
The Limits of Brilliance: The Role of Supply Problems in Hannibal's Failed Italian Campaign

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The year 241 BCE saw Rome emerge victorious from the First Punic War. The verdict of that war gave Rome control of Sicily, wrested from the mighty Carthaginian empire by hard fighting at sea. However, Rome's appetite for conquest was far from sated. Taking full advantage of the weakened condition of their foe in 237, the Romans seized the islands of Sardinia and Corsica as well. This post-war opportunism intensified Carthaginian resentment and virtually guaranteed a second war. Hannibal Barca, that incomparable commander who nearly brought Rome to its knees, was Carthaginian hatred personified. He tested the political will of the Roman ruling elite and the legendary perseverance of the Roman people. His campaign in Italy, known to history as the Hannibalic War of 218-201, set in motion the social, economic, and political currents which eventually resulted in the demise of the Roman Republic. The conflict was a life and death struggle for control of the Western Mediterranean, a struggle the Roman historian Livy described as "the most memorable of any that have ever been waged."¹ Rome's legions and the commanders who led them proved to be outclassed on the battlefields of Italy. To survive the onslaught – indeed, the wholesale massacre – the Romans learned through bitter experience to employ a strategy of attrition, containment, and isolation. They also learned to capitalize on their substantial advantage in manpower and logistics. Mighty as Hannibal was in the field, he did not have the staying power or the resources needed to bring about a favorable settlement with Rome. Hannibal's undoing was the result of the deliberate Roman policy of harassment and deprivation, his inability to win a critical mass of political support from the Italian communities, and his failure to find a long-term solution to his considerable supply needs.

A Brief Note on Primary Sources

The most important literary source for this particular period of Roman history is the account of the Greek historian Polybius. Polybius (204-122) was a statesman and soldier who spent many years in Rome as a captive of the Republic. He was sent to Rome as part of a larger group of one thousand leading citizens of the Achaean League on suspicion of collaboration with the Macedonian ruler Perseus in the aftermath of the Third Macedonian War. He lived and worked during a dangerous time, an era of expanding Roman interference and bellicosity in the Hellenistic East. As a leading citizen of the Achaean League he needed to tread carefully in his attempt to preserve the independence of the Greeks while concurrently depriving the Romans of any pretense for further aggression against his homeland. He was ultimately unsuccessful, for in addition to their prowess in war, the Romans were exceptionally adept at finding any excuse to legitimize the subjugation of their enemies. Having come of age during this dynamic time, Polybius had access to eyewitnesses of the Hannibalic War. He had become acquainted with the consul Lucius Aemilius Paullus during the latter's campaign against Perseus in the Third Macedonian War. During his sixteen-year captivity in Italy from 167-151 Polybius was allowed to stay at the residence of Aemilius Paullus and through him gained access to the leading citizens of Rome. Among them was Scipio Africanus the Younger,² better known as the commander who orchestrated the final destruction of Carthage. Polybius witnessed the once-proud city of Carthage burn during the Third Punic War (149-146). In addition, he witnessed the sack of Corinth by the Consul Lucius Mummius in 146.³ There is a bit of the historian in every history. However, Polybius was fully aware of the importance of historical objectivity.⁴ He made explicit his desire to be an unbiased recorder of events, pointing out that students should not be, "led astray by the ignorance or partisanship of historians."⁵ His willingness to bestow praise on friend and foe alike suggests Polybius was, in part, successful. As both a man of affairs and a man of war, Polybius understood the complex interconnectedness of politics, strategy, and tactics.

The work of Titus Livius (59 BCE-17 CE), better known by his anglicized name Livy, provides a source of slightly lesser importance than Polybius for the time period under scrutiny. He employed a style that is at once grand, sweeping, and unapologetically patriotic towards Rome. Livy's work is

somewhat marred by his patriotic flair and for this he has been the subject of criticism.⁶ The narrative of his massive 142-book masterpiece *History of Rome from the Founding of the City* does betray a marked degree of patriotic embellishment and exaggeration, but it was highly regarded by contemporaries and in some cases it remains the only available literary source. Livy also had access to many sources which are no longer available to modern historians, and he was well positioned during his life as an acquaintance of several leading members of the Roman elite – including the Julio-Claudian emperors Augustus and Claudius. For these reasons, Livy's *History of Rome* continues to serve as an indispensable compliment to the work of Polybius.

Deficiencies of the Existing View of Hannibal's Failure

The prevailing interpretation among modern historians who have covered this great war identifies Hannibal's inability to win over the communities of Italy as the primary cause of his ultimate failure. Theodor Mommsen, a mid-nineteenth century historian who wrote a widely acclaimed history of ancient Rome, explained that Hannibal's victory could have "only be looked for as the result of political and not of military successes – of the gradual loosening and final breaking up of the Italian federation."⁷ In other words, Hannibal could never have won the war through military victories alone; he needed to convince the Italian communities, either through coercion or persuasion, to abandon Rome and side with him. This interpretation is echoed by Henry Francis Pelham, another notable nineteenth century scholar of ancient history, who observed that Hannibal's "inability to shake the loyalty of northern and central Italy and of the Latin colonies everywhere . . . caused his ultimate failure."⁸ More recently, William Dunstan in his work *Ancient Rome* largely repeated what his nineteenth century counterparts had to say.⁹ Michael Fronda, in his search for the reasons why the Italian communities remained loyal, began his analysis with the assumption that their loyalty led "ultimately to Rome's victory over Carthage."¹⁰ The view that Hannibal was undone by his inability to win allies in Italy is sound, but it neglects the deeper question of why the young general needed such support in the first place. Hannibal would not have had any need for local allies if he had possessed a sustainable source of manpower and supplies as well as the means to transport those resources to Italy from without.

The military historian Richard Gabriel observed that the Carthaginians faced two significant strategic constraints going into the Second Punic War. First, an inability to control the sea lanes and second, a lack of significant recruiting bases for their armed forces.¹¹ This meant that, among other things, Hannibal had to be self-sufficient wherever he went. He could not count on any logistical flows coming from either Spain or Africa because the Carthaginian government had little to spare and because Rome's fleets would have intercepted any ships bound for the Italian coast. With the possibility of outside support ruled out, Hannibal pinned his hopes on being able to quickly conclude the war before Rome could raise, equip, and train its vast manpower pool.¹² He planned to do this not by razing Rome to the ground but by forcing Rome to accept a favorable settlement by winning a rapid succession of spectacular victories.¹³ This would have had the effect of rattling what Hannibal believed was a fragile system of alliances Rome had built around itself.

On Hannibal's Need for Supplies and Support

The root cause of Hannibal's ultimate failure in Italy was his inability to find a sustainable solution for his supply problems. Unlike his opponent, who enjoyed a considerable advantage in material resources, Hannibal did not possess the capability of maintaining a drawn-out struggle. His greatest fear was losing momentum and becoming mired in a war of attrition which he was ill-equipped to fight. How to keep his army supplied in hostile country – a problem for which he was never truly able to find a solution – was one of Hannibal's constant concerns. His supply needs were considerable. Though Hannibal's warriors were undoubtedly accustomed to privation – having been forged by years of bitter fighting in Spain – even the most combat-hardened soldier still requires food, water, and warmth to survive.

Deprived the luxury of an intact supply chain, Hannibal was forced to subsist on what forage he could obtain from the Italian countryside and what little allied support he was able to muster. His greatest hope rested with the Celts living on both sides of the Alps, a diverse collection of tribes who the Romans called *Gauls*. Even before he departed Spain he sent envoys to the Celtic tribes living in northern Italy to secure their loyalty and support.¹⁴ Though ethnically homogenous, these people lagged behind the Romans in terms of political, economic, and social development. Polybius described them as primitive and

warlike agriculturalists with “no knowledge whatever of any art or science.”¹⁵ Their friendship was relatively easy to obtain, for these people had accumulated centuries of animosity towards their Roman neighbors to the south. Indeed, several tribes revolted from Roman rule upon merely hearing of Hannibal’s impending invasion. They drove the Romans from several of their colonies in the Po River region.¹⁶ During the long march to Italy, Hannibal benefited from the friendship of Celtic tribesmen living in modern day southern France. They furnished the Carthaginian general with food, clothing, weapons, and even an armed escort to the foot of the Alps.¹⁷

Celtic support was critically important for Hannibal. Hannibal’s march from New Carthage (modern Cartagena, Spain) to northern Italy took five perilous and deprivation-filled months. By the time he descended onto the plain of the Po River in late October of 218 his army had shrunk by more than half to just

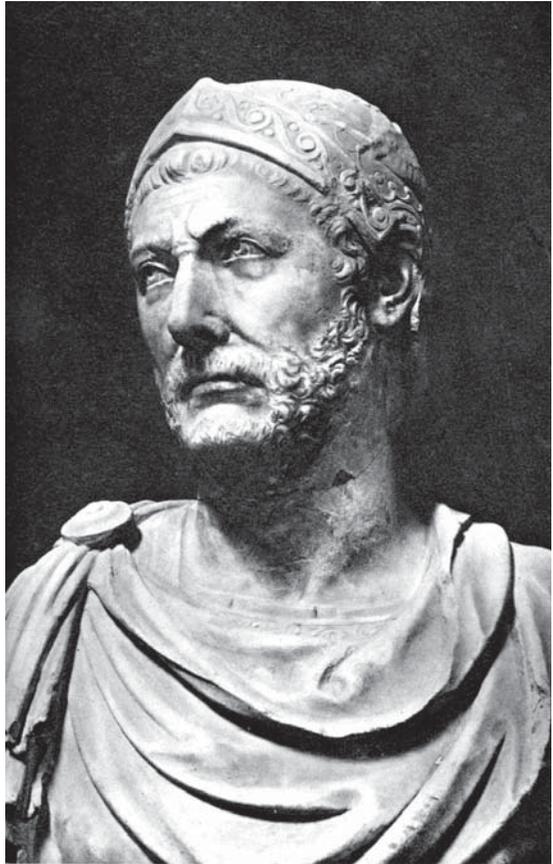


Figure 1 Bust of Hannibal. Illustration from Mommsen’s *Römische Geschichte* (1932) page 265, *Hannibal*.

twenty thousand infantry and six thousand cavalry.¹⁸ Most of these troops were in an emaciated and demoralized condition. Polybius noted that “the survivors . . . had become in their external appearance and general condition more like beasts than men.”¹⁹ Hannibal found himself in dire need of supplies and reinforcements, for the difficulty of the Alpine passes prohibited him from bringing many supplies with him. Fortunately for Hannibal, the Celts delivered on their promises, furnishing him with provisions and replenishing his ranks with contingents of Celtic warriors.²⁰

Mommsen estimated that they added more than sixty thousand infantry and four thousand cavalry to his army by the time he descended into Etruria after the Battle of the Trebia River.²¹ Though the Celtic contributions to Hannibal's Italian campaign may have been substantial, it was never enough to sustain his effectiveness throughout his protracted struggle against Rome. Rome was a juggernaut which possessed, according to Polybius, over seven hundred thousand troops capable of being mobilized for war.²² Some Bruttians and Lucanians from the extreme south of the peninsula joined Hannibal in the latter stages of his campaign. However, they were too few in number and too late in arrival to make a substantial impact. The great Roman war machine had already mobilized its immense manpower pool. A discussion of Rome's overwhelming advantage in



Figure 2 *Hannibal in Italy*. Fresco by Jacopo Ripanda, c. sixteenth century. Musei Capitolini, Rome.

war resources will be provided in a later section.

Hannibal resorted to alternate means of alleviating his supply needs when willing support was not forthcoming. For instance, the Celtic tribes of northern Italy were not all equally willing to engage Hannibal in an alliance. When the Taurini people refused his gestures he besieged their capital and took it after three days.²³ He also resorted to bribery to obtain what he needed. He gained access to the Roman supply magazine at Clastidium by bribing the Roman commander there.²⁴ The Carthaginians also weathered lean times by plundering

the countryside – a measure which wrought a substantial amount of devastation in Italy’s rural areas. Hannibal’s rapid succession of victories at the Trebia River and Lake Trasimene sent the Romans into a panic and left him utterly free to lay waste to the Italian countryside. He did this throughout central and southern Italy. In the latter half of 217, for instance, he rampaged through Umbria and Picenum, finally settling in the rich agricultural region of Apulia on the Adriatic coast. He thoroughly plundered this area as well, dedicating himself to the restoration of his troops who were suffering at the time from what Polybius called "hunger-mange."²⁵ The rampaging delivered more than just food. Captured cities and their garrisons yielded a massive number of Roman armaments which the Carthaginian general used to outfit his troops in the Roman manner. Polybius remarked that Hannibal, “possessed himself of so large an amount [of booty] that his army could not drive or carry it all off.”²⁶ After scorching Apulia he crossed the Apennines and did the same in Campania – a region celebrated by contemporaries for its beauty and fertility.

Forage, far more than plunder or bribery, sustained the Carthaginian host during its time in Italy. The method Hannibal used to gather supplies around the Apulian city of Geronium was typical of his foraging operations in other parts of the country. Looking for suitable winter quarters, he sent his messengers to Geronium to seek an alliance with its inhabitants. Like most of the other communities of Italy they ignored his entreaties. Hannibal besieged the city and executed the inhabitants after its capture. With the town secured, he established his camp before it and began using the existing buildings within its walls as storehouses for grain. The young general then dispatched two-thirds of his army to harvest the ripe grain in the surrounding countryside.²⁷ By foraging in this manner, Hannibal was able to survive for years in Italy without external support.

Though plunder and forage could provide the basic necessities of life, they came with significant disadvantages. Taking provisions by force meant enacting great suffering on the local populace – the very people whose allegiance Hannibal needed to court. Relying on forage for survival also restricted Hannibal’s strategic agility. Hannibal’s crossing into Italy, for instance, may have been delayed for months out of a need to wait for crops to ripen in the fields of north-eastern Spain.²⁸ Similarly, he was forced to remain encamped outside Geronium at the beginning of 216 while waiting for crops to ripen in the field.²⁹ This delayed the movement of his army, an expensive tradeoff considering that momentum,

speed, and initiative were key elements of his formula for victory. Foraging also exposed his army to dangers they normally would not have had to endure. For instance, with his forces dispersed whilst foraging about the countryside around Geronium, Hannibal only narrowly prevented his camp from being overrun by a Roman attack under the command of Marcus Minucius. A large number of Hannibal's men perished that day.³⁰ The Romans, on the other hand, enjoyed complete freedom of movement. They were fighting in their home territory against a single body of Carthaginians. This allowed them to pre-stage provisions at strategically located magazines throughout Italy and avail themselves of sea transportation when and where necessary.

It has been conjectured that a want of supplies prohibited Hannibal from besieging Rome itself. William Dunstan, for example, contended that Hannibal was unable to make an attempt on the walls of Rome because of a dearth of siege equipment and adequate supply bases.³¹ The explanation seems plausible. Bringing ballistae and catapults across the Alps would have been a foolish errand, and Polybius indeed mentioned that Hannibal left his "heavy baggage" in Spain before setting out for Italy.³² Furthermore, a substantial number of siege engines were captured at New Carthage after the fall of that city at the hands of Scipio Africanus in 209.³³ Hannibal's original plan may very well have provided for a second expedition following him to Italy with the siege equipment he left behind after Rome's legions had been subdued and a path to the city cleared. Richard Gabriel offered an alternative view, stating that instead of insufficient siege equipment (which, he claimed, was easy to manufacture on the spot), Hannibal was prevented from assaulting the city because he lacked the provisions and men needed to sustain a prolonged siege.³⁴ Clearly, his handicap in the realm of logistics and supplies played a key role in deterring Hannibal from assaulting Rome.

On the Roman Advantage in Resources

Hannibal's glaring disadvantage in manpower was part of the reason why he declined to besiege Rome in the summer of 217.³⁵ It is useful at this point to undertake a digression to comment on Rome's immense advantage in material resources vis-à-vis the Carthaginians. Rome's improbable recovery in the years after the Battle of Cannae in 216 appears on the surface to be some miracle made

possible not by the dealings of men but by the intervention of the gods. The story becomes less enchanting, however, when one examines the resources available to both combatants. Rome, far and away, possessed the great advantage in manpower. Gabriel claimed that Carthage possessed a total of one hundred and fifty thousand foot soldiers and thirty-five thousand horse troops for *all* of its military needs at the outset of the Second Punic War.³⁶ From this number the Carthaginians had to provide defenders for Spain and Africa, rowers and marines for the fleet, and soldiers for Hannibal's expedition to Italy. By the late 220s, according to Polybius, Rome had two hundred and forty thousand infantry and over fourteen thousand cavalry trained, equipped, and in the field ready to fight. Of this the allies furnished one hundred and eighty thousand infantry and ten thousand cavalry – the great majority of the force. In addition to these men in the field, Rome possessed “on the roll” over four hundred thousand infantry and almost thirty-eight thousand cavalry which were “able to bear arms.”³⁷ These figures mean that, both at the outset and in the long run, Hannibal was greatly outnumbered. His best hope of breaking the political will of Rome rested with striking Italy before the Romans could fully mobilize their massive manpower reserves. He was, of course, unsuccessful in this aspect. Failing to bring the Romans to terms quickly, Hannibal was rendered impotent during the latter years of his campaign. In effect he lost the initiative and was overtaken by events after about 211. Thereafter, he was forced to sulk about in Bruttium and Lucania while the Romans waged war simultaneously on multiple fronts in Italy, Spain, Sicily, and Africa.

The sheer number of men levied and lost to the first encounters with Hannibal serve as resounding reminders not only of Rome's material wealth but also of the critical importance of her allies to the war effort. The allies consistently supplied more than half the total Roman force. For example, the numbers Livy provided indicate that the Roman allies supplied most of the manpower – a full sixty-two percent of the infantry and seventy-one percent of the cavalry – at the outset of the Second Punic War in 218.³⁸ On a broader level, Polybius announced that allied contingents represented over sixty percent of the total manpower available to Roman commanders at the outset of the war.³⁹ Indeed, it was a common practice for a given Roman legion to be composed of an equal number of Roman and allied infantry, and the number of allied horse was usually three times as many as their Roman counterparts in the legion.⁴⁰ Roman

troops essentially formed the core of the fighting force while the allies supplied bulk and most of the cavalry. More importantly, however, the allies could furnish new soldiers to replace those lost in battle. The early casualty rate was astounding. The first two years of the war saw 140,000 Roman and allied soldiers killed or captured by Hannibal's forces. No less than twenty percent of the entire military age population of Rome was dead by the end of the Battle of Cannae in 216.⁴¹ Rome could never have survived the onslaught without the replenishments provided by her allies.

Hannibal, on the other hand, had to work with the forces he brought with him and what local reinforcements he could extract. The latter were substantial at the outset of his campaign but gradually trickled down to almost nothing. As mentioned before, the Celts supplied him with tens of thousands of troops in the beginning, and it is estimated that forty percent of his army came to be composed of Celtic warriors after he was reinforced by the northern Italian Gauls.⁴² As was the case with his supply problems, however, Hannibal never truly found a long-term solution to the manpower limitations he faced. His elite corps of African and Spanish infantrymen, for example, gradually eroded and disappeared from his ranks. They were replaced by less effective Bruttians, Lucanians, and Gauls as his campaign wore on.⁴³ Hannibal's great disadvantage in wartime resources meant that he needed a political as opposed to a military victory.⁴⁴ He knew early on that spectacular victories on the battlefield would be more valuable for their psychic impact on his enemy than for the actual physical harm they caused. He intended to detach Rome from its allies by winning some battles and demonstrating Rome's weakness while simultaneously bombarding the allies with promises of liberation and autonomy.⁴⁵ Doing so would deprive Rome of allied manpower while adding it to his own.

Hannibal and the Roman Allies

The second phase of the Second Punic War, the period from the Battle of Cannae in 216 to the recapture of Capua in 211, was the apex of Hannibal's campaign. Terentum in Magna Graecia surrendered almost immediately after Cannae as did Argyrippa in Apulia and some towns in Campania.⁴⁶ Sensing the distress of his enemy, Philip V of Macedon concluded an alliance of mutual support with Hannibal in 215.⁴⁷ Hieronymus of Syracuse, grandson and successor to the loyal Roman ally Hiero II, turned his domain over to the Carthaginians in

214.⁴⁸ Most of Lucania, Bruttium, and Samnium switched sides as well. Though nothing to scoff at, the total number of defections throughout the entire campaign was never enough to overcome Rome's material advantage, nor was it enough to break the political will of its leaders.

It was not for a lack of effort that Hannibal failed to gain a critical mass of support among the Italian communities; he worked hard to get them to abandon Rome. For instance, when the Celtic contingents in Publius Cornelius Scipio's army defected to Hannibal's side shortly before the Battle of the Trebia in 218, the Punic general received them amicably, promised them gifts, and encouraged them return to their respective cities to incite their countrymen to follow their example.⁴⁹ He consistently treated non-Roman prisoners well, stressing on numerous occasions that he was there to restore the freedom Rome had denied them. He urged them to return home to spread the word among their fellows.⁵⁰ Such "liberation propaganda," according to Fronda, was one of Hannibal's favorite psychological tactics.⁵¹

Polybius claimed that Hannibal's scorched-earth policy was much more than an outlet for his intense hatred of Rome – it was a calculated form of terrorism designed to induce the Italian communities to abandon the Romans.⁵² By inflicting untold suffering, Hannibal meant to simultaneously demonstrate the weakness of Rome as the protector of Italy and show his superiority relative to the same. The results were disappointing. Indeed, Hannibal's ruthless plundering and burning probably alienated many communities and did nothing to win him friends in Italy.

The question of why the allies remained loyal to Rome must be asked. Ever the Roman patriot, Livy believed that the true source of fidelity stemmed from the mutual loyalty felt by the Romans and their Italian allies. This loyalty, according to Livy, was reciprocal. He described the wartime consuls as being genuinely concerned for the wellbeing of Rome's allies and outraged at witnessing the atrocious acts committed by Hannibal upon them. While the Italian cities and peoples had once been conquered by Roman force of arms, by the end of the third century they had generally come to see Rome as a benevolent master instead of a brutal conqueror. Roman conduct during the Hannibalic War strengthened this sentiment. Livy remarked, "though everything was wrapped in the flames of war, the allies did not allow their terrors to warp them from their loyalty, simply

because they were under a just and equable rule, and rendered a willing obedience to their superiors - the only true bond of allegiance.”⁵³

Fronza rejected this sentimental idea. Taking a diplomatic perspective, he examined the diplomatic and political history of individual Italian cities and concluded that internal factional rivalries caused some communities to respond to Hannibal’s overtures and some to reject them.⁵⁴ In his words, “the dynamic of Rome’s indirect rule through collaboration by the local governing classes [within each city] intersected with personal and political rivalries within those local aristocracies, and . . . these internal divisions came to the surface when Rome’s position was threatened by Hannibal.”⁵⁵ Fronza’s argument seems plausible, for the history of Rome’s treatment (or mistreatment) of individual cities and their leading families must have influenced their decision of whether or not to ally with Hannibal.

On the Roman Strategy of Attrition and Isolation

Rome and her generals came to learn that victory resided not in the finality of a pitched battle but in a slower, more methodical, and less certain approach of attrition warfare. Never before had the Romans found it necessary to resort to such a mode of warfare, which explains the initial vicissitudes of her generals in their approach to the Hannibal problem. With superior resources, control of the seas, and a substantial number of allies providing men and materiel for the war effort, the Romans realized that it was in their best interest to make the war a marathon instead of a sprint. This marathon approach was pioneered by a man named Quintus Fabius, the dictator for 217. His methods were controversial, but in the end they were embraced by the Romans as the best way of winning the war.⁵⁶ Appointed after the tragedy at Lake Trasimene, Fabius went to work implementing the delaying strategy which later bore his name and earned him the agnomen *Cunctator* (the delayer).

Fabius deliberately avoided symmetrical confrontations with Hannibal thereby preventing the disasters which had befallen his predecessors. He stayed on Hannibal’s heels as the latter stomped through the Italian countryside, watching his every move and frustrating his designs whenever and wherever he could.⁵⁷ The Fabian strategy was designed to whittle down the enemy’s numbers by attacking foragers or stragglers who had wandered too far afield from the main

body. Fabius's modest successes in 217 bolstered sagging Roman morale while simultaneously chipping away at the enemy's. In stark contrast to his incendiary predecessors, Fabius took a cool, pragmatic, and methodical approach to the conduct of the war. As wise as his approach was given the circumstances Rome faced, Fabius angered many who subscribed to the conservative belief that a decisive engagement was the best way to defeat Hannibal. Many of his contemporaries came to see him as weak, feminine, and cowardly. Fabius's own Master of the Horse Marcus Minucius abandoned the cautious approach at the first opportunity.⁵⁸ The brash Gaius Terentius Varro, one of the consuls of 216, did everything he could to provoke a pitched battle.⁵⁹ Even the senate and people of Rome lost patience with the Fabian approach, evidenced by the elevation of Minucius to the co-dictatorship in 217.⁶⁰

Upon the expiration of his term of service, Fabius dutifully relinquished his *imperium* to the consuls of 216, Lucius Aemilius Paulus and Gaius Terentius Varro – two men who did not share his fondness for corrosive warfare. The Romans were again lulled into a pitched battle, the result of which was more catastrophic than anything they had previously endured. The Battle of Cannae in 216 resulted in the death of seventy-six thousand Roman troops with a further ten thousand taken prisoner. The debacle resulted in a number of defections to Hannibal, and it permanently altered Rome's subsequent approach to the war. Fabius's strategy, which had grown unpopular, became appreciated anew, and Fabius himself was elected to the consulship several times in the years following Cannae. Almost without exception, Roman commanders from 216 onward remained committed to Fabian tactics until the end of the war.⁶¹

Polybius observed that “the Romans both in public and in private are most to be feared when they stand in real danger.”⁶² Roman actions in the years after 216 were consistent with Polybius's assessment. With the tenacity and grit which were their hallmarks, the Romans set about recovering what had been lost to them. The talented Marcus Claudius Marcellus secured Syracuse after a two year siege in 212.⁶³ The following year saw the consuls Quintus Fulvius Flaccus and Appius Claudius Pulcher recapture Capua after a two year siege, in spite of Hannibal's attempt to lift the siege by threatening the very gates of Rome.⁶⁴ Fabius, in 209, besieged and retook the southern city of Tarentum.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, Rome's allies in the Aetolian League prevented Philip V from lending aid to the

Carthaginians in Italy. Disloyal cities were treated harshly, thoroughly plundered and, as in the case of Capua, had their leading members executed.

A key element of Rome's victory strategy involved preventing external aid from reaching Hannibal in Italy. The Romans accomplished this by leveraging their superior manpower pool and their control of the sea. Sporadically throughout the war the Carthaginians dispatched a number of follow-on expeditions to Italy designed to resupply Hannibal. These were either repelled before they reached Italy or were destroyed shortly after arrival before they could rendezvous with Hannibal. In 217, for instance, a fleet led by the consul Gnaeus Servilius chased off a Carthaginian fleet bound for a rendezvous with Hannibal at Pisa.⁶⁶ Rome dispatched a fleet to the Adriatic to act as a buffer which prevented Philip V from transporting Macedonian reinforcements to Hannibal.⁶⁷ Two sizeable relief expeditions were able to reach Italy, one arrived over land by way of the Alps and one came by sea. Both were neutralized and prevented from reaching Hannibal. Hasdrubal Barca, Hannibal's brother, slipped away from Spain and scaled the Alps with a substantial army as his brother did ten years prior. He was defeated and killed by the Romans at the Metaurus River in 207 before he could provide support to his brother.⁶⁸ A final attempt to reinforce Hannibal was led by his younger brother Mago in 205. The Romans in this instance prevented a reunion of the brothers by assigning a force to monitor and occupy the younger Barca in the Po Valley. Mago was eventually defeated and later died of his wounds while in transit back to Africa after being recalled along with Hannibal.⁶⁹

Knowing that developments in Spain would have a direct impact on events in Italy, the Romans wisely prosecuted the war in that country throughout the entire Second Punic War. Carthaginian forces left unmolested in Spain would have been free to deploy reinforcements to Italy. The Scipio family must be given credit for tying up Carthaginian resources in this critical arena. Gnaeus Scipio was dispatched to Spain at the beginning of the war in 218 specifically to prevent any Spanish reinforcements from reaching Italy. He was later joined by his brother Publius Cornelius Scipio, but both were killed campaigning in 211 against Hannibal's brother Hasdrubal. Cornelius's 25-year-old son Publius Scipio gained the Spanish command in 210 and began his long and distinguished military and political career.⁷⁰ He captured New Carthage in 209 by employing a coordinated land and sea attack, and he thoroughly plundered the rich city after its capitulation.⁷¹ By 206 he had achieved total success in Spain by eliminating the

last remaining Carthaginian force there.⁷² Scipio was welcomed back to Rome as a hero, and he leveraged his immense popularity to win the consulship. Within a few years he carried the war to Africa and inflicted a final defeat on Hannibal at Zama in 202, earning for himself both a permanent place in Roman history and the right to add the prestigious agnomen *Africanus* to his name.

Conclusion

Starved of supplies and reinforcements, his every move watched by a Roman army dedicated to the purpose, Hannibal lost the initiative and had become mired in a war of attrition against an enemy with infinitely more resources. He descended into the extreme south of the Italian peninsula after the fall of Capua in 211 and was forced to saunter about the hills of Lucania and Bruttium while the Romans dispatched its forces near and far to reconquer what they had lost. Indeed, the Romans campaigned in the later years of the war as if Hannibal were not even there.⁷³ He lingered in southern Italy until recalled home in 203 to help defend Carthage from the Roman onslaught led by Scipio Africanus.⁷⁴ Rome imposed harsh terms after the Carthaginian defeat at Zama. Not content with fading quietly from history, Hannibal maintained a leading role in the post-war Carthaginian government until he was forced into exile by his political opponents in 195. He maintained his hatred of the Romans until the very end of his life. After his exile, Hannibal lent his considerable military talents to Rome's enemies in the east – first to the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III and finally to King Prusias I of Bithynia. He took poison in 183, electing to die by his own hand instead of being subjected to the indignity of Roman captivity and execution.⁷⁵

Hannibal lost the war even though he was undefeated in every battle he fought on Italian soil, making his campaign one of the great paradoxes in the history of warfare. Though ultimately unsuccessful, the trauma of his Italian campaign left lasting scars on the Roman Republic. The physical devastation Hannibal wrought on the countryside coupled with the long absence of many Italian farmers on campaigns against him left scores of farms dilapidated beyond repair. Many small farmers were ruined economically as a result, and they flocked to Rome in search of work. This fueled the growth of the famous Roman city mob. Meanwhile, the Roman elite added to their already-immense land holdings by buying up adjacent tracts of abandoned farmland. They also encroached upon vast

swaths of *ager publicus*, public land which had recently been enlarged by confiscations from treacherous Italian communities. The result was the growth of the *latifundia*, large slave-worked estates owned by the very rich. The simultaneous growth of *latifundia* and the urban poor created an immense gulf between rich and poor within Roman society. This set the stage for the political turmoil in the age of the Gracchi and beyond.

Notes

¹ Livy, *The History of Rome*, ed. Ernest Rhys, trans. Canon Roberts (London: J. M. Dents & Sons, Ltd., 1905), 21.1, accessed September 5, 2014, <http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/txt/ah/Livy>.

² Oliver J. Thatcher, ed., *The Library of Original Sources* (Milwaukee, WI: University Research Extension Co., 1907), 3:166-93, accessed August 24, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/polybius6.asp>.

³ C. B. Edwards, "Introduction," in *The Histories of Polybius*, trans. W. R. Paton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922), para. 4, accessed August 24, 2014, http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Polybius/Introduction*.html.

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⁵ Polybius, *Histories* 3.21.8-10.

⁶ John Jacobs, review of *Livy: Hannibal's War*, by J. C. Yardley (trans.), *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, March 2007, para. 3, accessed August 25, 2014, <http://bmc.brynmawr.edu/2007/2007-03-36.html>.

⁷ Theodor Mommsen, *The History of Rome*, 2nd ed., trans. William P. Dickson (London: Richard Bentley, 1864), 2:119.

⁸ H. F. Pelham, *Outlines of Roman History*, 4th ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), 128.

⁹ William E. Dunstan, *Ancient Rome* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 74.

¹⁰ Michael P. Fronda, *Between Rome and Carthage: Southern Italy During the Second Punic War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

¹¹ Richard A. Gabriel, *Scipio Africanus* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2008), 28-32.

¹² *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³ Dexter Hoyos, *Hannibal's Dynasty: Power and Politics in the Western Mediterranean, 247-183 B.C.* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 102.; Fronda, *Between Rome and Carthage*, 34-7.

¹⁴ Polybius, *Histories* 3.34.1-9.

- ¹⁵ Ibid., 2.17.8-12; 2.29.5-8.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 3.40.3-14.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 3.49.5-13.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 3.60.5.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 3.60.6.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 3.66.7-8.
- ²¹ Mommsen, *The History of Rome*, 2:118.
- ²² Polybius, *Histories* 2.24.16.
- ²³ Mommsen, *The History of Rome*, 2:113.
- ²⁴ Livy, *The History of Rome* 21.48; Polybius, *Histories* 3.69.1.
- ²⁵ Polybius, *Histories* 3.87.2.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 3.86.10.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 3.100.
- ²⁸ Hoyos, *Hannibal's Dynasty*, 102-3.
- ²⁹ Polybius, *Histories* 3.107.1.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 3.102.
- ³¹ Dunstan, *Ancient Rome*, 74.
- ³² Polybius, *Histories* 3.35.5.
- ³³ Livy, *The History of Rome* 26.47.
- ³⁴ Gabriel, *Scipio Africanus*, 50.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 30.
- ³⁷ Polybius, *Histories* 2.24.3-16.
- ³⁸ Livy, *The History of Rome* 21.17.
- ³⁹ Polybius, *Histories* 2.24.3-16.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 3.107.10-12.
- ⁴¹ Gabriel, *Scipio Africanus*, 49.

- ⁴² Ibid., 59.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 56.
- ⁴⁴ Mommsen, *The History of Rome*, 2:119.
- ⁴⁵ Fronda, *Between Rome and Carthage*, 34-7.
- ⁴⁶ Polybius, *Histories* 3.118.
- ⁴⁷ Pelham, *Outlines of Roman History*, 129; Dunstan, *Ancient Rome*, 75.
- ⁴⁸ Pelham, *Outlines of Roman History*, 129.
- ⁴⁹ Livy, *The History of Rome* 21.48; Polybius, *Histories* 3.67.1-5.
- ⁵⁰ Polybius, *Histories* 3.77.3-7, 3.85.1-4.
- ⁵¹ Fronda, *Between Rome and Carthage*, 37.
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- ⁵³ Livy, *The History of Rome* 22.13.
- ⁵⁴ Fronda, *Between Rome and Carthage*, 33.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
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- ⁵⁷ Polybius, *Histories* 3.89.1-3.90.14.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 3.94; 3.101-2.
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- ⁶⁴ Polybius, *Histories* 9.3-9; Pelham, *Outlines of Roman History*, 130.
- ⁶⁵ Livy, *The History of Rome* 27.15-16.
- ⁶⁶ Polybius, *Histories* 3.96.7-10.
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- ⁶⁸ Livy, *The History of Rome* 27.47-49; Polybius *Histories* 11.1-3.
- ⁶⁹ Livy, *The History of Rome* 30.18-19.

⁷⁰ Dunstan, *Ancient Rome*, 75-6.

⁷¹ Livy, *The History of Rome* 26.42-47.

⁷² Pelham, *Outlines of Roman History*, 131.

⁷³ Hoyos, *Hannibal's Dynasty*, 137.

⁷⁴ Dunstan, *Ancient Rome*, 77; Pelham, *Outlines of Roman History*, 132.

⁷⁵ Dunstan, *Ancient Rome*, 77-8; 83.

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