the harvest season of 216 BC Hannibal seized an important grain distribution center named Cannae in Apulia, near his winter quarters. The Senate decreed that an immediate confrontation was necessary, and most uncharacteristically dispatched both of the consular armies, totaling some 80,000 men, to attack. Since both consuls would be present with the army, the unfortunate custom was in force that the two consuls would alternate command on opposite days. That's no war to run a horse race, never mind a war.

Varro and Aemilius disagreed at once. Though the Romans had nearly double the number of Hannibal's infantry, they were outnumbered in cavalry by almost as much. Aemilius didn't want to fight in the open land before Cannae where Hannibal would have all the room he needed to deploy his cavalry and his infantry. Varro disagreed and seemed vindicated when his troops won a minor cavalry skirmish. When his day of command came up he brought the army forward; Aemilius could do nothing except follow along and help dig in along the Aufidus River.<sup>22</sup>

The battle, which is still studied at West Point as a masterful example of encircling tactics, was fought on August 2, 216. Hannibal arranged his line in the shape of a crescent with the bulge facing

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<sup>19</sup> Of course no one called him "Delayer" to his face! At 30.26 Livy refers to the famous lines from book 12 of Ennius's *Annals*: "One man by delaying restored our republic./ For he didn't place public opinion before safety./ Therefore has his glory shone increasingly with the passing of time (My translation of lines 200-202 in Ernout's collection)." See also Lancel, *Hannibal* p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> Polybius, 3. 87-94. Livy at 22. 31 points out that only Servilius had the power to appoint Fabius dictator, but since he was away in Cisalpine Gaul the people took it upon themselves, unconstitutionally, to name Fabius acting dictator.

<sup>21</sup> Livy, 22. 34-35 and 39. Once again a word of caution: Polybius, who is the ultimate source for Livy's account, would certainly have been biased towards "the good consul" Aemilius Paulus, who (as you can see from the chart following chapter 28) was the grandfather of his friend and patron Scipio Aemilianus. See *CAH VIII* pp. 51-52 and 80; Crawford p. 55.

<sup>22</sup> Polybius, 3. 107-114; Livy, 22. 40-45.

the Romans. That bulge consisted of his weaker Gallic and Spanish allies; he placed his crack Carthaginian troops on either wing of the crescent. When the too eager Romans attacked the tempting bulge, it broke and fell back, putting the pursuing Romans between the two wings of Carthaginian infantry. Hannibal's cavalry then attacked the Romans from the rear as the wings suddenly engaged.<sup>23</sup> In one bloody, skull-crunching afternoon, Rome lost 70,000 troops, among whom were the consul Aemilius Paulus, two quaestors, 29 military tribunes, and 80 Roman senators. As the fates would have it, Varro managed to get clean away.<sup>24</sup>

With the debacle of Cannae, everything seemed to go wrong at once. Rome's Greek allies in Italy, such as Capua and Tarentum, went over to Hannibal, and many of the cities of Campania even opened their gates. King Philip of Macedon, smelling blood and dreaming of Alexander, concluded an alliance with Hannibal,<sup>25</sup> as did King Hieronymus of Syracuse. It's not surprising that right after Cannae Maharbal, Hannibal's cavalry commander, told him that he would be dining at the Capitol in five days.<sup>26</sup>

Well, Hannibal missed that dinner, and Carthage lost the war. To understand why, it's important to remember that Hannibal was still in hostile territory, and that he hadn't received any reinforcements. The Greeks and the Gauls might go over to Carthage, but Rome's Latin allies never would. Rome had granted those allies full citizenship—a trick that Solon had trouble pulling off for even a few immigrant tradesmen—and she didn't assess them tribute. The allies certainly preferred fellow Latins to foreign invaders. These Latin cities and Rome were strongly walled and much fortified. Hannibal had neither leisure nor equipment for long sieges.

Rome was also at her best. The peak of Roman civilization didn't come later under the empire, when Rome stretched from Scotland to Iraq and became the richest city in the history of the world; we've already pointed out that conquest invariably marks the beginning of decline for a culture. Rome was at her best now, when she refused to give an inch to her would-be conquerors.

For instance, though in desperate need of troops, Rome refused Hannibal's offer of ransom for the 8,000 soldiers he had captured at Cannae. The senators who voted against ransom even had relatives among those hostages, but they still wouldn't give in. Of the 10 ambassadors who had been sent by the captives to the Roman senate, 9 fulfilled their oaths to Hannibal and returned voluntarily to captivity. The tenth, a clever fellow who had rushed back into the Carthaginian camp pretending to have forgotten something and had thus hoped to fulfill his vow to return, was sent back to Hannibal in chains. Romans didn't like cheaters. The few hundred soldiers who had escaped from Cannae were branded as traitors and were sent into exile in Sicily for the duration. It was this spirit more than anything else that kept Rome afloat.<sup>27</sup>

The Senate returned to Fabius's strategy at home, while abroad the army isolated Hannibal's allies and conquered them one by one. The praetor Marcus Valerius Laevinus was sent to Greece virtually as a secret agent to stir up trouble for Philip. In 211 he concluded an alliance with the Aetolian

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<sup>23</sup>Polybius, 3. 115-116; Livy, 22. 47-48.

<sup>24</sup>Polybius, 3.1 16 and Livy, 22. 49.

<sup>25</sup>Preserved in a fragment of Polybius, 7. 9.

<sup>26</sup>Livy, 22. 51.

<sup>27</sup>Polybius, 6. 58 and Plutarch, *Marcellus* 13 [p. 375]; Livy, 22. 58-61.

League, promising them land after their victory and ships to help them win it. Philip was so busy fighting his own social war that he never did send help to Hannibal. The Aetolian League, disgruntled when Rome proved too preoccupied to keep her promises, signed a separate treaty with Philip in 206. The following year the Romans went along and also signed a hasty agreement recognizing the status quo. Philip could be dealt with later.<sup>28</sup>

Marcus Claudius Marcellus was elected consul for the third time in 214 and was dispatched to reconquer Sicily. The siege of Syracuse took him two and a half years. Part of the problem was the Greek scientist Archimedes, the same genius who is reputed to have shouted “Eureka!” (εὕρηκα—“I’ve found it!”) when, sitting in his bathtub, he suddenly figured out the principle of specific gravity. He’s also reported to have said that he could move the earth if he could find a place to stand and a lever long enough. At any rate, this same scientist, like Leonardo, also turned his genius to siege mechanics, causing no end of problems for the Romans. He had constructed graduated catapults to keep up a barrage of stones on the enemy’s ships regardless of the distance; he built cranes to drop rocks on Roman ships that got too close to the walls of Syracuse; and, most dangerous, he developed a “crane’s beak” which could reach down from the walls, grab the prow of a Roman ship, lift it into the air, and then drop it suddenly, either swamping or capsizing the boat.

When Marcellus finally did breach the walls of Syracuse it was because a deserter told him that everyone in the city was drunk following a three day festival to Artemis. The party ended abruptly and, much to Marcellus’s regret, Archimedes was killed during the assault. A Roman soldier cut the scientist down when he was too absorbed in a geometry problem to realize what was going on.<sup>29</sup>

Further successes followed: Capua was retaken in 212, and Tarentum in 209. The real turning point, however, came in Spain. This had been prepared as early as 217 when Gnaeus Scipio, brother to the consul wounded at the Ticinus, had sunk a Carthaginian fleet at the mouth of the Ebro River. Later, with the help of his brother Publius, he inflicted on Hannibal’s brother Hasdrubal the first defeat of a Carthaginian army in a pitched battle. It provided a vital boost in morale after Cannae. Most important, it kept Hasdrubal from sending reinforcements to Hannibal in Italy, and this contributed to Hannibal’s inability to administer the *coup de grace*. Unfortunately for Rome, the two Scipio brothers were killed in 211 while attempting to move on New Carthage in the south of Spain.<sup>30</sup>

It’s fortunate that the death of these two commanders came after the fall of Capua, for the gradual turning of the tide gave the Senate enough breathing room to send reinforcements. As their commander the people would settle for no one else except the son of the martyred ex-consul, the same Publius Cornelius Scipio we saw rescue his father during the battle of the Ticinus. He was now only

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<sup>28</sup>Livy, 26. 24 and 28; Scullard pp. 215-216; Mommsen II.179-184; *CAH* VII I pp. 102-106; Lancel, *Hannibal* pp. 132, 153-154; Erich S. Gruen, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) pp. 373-381.

<sup>29</sup>Polybius, 8. 6-8 and 37; Plutarch, *Marcellus* 19 [p. 380]; Livy, 25. 31. There’s a famous story that Archimedes used huge magnifying glasses to burn the rigging of the Roman ships, but that seems to be just another myth traceable to the satirist Lucian (cf. the story of the first Marathon race in chapter 16). Lucian says in his *Hippias* chapter 2: “The former [i.e. Archimedes] burned the ships of the enemy by means of his science,” but none of our earlier sources mention the trick. See Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Modern Library Edition) vol. 2 p. 505 note 99.

<sup>30</sup>Polybius, 3. 95-96; Scullard pp. 211-214; Mommsen II. 184-189; Lancel, *Hannibal* pp. 133-136.

24 and, having only held the aedileship, was technically too young to command an army. The people gave him the command anyway. In 210 he arrived in Spain with about 30,000 reinforcements.<sup>31</sup>

As it turned out, Scipio was the hero that Rome had been waiting for. Scipio completed his father's plans and took New Carthage in 209. He then defeated Hasdrubal in Baetica, and though he carelessly allowed Hasdrubal to escape across the Alps into Italy, in 206 Scipio faced the remaining Carthaginian commanders at Ilipa and, through his victory, destroyed Carthaginian rule in Spain forever. Meanwhile poor Hasdrubal, who had advanced down to the Metaurus River on the coast of Umbria, was stopped dead by the two consuls Gaius Claudius Nero and Marcus Linius Salinator. Showing the grim Roman sense of humor, Claudius cut off Hasdrubal's head and flung it before Hannibal's guard posts so the commander would realize that his reinforcements weren't showing up.<sup>32</sup>

After Scipio was elected consul for 205, he had a serious debate with Fabius, the now elderly "Delayer." Fabius was no imperialist: his cautious objective was to drive Hannibal out of Italy, and he wasn't really anxious to risk anything else. Scipio, however, was both an imperialist and as imaginative a general as Hannibal. Just as Hannibal had tricked the Romans at the start of the war by invading Italy, it was Scipio's plan to turn the tables on Carthage, invade Africa, and make Rome a Mediterranean power. Scipio won the debate and the invasion was on.<sup>33</sup> Scipio fought for two years in Africa while Hannibal was gradually forced into the toe of Italy. While in Spain, Scipio had taken the trouble to recruit the Numidian prince Masinissa. With his help he besieged Utica and wiped out the army of another general Hasdrubal. He accomplished that trick by rather underhandedly setting fire to the enemy's camp at night. The camp went up like a tinder box, and Hasdrubal's army disappeared in a terrible night of fire, panic, and slaughter. It was at this point that the Carthaginians recalled Hannibal.<sup>34</sup>

Scipio managed to negotiate a truce with the peace party at Carthage, but they were wasting their time. Trusting in Hannibal, the Carthaginian nationalists restarted the war by seizing some Roman supply transports in the Bay of Carthage. Scipio sent three envoys to protest, but the Carthaginians ambushed and almost murdered them. Just as everyone apparently wanted, the two heavyweights met in a face-to-face contest.<sup>35</sup>

Scipio paid Hannibal the compliment of imitating his tactics. First he precipitated a battle by laying waste the countryside and forcing the Carthaginians to act before Hannibal was ready. He then made sure that his friend Laelius and King Masinissa were at hand with enough cavalry to equal the enemy's and so prevent any flanking moves. Hannibal finally pitched camp at Zama, a town about five days' march to the west of Carthage. Polybius (15. 6-8) and Livy (30. 30-31) have the two generals meet before the battle, but that may be just an historical excuse to write a couple of set speeches.

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<sup>31</sup>Livy, 26. 18 and Scullard p. 225-226; Mommsen II. 189-191; *CAH VIII* pp. 175, 179-180; Lancel pp. 136-138.

<sup>33</sup>Livy, 28. 40-44; Scullard pp. 232-233. Fabius and his supporters controlled the consulship from the defeat of Cannae until 207. Thus Scipio's Spanish command of 210 had to be granted by the Tribal Assembly, where his family's popular support had more punch than in the aristocratically controlled Centuriata. After 205 the Scipionic alliance and their imperialistic policy took over. See *CAH VIII* pp. 68-74.

<sup>34</sup>Polybius, 14. 1-8.

<sup>35</sup>Scullard pp. 232-236; Mommsen II. 218-219; Lancel pp. 172-173; Polybius, 15. 1-2.

Hannibal led his attack with 80 elephants, but they went mad with wounds and the noise of battle; most ran off through breaks in Scipio's line left for that purpose. To make matters worse for Hannibal, his mercenaries broke and even turned on his own men. At the last minute the cavalry under Laelius and Masinissa hit the enemy in the rear, deciding the hard-fought infantry battle.<sup>36</sup> Hannibal managed to escape, but his army was destroyed. Back in Carthage for the first time in 36 years, he advised peace, and indeed Scipio didn't want to start on a siege of Carthage either.<sup>37</sup>

Rome drove a hard bargain: Carthage could keep all her towns in Libya and didn't have to accept Roman garrisons, but she had to hand over all but 10 of her warships, and all of the elephants. She could go to war with no people outside of Libya, and with none inside Libya without Rome's permission. This latter provision made it possible for Masinissa to raid her borders with impunity. Finally Carthage was forced to pay a fine of 10,000 talents of silver in installments over 50 years.<sup>38</sup> Some Carthaginian senators refused to sign, but Hannibal dragged one senator who opposed the treaty off the podium and then apologized for having forgotten his manners after being absent for so many years fighting for his country. The Carthaginian Senate ratified the treaty.<sup>39</sup>

The end of the war also ended the glory of its two famous generals, who shared strikingly similar fates. Scipio eventually fell prey to his political enemies, who indicted him for embezzlement of state funds in 189. Scipio would not condescend to defend himself against the charge. He only talked of his great achievements for the state. When that didn't work, he withdrew into voluntary exile on his estate at Liternum, where he died in 184 at the age of 48. At his request he was buried on his estate, "so that my funeral might not be held in my ungrateful native city."<sup>40</sup>

Although Livy doubts the legend, Hannibal was supposed to have died the same year as Scipio. When his own political enemies had driven him out of Carthage, he joined the court of the Seleucid king Antiochus III in Syria. When Lucius Scipio and big brother Publius defeated Antiochus, Hannibal fled to Prusias, the King of Bithynia. He was followed there by Titus Quinctius Flaminius, the hero of our next chapter, who demanded his extradition to Rome. When Prusias gave in and Flaminius surrounded his house, Hannibal took poison.<sup>41</sup>

Of course I can't resist quoting Juvenal's famous lines on the moral of all this:  
 Weigh out Hannibal's dust. How many pounds does he come to,  
 This greatest commander of all? Here was a leader, too mighty  
 Even for Africa's reach, from the Moorish sea to the desert,  
 From the steaming Nile to the elephant-teeming jungles.  
 Spain is under his sway, he leaps the Pyrenees mountains;  
 Nature bars his advance with the ice of the Alpine glaciers

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<sup>36</sup>Polybius, 15. 9-14; Livy, 30. 32-35

<sup>37</sup>Scullard pp. 236-238; Mommsen II. 222-223.

<sup>38</sup>Students always ask, "How much is that worth?" Please look ahead to my remarks about the Edict of Prices in Chapter 40 to see why it is impossible to answer that question. That having been said, and just for fun, it is possible to come up with a modern figure. Lancel in *Hannibal* p. 177 puts the tribute at 10,000 Euboic talents, adding helpfully that a Euboic Talent equals 26 kilograms of silver. We know that the indemnity was to be paid in silver thanks to the note by Pliny the Elder at *N.H.* 33.51. Currently, in March of 1999, one troy ounce of silver is valued at \$5.549. Since one troy ounce = .0311 kilograms, we come out with the "current market value" of \$46,390,351 for the full indemnity.

<sup>39</sup>Polybius, 15. 18-19; Livy, 30. 37.

<sup>40</sup>Livy, 38. 50-54.

<sup>41</sup>Livy, 39. 51-52 and Plutarch, *Flaminius* 20-21 [pp. 463-465.]

## The Purple People

But he splits the rocks with his vinegar, cracks mountains open,  
Now he holds Italy, but still he intends to press onward.  
“Nothing is won,” he says, “until the soldiers of Carthage  
Smash the gates of Rome and plant their flags in the forum.”  
What a face he had! What a wonderful theme for a picture,  
A general with one eye riding an elephant—splendid!  
What is the end? Alas for glory! He also is conquered,  
Runs off to exile, and there, a truly magnificent client,  
Sits in the court of a king, awaits his Bithynian pleasure.  
What brought an end to the life that once confounded all nations?  
Not a sword, not a stone, not a spear. The avenger of Cannae,  
All those seas of blood, was a little ring that held poison.  
Run, then, over the Alps, behave like an absolute madman,  
To end up the schoolboys’ delight, the theme of their declamations.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Juvenal, 10. 147-167 (Rolfe Humphries, tr.).