

REVISION AND RECONSTRUCTION
OF THE BATTLES OF
CANNAE (216 BCE)
AND
ZAMA (202 BCE)

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Revision and Reconstruction in the Punic Wars: Cannae Revisited.

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Abstract

The history of the wars between Carthage and Rome was rewritten by two pro-Roman historians, Polybius and Titus Livius. The former, while usually more reliable, revised facts that would have shown his employers, the Scipionic/Aemilian family, in an unfavorable light, while the latter, a clear Roman patriotic propagandist, embellished history to suit his purposes. Accounts of the wars by Carthaginian historians seem to have been lost or been conveniently destroyed. Nevertheless, gaps and contradictions in the Roman accounts, together with a modern understanding of human motivation and environmental circumstances, allow for the reconstruction of the original events. A case in point is the battle of Cannae, in 216 BCE, where a modern analysis reveals the real reasons for Hannibal's victory, the true strengths of the armies of Romans and Carthaginians, the identity of the actual commander of the Roman forces, the correct casualty figures, and the likely reasons for Hannibal's refusal to march on Rome following his great victory.

The battle of Cannae, between the multi-ethnic forces of the Carthaginian general Hannibal Barca and the much larger Roman army under the command of consuls Lucius Aemilius Paulus and Gaius Terentius Varro, in 216 BCE, was without a doubt one of the most significant battles in history. Nevertheless, many important details of this engagement remain uncertain and controversial. This paper proposes a reinterpretation of several critical factors in the conflict: the actual size of the opposing armies, the identity of the Roman battle commander, the numbers of casualties, the reason behind Hannibal's strategy and amazing victory, and the factors that precluded Hannibal's marching against Rome immediately at the conclusion of the battle. The methods of logical inference, internal consistency, and psychological analysis, will be used to support our conclusions.

History was written by the victors. Nowhere is this dictum truer than in the case of the three wars waged between Carthage and Rome (264-241, 218-201, and 149-146 BCE). Even the name by which these conflicts are known reflects a Roman bias: Punic Wars. Surely historians in the maritime and mercantile city-state of Carthage would have referred to the conflicts as Roman Wars. As it is, historical records that were produced by the Carthaginian side have been totally obliterated or lost, and most of what we have was penned by pro-Roman sources. Of these sources, the two most important ones are the accounts of Polybius and Livy (Titus Livius).

Polybius was Greek. He lived from approximately 200 to 118 BCE, and thus was alive only through the course of the third war, which he was able to witness first hand. A military man, he was enslaved by the Romans, and came to serve the Aemilian/Scipionic family, becoming friend and mentor of Scipio Aemilianus, the destroyer of Carthage. He wrote about 50 years after Cannae, and his works are generally regarded as more reliable than those of Livy (e.g., Lancel 47-51; Barcelo 279; Seibert 1993a 1-2, 1993b 44-52). Apparently he made an effort to retrace

Hannibal's steps over the Alps and interviewed survivors of the second war. Nevertheless, his objectivity and accuracy becomes suspect when he writes about members of the family he served.

Livy lived from 59 BCE to 17 CE (or 64 BCE to 12 CE). He was essentially a Roman moralist and propagandist, whose historical accounts, although beautifully written, contain many fictionalized incidents, such as speeches (which he pretends to quote verbatim) and anecdotes, clearly invented to embellish the record and provide an inspirational and patriotic narrative for his Roman audience. Closer to a novelist than to an objective chronicler of the past, his history of Rome and the Punic Wars is less reliable than that of Polybius, and should be used only with great caution and reluctance to fill gaps in the incomplete Polybian account.

In what follows, we will consider a series of problem areas that emerge from an examination of the historical accounts of the battle of Cannae provided by Polybius and Livy.

1. The Size of the Opposing Armies.

After being defeated in the cavalry encounter at the Ticinus river (218 BCE), at the battle of the Trebia (218 BCE), and at Lake Trasimenus (217 BCE), the Romans decided to raise a massive army to get rid of Hannibal once and for all. Polybius (3:107) tells us that the Romans recruited eight legions, to be matched by an equal number of legions from their Italian allies, and that the numerical strength of each legion was increased from 4,000 to 5,000. Consequently, the size of the infantry forces marshaled by the Romans totaled 80,000. This number is usually accepted as valid by most historians. The question, though, is the size of the cavalry complement of each legion, and the total strength of the Roman horse. Since the previous defeats of the Romans had been a direct result of the numerical superiority of the Carthaginian horse, it stands to reason that in recruiting cavalry complements for their enlarged legions, the

Romans also increased the size of the equestrian forces accompanying each legion, probably from 200 to at least 300, or perhaps even 350 or 400. Polybius (3:107) states that “on occasions of exceptional gravity” the Romans increased the size to 300, and that the numbers of the allied cavalry were required to be “three times as numerous as the Roman.” Hannibal’s successive defeats of three Roman armies certainly constituted an “occasion of exceptional gravity,” for the very survival of the Republic seemed to be at stake, and it makes sense to assume that the cavalry, whose weakness had contributed to the previous defeats, was particularly strengthened. Polybius indicates elsewhere (4:25) that a typical legion of his day included 300 horse riders (rather than 200), which makes an enhanced figure of 400 for “special occasions” even more likely. If we use the figure of 400 per Roman legion (or a total of 3200 for the eight legions raised for the battle), and triple that number, counting the strength for each allied legion as 1,200 (giving a total of 9,600), we arrive at a combined cavalry of 12,800. This would mean that the Romans not only outnumbered Hannibal’s infantry forces (which consisted of 40,000) two to one, but also held numerical superiority in cavalry (Hannibal’s numbering 10,000). Even if we accept only an increment for “occasions of exceptional gravity” of 300, this would give us 2,400 (300 x 8) Roman and 7,200 (900 x 8) allied cavalry, or a total of 9,600. The Romans had at least practical numerical equality with Hannibal’s horsemen.

Polybius (3:107), though, lists the strength of the Roman horse only as “over 6,000.” Why this discrepancy? Perhaps one reason can be found in the fact that the Romans consistently rationalized their defeats by attributing them to Hannibal’s superior cavalry numbers, so that accepting that they actually held superiority, or at least parity, in cavalry, at the moment of their greatest disaster, would have made their defeat that much more shameful. The Romans regarded themselves as the best warriors of their time, and Hannibal’s victories needed to be explained

away in order to maintain that self-image. While necessarily recognizing his genius (for how could they have been defeated by a lesser general?), they needed a way to excuse and justify their own failure.

Some (e.g., Daly 74-75) have argued that the larger numbers for the Roman horse are unlikely because “early encounters between Roman and Numidian cavalry suggest no significant qualitative difference between the two” and that therefore “the annihilation of the citizen cavalry at Cannae can be largely explained by their being greatly outnumbered.” As we will see below, though, there was a different reason for the defeat of the Roman and allied horse, which did not preclude their actual numerical superiority. It can also not be argued that the Romans would not have been able to raise a larger cavalry force due to a shortage of horses or riders, for even after Cannae they continued recruiting cavalry contingents for scores of legions.

2. The Command of the Roman Army at Cannae.

Although two consuls, Lucius Aemilius Paulus and Gaius Terentius Varro, were in charge of the largest army Rome had ever raised, they alternated actual command day by day. Who was in command the day of the battle, and who was, therefore, responsible for the worst defeat in Roman history? Polybius (3:113) and Livy (22:45), who essentially copies Polybius here, state that it was Terentius Varro’s turn to take command on that fateful day of August 2, 216 BCE. Aemilius Paulus is described as being reluctant to engage, and Varro’s rashness has been blamed for the disaster. But the evidence suggests otherwise. As Seibert (1993a 192) has pointed out, the consul in command would have traditionally led the right wing, where the Roman horse (the equites) were placed. It was Aemilius Paulus who was in this place of honor. Varro, on the other hand, was in charge of the left wing, that of the allied cavalry. It was Aemilius Paulus who can therefore be identified as the consul in command that day. As an

employee of the Aemilian family, Polybius would have had the motivation to disguise this fact by blaming Varro instead, in order to protect the reputation of Aemilius Paulus. Two additional facts support the contention that Paulus, and not Varro, was in command. After being wounded, Paulus was offered the opportunity to escape from the field, but chose to stay and face certain death, which would be consistent with the shame he would have experienced at the unfolding disaster, had it been his responsibility. Varro, on the other hand, was able to escape with a small number of surviving allied horse, and upon returning to Rome was received with open arms and congratulated for not having despaired of the Republic (e.g., de Beer 216). Had he been the commander responsible for the annihilation of Rome's greatest army, it is highly unlikely that he would have enjoyed such a reception! The Romans notoriously did not reward their failed generals, much less assign them to further military commands, as was later the case with Varro (Dodge 411, 428). We must conclude that Lucius Aemilius Paulus, and not Varro, was the Roman commander at the battle of Cannae.

3. The Reasons for Hannibal's Victory at Cannae.

The deployment of forces on the plain of Cannae, to the right of the Aufidus (now Ofanto) river, close to the modern city of Barletta, in southeastern Italy, seems to have been as follows. The Roman horse, numbering 2,400 (or 3,200, if we accept the enhancement of 400 per legion) was on the right wing, commanded by Aemilius Paulus. The allied cavalry, numbering 7,200 (or 9,600), formed the left wing, and was under the command of Terentius Varro. The center, led by Minucius and Servilius, consisted of the massed infantry forces, placed in more compact and deeper formation than was usual for a Roman army. Their number was 80,000 minus the forces left to guard the Roman camps on both sides of the river. The front line consisted of skirmishers. The Roman army faced south.

Hannibal's army faced north, and it also had cavalry contingents on both flanks. On the Carthaginian left wing, facing the 2,400-3,200 Roman equites, Hannibal placed his 6,000-strong heavy Celtic and Iberian horse, led by Hasdrubal (no relation to Hannibal's brother by that name). On the right wing he deployed the Numidian horse, led by Hanno (or Maharbal), numbering 4,000, and facing the 7,200-9,600 allied horse. In the center he placed his infantry, some 40,000 (minus forces left to defend his camp on the left side of the river). They consisted of Gauls interspersed with contingents of Iberians, plus his African veterans (5,000 on each side) as a reserve force. The Carthaginian center formation advanced as a convex semicircle (as seen from the Roman side). In front was a line of skirmishers.

Hannibal had to have planned his troop deployment well before the battle, it could not have been an improvisation conceived on the spot as the Roman army was moving into place. Why did Hannibal choose to position his forces as he did? What was the fatal flaw he recognized in the Roman formation, and how could Hannibal have predicted it?

It can be argued that what did the Romans in was, above all, their elitism. Hannibal knew that the Roman nobility would ride on the right, and not together with their "lesser" peers, the Italian allies. If the Romans had divided their total cavalry into two equal forces, deployed on either side of the field, the outcome of the battle might have been quite different. But they predictably placed the smaller elite Roman force on the right, and Hannibal was able to deploy against them the heavy Celtic and Iberian horse under Hasdrubal, outnumbering them by more than two to one, and practically assuring victory on that side.

It is important to note that Hannibal's total cavalry force consisted of two totally different equestrian contingents: Celtic/Iberian and Numidian. The heavy Celtic and Iberian riders formed a shock force that would crush their outnumbered Roman counterparts, the cavalry battle

becoming compacted between the river and the Roman right infantry flank, to the point that riders would have to dismount in order to fight, lacking sufficient room to maneuver. The Numidian horse, on the other hand, which Hannibal placed on his own right wing, was a highly mobile force, specializing in hit and run clashes, and its riders were arguably the best in the world at that time. Their tactics involved advancing and retreating, circling and changing directions, closing in to strike and immediately withdrawing too far away to be struck. They were the ideal forces to harass and keep busy the larger contingent of allied horse on the Roman left, who were unable to match the agility of the Numidians.

As the Celtic and Iberian horse routed the Roman cavalry, rather than chase after the few survivors, the disciplined riders under Hasdrubal rode swiftly behind the battlefield to fall upon the allied horse at the opposite side, the forces kept in check by the harassing Numidians. The allied cavalry under Varro broke, and his riders fled from the field with tremendous losses, being chased by the Numidians. Meanwhile, the heavy horse under Hasdrubal wheeled around once again and fell upon the back of the Roman army. In the meantime, Hannibal had sprung a trap he had hidden in plain sight.

It is tempting to regard the choice of a flat plain, such as that at Cannae, as terrain for the great battle, a blunder on the part of Paulus or Varro, because it was ideal for the maneuverability of Hannibal's formidable cavalry. But the Romans had an important reason to choose to do battle on an open plain: it precluded the hiding of forces for an ambush, a Hannibalic tactic that had resulted in heavy Roman losses at the Trebia and at Lake Trasimene (where Hannibal actually managed to hide his entire army in ambush!). Since on the plain of Cannae no ambush was possible, the Romans were confident that their massive numerical superiority would guarantee them victory. They were not bothered by the fact that cavalry could

operate effectively on such terrain, for, after all, they had now equestrian equality or even superiority. For this reason, the story of Paulus and Varro disagreeing on the location of the battle is, in all likelihood, fictitious.

The battle plan of the Romans clearly intended to puncture through the Carthaginian center with their massive phalange-like infantry force, and to envelope the defeated Carthaginian forces to the right and left of the broken center. But their expectations did not come to be. The genius of Hannibal allowed him, not only to use the predictable Roman elitism to defeat their cavalry, but to achieve the apparently impossible, the total envelopment of the larger army by his much smaller one, and the complete annihilation of the enemy.

By advancing his troops in a convex arc, Hannibal ensured that the initial engagement between the advancing Roman phalange and his forces was concentrated in the very center, so that the Romans not in the immediate center would be drawn to it, in order to be able to engage, compacting their army more and more towards the middle. Although his Gauls and Spaniards were, to an extent, his weakest and most expendable forces, Hannibal himself, together with his brother Mago, commanded the center, and made sure that the Carthaginian army gradually pulled back in an orderly fashion, making the convex front gradually straight, and then actually concave. The huge Roman force, undoubtedly believing they were winning, continued to advance into the sack-like trap formed by the gradually withdrawing Carthaginian forces. At the critical moment, the elite African veterans Hannibal kept in reserve, 5,000 on each side, wheeled in, and attacked the flanks of the trapped Roman army, stopping its advance, as in the arms of a vise, pressing the Romans together more and more, until they were hardly able to move. Any possibility of retreat was blocked by Hasdrubal's horsemen at the rear. The Carthaginian center did not break, and reversed its retreat as the Roman army became gradually immobilized. Only

soldiers at the borders of their trapped force could fight at all, and even they had insufficient space to wield their swords. Meanwhile, those in the center were essentially sentenced to wait for their turn to die. Within a few hours, the greatest army Rome had ever raised was no more.

Hannibal's victory was the result of a number of factors: Roman elitism and predictability, the agility of the Numidian cavalry, the discipline of all of his forces, who were able to implement his master plan in clockwork fashion, and, above all, his own tactical and strategic vision. His victory most certainly did not depend on luck, nor was it the result of the incompetence of Aemilius Paulus, and much less of Varro, nor of the Voltumnus wind that was said to be blowing in the faces of the Roman soldiers. The fatal flaw was also not the Roman practice of alternating daily command. What doomed them at Cannae was ultimately their own arrogance and the genius of their greatest adversary.

4. The Casualty Figures at Cannae.

Polybius (3:117) states that only 70 of the allied cavalry managed to escape with Varro and that 300 others "reached different cities in scattered groups." He further indicates that some 10,000 Romans were captured, "but not in the actual battle, while only perhaps three thousand escaped from the field to neighboring towns." He adds; "All the rest, numbering about seventy thousand, died bravely." As for Hannibal's losses, Polybius lists "about four thousand Celts, fifteen hundred Spaniards and Africans, and two hundred cavalry," or a total of 5,700. Livy (22:49), on the other hand, gives a lesser figure for the Roman losses (about 50,000) and a larger for the Cartaginian dead (8,000). Some historians (e.g., Goldsworthy, 2001; Daly, 2002) have balked at accepting the Polybian figures, because they seem larger than possible if one assumes that the Romans had only 6,000 cavalry. Their total strength would have been 80,000 infantry plus 6,000 horse, or 86,000, and Polybius's figures, 70,000 fallen, plus 10,000 prisoners, plus up

to 10,000 survivors, total about 90,000. But we have already established that the real cavalry strength of the Roman army at Cannae was in all likelihood somewhere between 9,600 and 12,800. Taking these revised figures into account, Polybius's casualty numbers seem quite plausible, and no contradiction exists. In view of the overall greater reliability of Polybius's account over Livy's, it seems reasonable to accept that, indeed, 70,000 Romans and a little over 5,000 of Hannibal's men died on the plain of Cannae, on August 2, 216 BCE.

5. The Reasons for Hannibal not Marching Against Rome in the Aftermath of Cannae.

Much has been made of Hannibal's apparent failure to capitalize on his victory at Cannae by marching immediately against Rome, after the annihilation of its greatest army, and thus ending the bloody conflict with the sacking of the city on the Tiber. This alleged failure is the subject of an often quoted anecdote, in all likelihood fictitious, in which Maharbal, commander of the Numidian cavalry, urges Hannibal in vain to march without delay against Rome, telling him: "In five days you shall banquet in the Capitol! Follow after; I will precede you with the cavalry that the Romans may know that you are there before they know that you are coming!" Upon Hannibal's refusal, he rebukes him by saying: "In very truth the gods bestow not on the same man all their gifts; you know how to gain a victory, Hannibal: you know not how to use one" (Livy 22:51). Livy presented this bit of nonsense to bolster his own thesis: "That day's delay is generally believed to have saved the City and the empire" (22:51). As Seibert (1993a, 199) has pointed out, the Roman origin of this story is clear from the reference to "banqueting in the Capitol," for Maharbal could hardly have known that this was customary for a returning victorious Roman general!

But was Hannibal's "failure" to march on Rome indeed a blunder? Why did he choose not to proceed toward the capital of his enemies, after his greatest victory? We will attempt to answer the second question first.

Hannibal was born into a culture quite different from that of Rome. Carthage was a maritime merchant city-state, ruling over commerce in the Mediterranean world. The philosophy of a business-oriented realm is typically not militaristic, for war functions as an impediment rather than a facilitator of commerce. Conflicts and disagreements tend to be settled by trade, negotiation, and compromise, rather than by war, violence, and destruction. The historical record suggests that although Carthaginians were able to wage war when necessary, they were not a warlike society. When circumstances forced armed conflict, they preferred to hire mercenaries to do the fighting for them. Mercenaries can be hired, paid, and dismissed. The Carthaginians did not maintain a regular citizen army. When given a choice, they preferred a negotiated peace to violent conquest. Being a product of a mercantile society, the character of Hannibal, the man, must have been affected by this social background.

Hannibal was an educated man. He was able to communicate in many languages, among them Greek, and it is likely that he was well read in the Greek classics. One of his tutors, Sisylos, was from Sparta, and another, Silenos, was a Greek from Sicily. It is likely that Hannibal was familiar, not only with the works of Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon, but also with those of Greek philosophers, such as Heraklitus, Parmenides, Plato, and above all, Aristotle, tutor to Alexander the Great, whom he greatly admired.

From age nine, Hannibal grew up in Spain, among the forces of his father, the Carthaginian general Hamilcar Barca, who made sure that his son continued to have the best of tutors, and who undoubtedly inculcated in him the values of Carthaginian society. To assume

that because he grew up surrounded by the Carthaginian colonial forces in Spain he only learned soldiering (at which he clearly excelled) is unjustified. It seems likely that Hannibal, far from being a violent man filled with hatred of the Roman enemies of Carthage, was a rational, cultivated individual. The story of his childhood oath of eternal enmity against Rome is most likely apocryphal, and in any case, it was an oath never to become a “friend” (meaning “a subject”) of Rome, rather than a profession of hatred. It is quite possible that rather than delighting in warfare, Hannibal engaged in it only out of necessity for the protection of his country. There is no doubt that he was patriotic, and that he placed the welfare and glory of Carthage above his own, even at times when his city-state failed to support him.

The document he prepared for the treaty of Carthage with King Philip V of Macedon, in 215 BCE (recorded by Polybius, 7:9), reveals not only that he was highly educated, respectful of religious traditions, and well aware of diplomacy and protocol, but also that his plans and intentions did not include the destruction of Rome. It is clear from this document that Hannibal merely intended to curb the expansionistic military imperialism of Rome, and restrict the Romans to their own geographical region in the middle of the Italian peninsula (Lancel 192-194). This would have resulted in freedom for the cities previously subjugated by the Romans, especially the Greek colonies at the south of the peninsula, as well as the liberation of the Gallic tribes in the north. Naturally, it would also have allowed Carthage to retain its commercial pre-eminence in the Mediterranean.

The Romans (especially Livy), portrayed Hannibal as greedy, cruel, faithless, and treacherous, charges that were actually truer about the Romans themselves (consonant with the workings of the ego defense mechanism of projection, attributing to someone else flaws one is unwilling to recognize in oneself). This is not to argue that Hannibal was flawless, of course, but

he certainly was not crueler than his adversaries, who demonstrated terrible brutality and vengefulness upon retaking cities that had previously allied themselves with the Carthaginians. For those interested in Hannibal's character, the excellent books on the subject by Gottlob Egelhaaf (1922) and Edmund Groag (1967) are still highly recommended.

If we now imagine this brilliant general, an educated and cultured person from a society that settled disagreements through compromise and negotiation, standing on the bloody field of Cannae, littered with 75,000 dead and countless wounded and maimed, we can speculate that the spectacle was not one in which he would have taken great pleasure. While acknowledging the necessity of achieving victory in the face of a ruthless and intransigent enemy, his emotions were probably closer to revulsion and consternation. In this mindset, for him to contemplate now the destruction of a great city, resulting in hundreds of thousands of additional deaths, men, women, and children, would not have resulted in eagerness to implement such macabre vision (quite the opposite, by the way, seems to have been the case with Scipio Aemilianus, the architect of the destruction of Carthage 70 years later, whose only regret after killing three fourths of a million people, seems to have been the thought that some day Rome herself might suffer the same fate!). An immediate march against Rome was then incompatible, not only with Hannibal's goals and intentions, but also with his character and personality.

But would it have made sense to attempt such a march at all? Rome was a large city, defended by huge walls, which Hannibal's troops would have been unable to breach, lacking siege equipment. Besides, his numbers were insufficient for a successful siege. Parking his relatively small army in front of the walls of Rome would have allowed them to be trapped between the city's defenses and reinforcements arriving from all corners of the peninsula, and would have accomplished nothing but his own destruction. It must be remembered that, while

Hannibal was in a foreign land, cut off from his supply lines, and unable to receive reinforcements, the manpower potential of the Roman federation was in excess of 700,000! (Dodge 95).

There was still another reason why Hannibal could not have simply marched on Rome right after the battle of Cannae. As John Shean argues quite convincingly, the logistical limitations of Hannibal's army would have made it impossible at that point (Shean 159-187). Without a permanent base of supply, Hannibal did not have the resources to feed his animals and men on a march of over 200 km without adequate preparation. Additionally, he had to take care of an indeterminate, but certainly large, number of wounded.

There is also a further socio-cultural and political reason for why Hannibal would not have contemplated such an action, even had it been feasible. In the tradition of the Mediterranean world of his day (Greek, Macedonian, Carthaginian), a defeat such as the one inflicted on Rome at Cannae would have led inevitably to a negotiated peace. Rome, having been repeatedly defeated in the field and having had its greatest army annihilated, would have been expected to agree to peace terms that included some compensation paid to the victor. But the Romans refused to negotiate, and, showing a total disregard for human life, even that of their own citizens, refused to ransom their captured soldiers, branding them as cowards simply due to the fact that they were still alive! This was something Hannibal could not have foreseen. Once the Roman attitude became apparent, Hannibal continued with his original plan of liberating the people subjugated by Rome in order to gradually achieve the defection of Rome's allies. He almost succeeded. His strategy was sound, and the causes for its ultimate failure can be found, not in some intrinsic weakness in his plan, but in two factors. The first one was the reluctance of the people of Capua, Tarentum, and other liberated cities, to actually serve in Hannibal's army and

risk making the ultimate sacrifice in defense of their newly gained freedom. The other consisted of the myopic and misguided policies of his mother city, Carthage. The Carthaginian senate repeatedly failed to fully support their greatest field commander, showing more concern for the protection of their silver mines in Spain than for the resolution of the struggle in the Italian peninsula, the war theatre in which final victory or defeat had to be decided.

Marching on Rome in the aftermath of Cannae was thus logistically impractical, strategically suicidal, philosophically unacceptable, and psychologically incompatible with Hannibal's cultural upbringing and personality. After Cannae, Hannibal remained in Italy for 13 more years, during which time he was never actually defeated by the Romans, who were now satisfied with following him at a distance and avoiding any further pitched battles with him. With his limited numbers he could not be everywhere to protect his allies, and the cities he had liberated were recaptured by the Romans, one by one. Had they, as well as Carthage, supported him with all their resources, the outcome of the war would have been most likely different. That they did not, and that he consequently failed, is perhaps one of the greatest tragedies in human history.

6. Conclusion: The Lessons of History.

It is interesting to speculate on the consequences the victory of Rome over Carthage had for the subsequent history of the rest of the world, and on how different that history might have been if Carthage, and not Rome, had prevailed.

Rome was a militaristic society, where martial prowess and victory were valued above everything else. Advancement in Roman society depended on military record. The Romans regarded themselves as an elite destined to rule, and everyone else as inferior. In their thirst for conquest, they were the original developers of the policy of pre-emptive warfare. The expansion

of empire that followed the wars against Carthage was characterized by the destruction of anyone who they suspected could become a rival in the future. Their disregard for human life is demonstrated by instances of genocide, such as the holocaust of Carthage, by the destruction and massacre of Corinth, the sack of Jerusalem, and many more atrocities. Their society, although not unique in this respect, was based on the institution of slavery. That they were good at codifying laws and at building aqueducts and monuments has led many to ignore the darker side of the Republic, and later, the Empire.

Ever since the defeat of Carthage, the history of the West has followed on the footsteps of Rome. It has been characterized by warfare, bloodshed, and conquest, by the establishment of empire, and later by efforts to replicate the Roman Empire after it finally collapsed. Hitler's Thousand-Year Reich was based on his dream to create an empire like Rome's. Two books recently released in Germany, Michael Ewert's *Amerikas punische Kriege: Niedergang, Terror und Gehirnwaesche*, and Peter Bender's *Weltmacht Amerika-Das neue Rom*, present compelling arguments that the same is true for the current policies of the Bush administration.

How different the world would have unfolded if Hannibal had been victorious, and the mercantile culture of Carthage, based on barter, business, exchange, negotiation, and compromise, had become the model for future generations! Perhaps peaceful coexistence rather than armed confrontation and conquest would have become the norm rather than the exception, and the tragic millennia of constant warfare could have been avoided. Peace and stability are the necessary prerequisites for successful commerce. A Carthaginian victory would perhaps have resulted in a more rational society, in which might does not make right. Carthage did not try to impose its religion, beliefs, or even political system, on its allies, or within its sphere of influence. Could perhaps a spirit of tolerance have developed, instead of centuries of intolerance,

repression, and religious persecution? It is impossible for us to know, of course. But there is little doubt that the second war between Rome and Carthage, the so-called Hannibalic war, was a major turning point in world history, and that the road not taken might have resulted in a radically different future.

Returning to our original thesis, we have found that the history of Hannibal's epic struggle against Rome was distorted and misrepresented by the victors. In the case of the battle of Cannae, the Roman account changed the actual size of the armies, attributed Roman defeat to the wrong commander, reduced (with Livy) the casualty figures of the defeated, failed to give the real reasons for the Roman disaster, and proposed a fictitious misjudgment on Hannibal's part as the reason for his ultimate failure. It is hoped that the arguments presented in the present paper will help to reconstruct the events that transpired at Cannae in 216 BCE, and to put Hannibal in a different historical perspective.

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Revision and Reconstruction in the Second Punic War:
Zama--Whose Victory?

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Abstract

This paper offers a reconstruction of the events leading up to the battle of Zama, in 202 BCE. The writings of pro-Roman historians, especially Polybius, an employee of the Cornelian family, and Livy, a patriotic propagandist, tend to exaggerate the importance of Publius Cornelius Scipio's generalship at Zama and the preceding conflicts. Gaps and contradictions in the Roman accounts, together with an understanding of psychological factors, such as the need to compensate for the Roman humiliation at Cannae, plus a stress on internal consistency, allow for a reconstruction of the decisive engagement at Zama. Masinissa, much more than Scipio, emerges as the key protagonist of the Roman victory, in a battle that Hannibal's tactical genius could have won despite the inferior quality and numbers of his army. The implications and long-term effects of the battle of Zama are discussed.

The battle of Zama, waged in North Africa in 202 BCE, between the armies of Hannibal Barca—the Carthaginian leader famous for his crossing of the Alps—and the Roman general Publius Cornelius Scipio, was the final military engagement of the Second Punic War, and a decisive turning point in the history of the Mediterranean cultures and the rest of the world. The traditional accounts of the battle, based practically in their entirety on pro-Roman sources, paint a distorted picture of the conflict and its outcome, as we will show in this paper. We will explore the reasons for the distortions in the historical record, and will attempt to reconstruct what actually happened on that fateful day by examining discrepancies in the various accounts and subjecting the record to psychological analysis and the method of logical consistency.

To understand what took place in 202 at Zama—not the name of the actual locality of the engagement, but the label most easily recognized—and the reasons why the records of the event were presented in the manner in which they have been preserved, it is necessary to go back to 216, the year of the greatest defeat in the history of Roman military power, the battle of Cannae. Only by taking into account Hannibal's victories at the Trebia (in 218), Trasimene (in 217), and especially Cannae, can we gain a measure of the magnitude of the humiliation Rome experienced at the hands of the great Carthaginian hero, who remained undefeated on Italian soil for 15 years. We can then comprehend the psychological and political need to build up the image of a Roman counter-hero, Scipio Africanus, and to exaggerate and distort the account of Zama by presenting it as a Cannae in reverse. The descriptions of Cannae and Zama in Roman historiography offer a curious reciprocal contrast, as will be seen below.

At Cannae, in 216 BCE, Hannibal was able to field 40,000 infantry plus 10,000 cavalry to face a vastly numerically superior Roman force under Lucius Aemilius Paulus and Gaius Terentius Varro, numbering 80,000 infantry and close to, or actually well over, 10,000 horse—

not merely 6,000, as usually claimed (see Mosig & Belhassen, 2006). Hannibal, through his brilliant battlefield tactics, managed to destroy the Roman horse early in the engagement and totally encircle the huge infantry force, achieving within a few hours the annihilation of the largest army Rome had ever assembled. The following haiku may assist in visualizing the devastation of the Romans at Cannae:

the Volturnus blows

proud Roman legions advance

no one named Gisgo

under the hot sun

Roman legions wearing red

black vultures circling

the plain of Cannae

seventy-thousand fallen

Hannibal victor

This terrible defeat was not only a severe blow to the military might of Rome; it was an affront to Roman arrogance and pride. The description of the battle of Cannae in Roman historiography was influenced primarily by the accounts of Polybius—who, although Greek, was in the employ of the Cornelian family—and Titus Livius, or Livy, a patriotic Roman propagandist. The reports of Polybius, Livy, and other pro-Roman historians distort the events at Cannae in several ways (detailed in Mosig & Belhassen, 2006). One claim was that, although the Romans had a two to one advantage in infantry, Hannibal had almost a two to one superiority in cavalry, and that the numerically superior horse was the deciding factor in the disaster. Polybius astutely gives the size of the Roman horse as “over 6000,” which is not technically false,

although clearly misleading, since the actual figure was probably close to twice that number. A force of 10,000 to 12,000 horse and 80,000 foot soldiers allows for the total Roman deployment to exceed 90,000. With 10,000 survivors plus 10,000 captured 90,000 is consistent with Polybius's reported casualty figure of 70,000. Livy, on the other hand, following Polybius's "6,000" number for the Roman horse, sees the total strength as 86,000, and gives a much lower number for the Roman fallen, 50,000. By the creation of a fictional numerical superiority in the Carthaginian horse and the sharp reduction of the Roman dead, the greatest shame of Roman arms was substantially diminished (Mosig & Belhassen, 2006).

Additionally, Roman pride, which had rationalized the defeats at the Trebia and at Lake Trasimene as the results of ambushes rather than "fair" engagements, needed some excuse to explain how they had been crushed on an open plain at Cannae, where no ambush could be concealed. To that end, Livy reports a spurious incident (not mentioned by Polybius) of treacherous trickery, fitting his portrayal of Hannibal (21:4) as possessing "inhuman cruelty" (*inhumana crudelitas*) and "no regard for truth" (*nihil veri*), as well as the standard Roman stereotype of Carthaginian perfidy and "Punic faith." A contingent of 500 apparently unarmed Numidians allegedly pretended to defect and then attacked the Romans from behind with weapons hidden in their clothes (22:48). It seems that vanity demanded that only through treachery and overwhelming cavalry superiority could the "noble" Romans have been defeated!

But wounded Roman arrogance needed more than fabricated lower casualty figures, inflated enemy numbers, and imagined trickery to alleviate the incurred disgrace. The Romans needed a hero behind whom they could rally, a greater than life figure to restore lost confidence, infuse new pride, and, above all, to counteract the image of the apparently invincible Hannibal, Rome's worst nightmare. They also desperately needed a great victory, comparable to Cannae, to

erase their dishonor. The heroization, deification, and hagiography of Publio Cornelius Scipio the Younger, later known as Scipio Africanus, provided the Romans with a legend to accomplish the former, while the exaggerated and distorted accounts of the battle of Zama supplied the illusion that a reverse Cannae had been achieved. We will examine below both of these developments.

A number of ancient sources provide information allowing us to follow the creation of the legend and apotheosis of Scipio Africanus. Besides Polybius (who regarded him as a hero, but had reservations concerning his character) and Livy, Haywood (1933) mentions support for the idolizing of Scipio in reports by Appian, Lactantius, Ennius, Cicero, Oppius, Hyginus, Valerius Maximus, Gellius, Nepos, and others. Members of the Cornelian family, as could be expected, “were united in believing Africanus one of the greatest men of history. Ennius and others had considered him more than a man” (Haywood 28-29).

The earliest expression of the heroization of Scipio in Roman historiography seems to be the incident that supposedly took place during the cavalry engagement at the Ticinus river, in 218 BCE, the first clash between Punic and Roman forces after Hannibal’s epic crossing of the Alps. There, Scipio’s father, the commanding consul, was seriously wounded, and was supposedly saved by the bravery of his son, the future Africanus (Livy 21:46, 9-10), who was at the time barely 18 years old. Nevertheless, according to Coelius Antipater, “the honor of saving the consul should be credited to a Ligurian slave [rather than to the young Scipio].” Livy actually says “*servati consulis decus Coelius ad servum natione Ligurem delegat*” (21:46, 10), while expressing a preference for the version attributing the act to the young hero. The Ligurian slave is also mentioned in Macrobius’s *Saturnalia* (1:11, 26), but the more popular account, giving Scipio as the savior, is found in Appian, *Hannibalic War*, 7; Valerius Maximus 5:4, 2; Floros

2:6, 10; Silius Italicus 4, 417-479, Orosius 4:14; 6; Zonaras 8:23, 9, and others (Beck & Walter 51). Polybius, as Lancel (1998) points out, does not mention the incident in his description of the battle of the Ticinus, but includes Scipio's presumed heroism much later, attributing the information to Scipio's friend Laelius, hardly an unbiased source:

in his laudatory portrait of his hero leaving to conquer Punic Spain in 210 (X, 3) [...] claims that the young man had single handedly saved his father, who was hemmed in by the enemy, while his companions hesitated in the face of danger [...]. This narrative smacks of the hagiography that very soon developed around the figure of Africanus, doubtless with the complicity of the interested party. (84)

Beck & Walter (2004) comment on the discrepancy between Coelius Antipater's description of the incident and the version favored by the mainstream of Roman historiography:

Die Absicht, den jungen P. Cornelius Scipio mit den Heldentat vom Ticinus zu schmücken, griff tiefer als eine blosser Stilisierung der *virtus* des Africanus. Polybius und hernach Livius dürfte es vielmehr darum gegangen sein, Scipio als einem Mann hinzustellen, der vom ersten Gefecht des Krieges bis zum Triumph von Zama unermüdlich gegen Hannibal gekämpft hatte. Coelius war von dieser Intention frei. (52)¹

If Scipio actually was at the Ticinus, he must have been at the battle of the Trebia as well, (also in 218 BCE), but there is no mention in any of the sources indicating either his presence or his participation in the first major engagement of the war, where Hannibal crushed the combined armies of Scipio's wounded father and of Sempronius Longus, the other consul of that fateful year. Clearly, if the young Scipio was there, he did nothing to distinguish himself.

¹ "The intention to decorate the young P. Cornelius Scipio with the heroic deed from the Ticinus goes deeper than a mere attempt to express his *virtus*. Polybius and afterwards Livy were much more interested in portraying him as a man who, from the very beginning of the war till the victory at Zama, struggled tirelessly against Hannibal. Coelius was unencumbered by that intention."

Scipio, supposedly, was also at Cannae, but, as Ridley (1975) points out, he is not mentioned by either Livy or Polybius in their descriptions of the battle. Nevertheless, Livy (22:50-52) lists his name as one of four military tribunes among the survivors who escaped from the debacle. Livy, but not Polybius, includes also an anecdote consistent with the hagiography of the hero, in which allegedly Scipio confronts M. Caecilius Metellus, who, together with others, is planning to leave Italy altogether, believing the situation to be hopeless, and forces him and his followers, at swordpoint, to take an oath to Jupiter invoking their personal destruction should they abandon Rome (22:54). The incident is suspect as a further fiction to enhance the growing legend. Scullard (1930) argues that “this story is probably a late invention, otherwise Polybius would hardly have omitted it” (38).

It is interesting to notice that the Romans disdained those who allowed themselves to be captured at Cannae, whom they branded as cowards and refused to ransom when Hannibal offered them the alternative; as a consequence they were sold into slavery. Disdain was only slightly less for those who had survived the battle by escaping, and they were also disgraced and labeled cowards, since to save themselves they had fled the battlefield rather than dying with honor (Livy 22:49-60). They were punished by being forced to serve indefinitely in Sicily without pay. On the other hand, escape from the Roman camp to avoid capture, rather than from the battlefield, was not similarly stigmatized. Naturally, if Scipio was at Cannae, as Livy implies, had he survived by escaping from the battlefield, by Roman standards he should also have been regarded as a coward and his reputation tainted accordingly—but no mention is made of it. If he was in the camp and did not see action other than escaping in the middle of the night, there was also no glory in that alternative. Similarly, Ridley argues that:

if, as seems likely, Scipio actually fought at Cannae, then here indeed is a hitherto neglected, albeit negative, element in the Scipionic legend: the studious avoidance of any direct statement by any of our sources to this effect. The dramatic contrast of Scipio's presence at Rome's greatest humiliation at Hannibal's hands with his ultimate turning of the tables at Zama, would seem to have been appealing [...] Scipio's part in [the battle of Cannae], apparently undistinguished, has been expunged from history. (165)

Scipio's involvement in the three Roman defeats at which he was probably present—Ticinus, Trebia, Cannae—was undistinguished at best. However, there is little doubt that he carefully studied Hannibal's tactics, and that he was a good student, as demonstrated by his Iberian campaign, where his victories against less competent Carthaginian commanders were made possible by tactical maneuvers derived from Hannibal.

The brazen attack on Cartagena in 209 BCE, while the Punic armies were away, was successful largely due to luck and his discovery of the shallowness of the ebbing waters protecting one side of the city (Livy 26:41-51). As Polybius (10:2) reports, Scipio tried to exploit the situation to convince his soldiers that he was under divine protection and had a special connection to the gods, especially Neptune. There is no doubt that he was a shrewd and clever manipulator of people, and in this and other instances did not hesitate to use the opportunity to build up his own image. He later allowed himself to be seen as a mystic and a favorite of Jupiter, fomenting the growth of his own legend.

Although as a politician he may have approached greatness—at least in a Machiavellian sense—as a military commander he was competent but not brilliant, certainly not a genius of the caliber of Alexander or Hannibal, Liddell Hart (1927) to the contrary. His main victories in Spain—at Baecula in 208 and Ilipa in 206 BCE—reflect his adoption of Hannibalic tactics,

especially the withdrawn center, which is not to say that his maneuvers showed a complete lack of originality.

The battle of Baecula, despite being hailed as a great victory by pro-Roman historians, was actually a disaster, if the intention was to block Hasdrubal, Hannibal's brother, from continuing north to cross the Alps and join the latter's forces in Italy. Scipio failed, and although he "won" the battle, Hasdrubal was able to escape with most of his army intact and proceed north for his rendezvous with destiny (Polybius 10:38; Livy 27:18). This failure could have cost the Romans the war, for had Hasdrubal succeeded in reinforcing Hannibal in Italy, the combined Punic forces under the command of the undefeated Carthaginian maverick would in all likelihood have proven unstoppable. Hasdrubal's defeat at the Metaurus before he could reach his brother saved the city on the Tiber from certain disaster, an event which owed nothing to Scipio and a lot to luck: the interception of Hasdrubal's messengers attempting to reach Hannibal to arrange for the meeting of the two Carthaginian armies (Livy 27:43).

Nevertheless, since the following battle, at Ilipa (206 BCE), effectively ended Carthaginian control of Spain, Scipio returned to Rome a hero, was elected consul in 205, and became proconsul the following year, retaining his command in Sicily. Hannibal, although remaining undefeated after 14 years of war, by 204 was limited in his operations to Bruttium, the tip of the Italian peninsula. The Fabians² in the Roman senate urged action, including the venerable Fabius Maximus, who had exhibited the wisdom of not engaging Hannibal after the Roman debacle at Lake Trasimene in 217 BCE, waging instead a war of attrition, a tactic which, when discontinued after the conclusion of his term in office, led to Cannae. With Hannibal's weary and much diminished army hemmed in at the tip of the peninsula, Scipio was urged to

² The Fabians were one of the main families of the Roman nobility, the others being the Cornelians and the Claudians.

lead the Roman legions on a final battle to defeat the Carthaginian general once and for all (Livy 28:38-45). Scipio refused, insisting instead on taking the war to Carthage, and the invasion of Africa started in 204 BCE.

Although he would have to face Carthaginian armies on their own land, where they could be resupplied without difficulties and would outnumber him, Scipio knew that they did not have another Hannibal among them, and judging from his experience with the less than gifted Carthaginian commanders in Spain he expected to have a better chance of success than facing the remnants of the army of the formidable Hannibal in Italy. Moreover, if he were to achieve success in Africa, he might accomplish the recall of Hannibal from Italy to defend his home city, in which case the great Barcid would arrive without a substantial part of his current forces, especially his much-feared cavalry, due to Roman control of the Mediterranean impeding easy transport of supplies and reinforcements by the enemy. Dodge (1891) perceptively comments:

Scipio did no more for Italy than Marcellus [conqueror of Syracuse], less than Nero [victor at the Metaurus], but he has descended into history as a greater character than either. Less able in many respects, his work was supplemented by opportunities not awarded them, and what he did bore fruit which all men could see. Scipio never hid his light under a bushel. Had Scipio faced Hannibal when Marcellus or Nero was called on to do so, he would probably have failed. Fortune saved him for Zama, when Hannibal had no longer an army and he himself had inherited the best of its size Rome had put into the field. (572)

Scipio had another reason to avoid fighting Hannibal in Italy, in addition to fear of suffering a crushing defeat at the hands of the master. He had been courting Masinissa, a Numidian prince and master of the horse, son of Gaia, king of the Maessylli, whose help and

cavalry would be available to him in Africa, but not in Italy. Earlier, Syphax, a Numidian king of the Masaessylia, had been persuaded by Scipio's father and uncle to join the Roman cause, while the brothers were commanding the Roman forces in Spain. His defection hurt Carthaginian efforts, dependent as they were on Numidian cavalry. Hasdrubal, Hannibal's brother, had combined his forces with those of King Gaia, under the command of Masinissa, who had remained loyal to Carthage, and inflicted two crushing defeats on Syphax. Masinissa was also cavalry commander for the Carthaginian army that in 211 BCE defeated the army of Scipio's father, Publius Cornelius Scipio the Elder, who was killed in the engagement (Polybius 9:22; Livy 25:32-34; de Beer 236-243).

After Baecula, in 208, Masinissa, still loyal to the Carthaginians, retreated south toward Gades. Scipio had crossed to Africa to visit the court of King Syphax and negotiate his continued support of Rome, and apparently charmed the king with his eloquence, despite the presence of the enemy Carthaginian general, Hasdrubal Gisgo. Back in Gades, he wooed Masinissa, "who also fell under the spell of Scipio's charm" (de Beer 270) and signed a treaty with him (Livy 28:35). This act of Masinissa, amounting to a betrayal of his loyalty to Hannibal and Carthage, would have a momentous effect on the outcome of the war. Clearly, Scipio's skill as politician surpassed his talent as battlefield commander.

While Masinissa was still in Spain, his father died, and the succession to the throne of the Maessylia resulted in conflict and civil war, with Mazaetullus usurping power and marrying the Carthaginian widow of the dead king in order to ally himself with Carthage. Masinissa returned to Africa and fought successfully to regain his kingdom, but this put him at odds with Syphax, the king of the Masaessylia, who had supported his rivals for the throne. This time Masinissa was defeated in battle, but managed to escape and hide in the mountains to avoid capture and death.

He was able to raise a new army from his supporters, but was defeated once more by his enemy. Masinissa was expecting Scipio's arrival in Africa, planning to use the opportunity to defeat his adversary, but Scipio's delays with the invasion cost him dearly (Livy 29; de Beer 278-279).

To seal Syphax's support of Carthage, Hasdrubal Gisgo gave the aging king, in marriage, his beautiful daughter Sophonisba, who had also been courted by Masinissa, upon which Syphax sent Scipio a message warning him not to invade Africa, for the king would now be on the Carthaginian side.

Scipio proceeded with the invasion anyway, and landed at Cape Farina, near Utica, in the spring of 204 (Livy 29:27, 5-12; Seibert 432), with an army of at least 30,000 men. He was joined there by the Numidian horse under Masinissa, who defeated a small cavalry force under Hanno that had been sent from Carthage to meet the invaders, Hanno himself being killed in the engagement.

Scipio laid siege to Utica (Ityke), but was unable to take it. Meanwhile, Hasdrubal Gisgo, together with his ally Syphax, assembled an army and marched against Scipio's position. It is important to note that Carthage, unlike Rome, had no confederation of allies, and that there was no standing army at the Punic city. As de Beer (1969) suggests, the hastily assembled force of Hasdrubal Gisgo and Syphax, although large in number, was probably "only a rabble of miserable quality" that would be "quite unable to stand up to veteran Roman legionnaires" (280), and even more importantly, had no Hannibal to lead them.

Scipio discontinued the siege of Utica and prepared a defensive camp on the peninsula, in what later became known as the *Castra Cornelia*, going into winter quarters. Probably still hopeful of being able once again to charm Syphax with his silver tongue, he sent many envoys to the Numidian camp, as well as to the Carthaginian, to offer a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Believing the overture to be in good faith, Hasdrubal Gisgo and Syphax started negotiations with Scipio aimed at ending the conflict. It was obvious that the Carthaginians wanted the long war to end, and for peace to be achieved. The Roman commander, who had no desire for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, since it would have deprived him of glory and the spoils of victory, pretended to go along, and skillfully gave the impression that he was in agreement with the proposals of his reluctant opponents, and that peace would be reached as soon as he received confirmation and approval from Rome. The peace proposal he was offered was not frivolous; it was an agreement stipulating that the Carthaginian forces would withdraw from Italy and the Romans from Africa, and that for the territories between Africa and Italy the status quo would prevail (Livy 30:3-4; Huss 295).

Having deceived the Carthaginians with the false negotiations—Scipio had not asked for any verification from Rome, it was all a sham—he engaged next in one of the most treacherous attacks recorded in human history. Since his delegates had repeatedly visited the Punic camps and had secretly mapped them in close detail, once he had the Carthaginians convinced that an agreement and peace were imminent, he launched a sneak attack in the middle of the night. Masinissa and Laelius were in charge of setting fire to the Numidian quarters, while Scipio himself supervised the torching of the Carthaginian camp (Polybius 14:2; Livy 30:5-6; Huss 295). The temporary structures housing Hasdrubal's and Syphax's men went up in flames, and the soldiers, thinking the fire accidental, emerged without their weapons to put out the blaze, and were cut down without mercy (de Beer 282). So much for good faith and "Roman fides." Through fire and sword, the unarmed and defenseless Numidians and Carthaginians were slaughtered by the thousands. No honor could be attached to such treachery, but Roman historiography tries to justify the actions of their hero by stating that he feared some Punic trick,

and that he had indicated that the negotiations were off prior to the sneak attack, both highly unlikely. Hasdrubal Gisgo and Syphax were able to flee from the macabre scene, the former returning to Carthage and the latter going to Abba (Livy 30:7; Huss 295).

The Carthaginian senators were horrified and demanded action. Hasdrubal was able to persuade Syphax to continue the struggle, and the forces of the Numidian king and the Carthaginians, mostly raw recruits rather than soldiers (Huss 296), congregated at the Great Plains to give battle. Livy characterizes the army of Hasdrubal Gisgo at the Great Plains as an “irregular army suddenly raised from a half-armed mob of rustics” (30:28, 3). Not surprisingly, they were defeated by Scipio, with the help of the Numidian cavalry under Masinissa. Hasdrubal fled to Carthage and Syphax to his capital, Cirta, with Masinissa and Laelius in hot pursuit.

Syphax was defeated and captured. In the same day, Masinissa married Sophonisba, the wife of the captured monarch. The well-known anecdote that follows throws some light on the characters of both Masinissa and Scipio. The latter regarded all prisoners as Roman property, and was outraged at Masinissa, demanding that he surrender Sophonisba to be sent in chains to Rome. Masinissa failed to stand up to Scipio, although he had the leverage of being commander of the Numidian cavalry, without which Scipio’s previous victories in Africa might not have happened, and whose help would be essential to face Hannibal when, as was inevitable, he was recalled from Italy. Despite professing ardent love for the beautiful Carthaginian princess, he could think of nothing better to offer her than a cup of poison. Scipio had seduced him with a promise of recognition as Numidian king, and clearly greed trumped love. She accepted her wedding “gift,” and her suicide at least spared her the indignity and humiliation of being paraded through the streets of Rome, as Syphax himself later was, prior to his incarceration and death at Tibur in 201 (Livy 30:13-15).

Scipio offered Carthage peace conditions as follows: unconditional return of war prisoners and deserters, withdrawal of all forces from Italy, concession of Spain to Rome, withdrawal from all Mediterranean islands between Italy and Africa, surrender of all but 20 Carthaginian warships, payment of 5,000 silver talents, delivery of citizens to serve as hostages, and the supply of a huge amount of grain to feed the Roman army (Livy 30:16). Carthage accepted and sent delegates, both to Rome, to sign the agreement, and to Scipio, to achieve the cessation of hostilities.

The request for a truce was granted by the Roman commander, but in Rome the Carthaginian delegates were vilified and mistreated. Livy writes:

Marcus Valerius Laevinus, who had twice been consul, contended that spies, not envoys, had come to them, and that they should be ordered to depart from Italy and guards sent with them all the way to their ships, and that a written order should be sent to Scipio not to relax effort in the war [...] a larger number [of senators] voted for Laevinus's motion.

The envoys were sent away without securing peace and almost without an answer.

(30:23, 2-8)

Hannibal, who was still undefeated in Bruttium, as well as his youngest brother, Mago, who had suffered a reverse of fortune in his invasion of northern Italy, after an aborted attempt to move south hoping to eventually join his brother, received orders to return to Carthage to defend the motherland, and both complied, although Mago died from his wounds on the way back (Livy 30:18-20). Hannibal, who had fought for 15 years in Italy, must have realized that the war no longer made sense and could not be won, and that all the Carthaginians could hope for at this point was a reasonable peace. He sailed to return to Africa, probably in the fall of 203.

During the armistice, 200 transports carrying supplies for the Roman forces in Africa, escorted by 30 warships, were severely damaged by a storm, within sight of Carthage, where the population was suffering starvation. While the warships managed to survive the tempest and reach the Promontory of Apollo, a number of the scattered and damaged Roman ships were towed to Carthage by Carthaginian vessels (Livy 30:10). Scipio reacted with outrage, claiming that the hope for peace and the sanctity of the truce had been violated. His delegates, sent to Carthage to protest, were threatened by a mob, but managed to escape unharmed. Scipio prepared to continue the armed conflict. The Roman historians, of course, neglect to mention that the Carthaginian envoys to Rome had also been mistreated, and that the Roman senate had failed to ratify the peace treaty (Livy 30:25, 10), so that the responsibility for the renewal of hostilities did not lie only with the Carthaginians—Rome had also acted in bad faith.

Meanwhile, Hannibal disembarked at Leptis (Livy 30:25, 10) late in 203 and moved to Hadrumetum (Livy 30:29). “From there, after he had spent a few days that his soldiers might recuperate from sea-sickness, he was called away by alarming news brought by men who reported that all the country round Carthage was occupied by armed forces, and he hastened to Zama by forced marches” (Livy 30:29, 1-3). Polybius, whom Livy probably follows in the above, writes:

The Carthaginians, when they saw their towns being sacked, sent to Hannibal begging him not to delay, but to approach the enemy and decide matters in a battle. After listening to the messengers he bade them in reply pay attention to other matters and be at their ease about this; for he himself would judge when it was time. After a few days he shifted his camp from the neighborhood of [Hadrumetum] and advancing encamped near Zama. This is a town lying five day’s journey to the west of Carthage. (15:5, 10)

The exact location of Zama remains the subject of research and speculation. It probably was not Zama Regia, about 90 miles west of Hadrumetum, as some have suggested (Moore in Livy, 1949, 28-30; Lancel 173), or Naragarra, favored by others. Even the classical record lacks unanimity. While Nepos gives Zama as the name of the place, Polybius refers to it as Margaron, Livy as Naragarra, and Appian as Killa (Seibert 446). A recent study by Duncan Ross (2005) may have solved the riddle. He describes a Numidian monument, Kbor Klib, which was in all likelihood erected to commemorate the victory of Scipio and Masinissa, and which overlooks a plain where the battle was probably held. It lies west of Sousse (Hadrumetum), in north-central Tunisia, between the modern cities of Siliana and Le Kef (Ross 1).

The military potential of Hannibal and Scipio at “Zama” was similar—each commanded about 40,000, but Scipio, with the arrival of Masinissa at the head of a contingent of 4,000 Numidian riders, was vastly superior in cavalry. When we add to this the fact that over two thirds of Hannibal’s forces were unseasoned, the illusion of apparent equality promptly dissolves. And yet, the Carthaginian side counted with the genius of Hannibal, which practically tipped the scales.

Before Zama, Hannibal and Scipio had never met directly, either in battle or in a face to face encounter. Roman historiography has constructed an anecdote suggesting that Hannibal asked Scipio for a personal conference prior to the battle, and Polybius as well as Livy pretend to transcribe in detail what was said, although neither was there. The exchanges reported may be largely or totally imaginary—at least some parts are patently absurd, as we will see below.

According to the Polybian account, as the generals meet, Hannibal speaks first, offering terms of peace, and counseling Scipio not to give in to arrogance and thus reject an offer made in good faith. This is plausible, although the words put in Hannibal’s mouth at the start of his

alleged statement are unlikely: “In the first place we went to war with each other for the possession of Sicily and next for that of Spain” (Polybius 25:6, 6). He might have said instead something like this: “We went to war initially when Rome intruded in the Carthaginian province of Sicily, and at the end of that conflict, when we were putting down a terrible rebellion of mercenaries, you, Romans, used the opportunity to steal Corsica and Sardinia from us; next we went to Spain, to be able to secure the means with which to pay the unreasonable tribute you demanded from us, but you imposed the Ebro as a limit beyond which we were not allowed to pass, and yet you made a treaty with Saguntum, a city south of the Ebro and thus within our agreed territory, a city which, with your encouragement, persecuted and massacred citizens loyal to Carthage, which forced me to lay siege to it and take it by force. Upon this, it was you, Romans, who used this as an excuse to declare war....” The matter of the guilt for the start of the Second Punic War has been debated for many years (e.g., Rudat, 2006; Hockert, 2005; Reutter, 2003; Barcelo, 2000; Hoyos, 1998; Kolbe, 1934), but the preceding would, in all likelihood, have been the position embraced by the Carthaginians, and is supported by most of the scholars listed above.

Scipio’s reply is not only arrogant, but absurd, and certainly would not have been left unanswered by Hannibal. According to Polybius, Scipio states that:

neither for the war about Sicily, nor for that about Spain, were the Romans responsible, but the Carthaginians were evidently the authors of both, *as Hannibal himself was well aware* {our italics—Hannibal would have had a hard time not laughing aloud at this bit of Roman propaganda, which obviously Scipio could not have believed himself}. The gods, too, had testified to this by bestowing victory not on the unjust aggressors but on those who had taken arms to defend themselves. (15:8) {Has Scipio

forgotten that in that case the gods must have favored Hannibal, who until then had emerged victorious every time, not to mention that the gods must have been asleep in 211, when both his father and his uncle were killed in battle in Spain? (Livy 25: 34-35)}.

Next Polybius reports that Scipio supposedly went on to claim that the Carthaginians had broken the previous peace agreement: “We jointly sent envoys to Rome to submit [the terms] to the senate [...] The senate agreed and the people also gave their consent. The Carthaginians, after their request [for peace] had been granted, most treacherously violated the peace” (15:8, 8-10), which, if we follow the later account by Livy, given above, was not the case. Scipio, allegedly, ends by demanding unconditional surrender: “Either put yourselves and your country at our mercy or fight and conquer us” (15:8, 14).

At Zama, Hannibal supposedly was able to field 36,000 infantry, 4,000 horse, and 80 elephants, to face Scipio’s army of 29,000 infantry and over 6,000 horse. A standard summary of the description of the battle, as presented by Roman historiography, can be found in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2003):

The elephants, opening the battle, were either ushered down corridors Scipio had left in his formation or driven out to the flanks, where they collided with Hannibal’s cavalry, which was then routed by the Roman cavalry. When the infantry lines closed, the Roman first line may have defeated both Hannibal’s first and second lines, though the remnants may have reformed on the wings of his third line, composed of his veterans from Italy. Scipio, too, reformed his lines at this point, and a titanic struggle developed until the Roman cavalry, returning from the pursuit, charged into Hannibal’s rear, whereupon his army disintegrated. (Polybius 15: 9-16; Livy 30: 29-35; Scullard, 1970; Lazenby, 1978)

First of all, let us consider the matter of the elephants. Roman historiography, as part of the development of the Scipio legend and the dissemination of pro-Roman propaganda, has recorded that Hannibal had available an inordinately large number of war elephants at Zama, no less than 80 (Livy 30:33). Considering that he had only 37 to cross the Alps and invade Italy, and that in the string of his great and devastating victories, from 218 to 216, the elephants participated in only one battle, at the Trebia, the number given for Zama is quite remarkable.

How many elephants did the city of Carthage, which did not support a regular standing army, maintain? If the Carthaginians had a large supply of trained war elephants at hand, it would have made sense for them to send along a sizeable contingent of pachyderms, the tanks of antiquity, with Hasdrubal Gisgo, when he marched to meet Scipio's invading force surrounding Utica. But we do not read Roman reports of any elephants, not a single solitary one, accompanying the forces of Hasdrubal.

Surely, after Scipio's treacherous sneak attack in the middle of the night, burning the tents of unsuspecting soldiers lulled into complacency with a promise of peace, the Carthaginian senate would have ordered all its available war elephants to march to face the ruthless enemy at the Great Plains. Once again, the elephants are conspicuous by their absence. Naturally, all we have are the Roman accounts—the work of the Carthaginian historians are no longer extant, having been conveniently lost or intentionally destroyed in the burning of Carthage and its libraries in 146 BCE.

All of a sudden, Hannibal, who had only been able to assemble a makeshift army for the decisive confrontation at Zama, appears with no less than 80 elephants, all with mahouts and trained for battle. This brigade of pachyderms is in all likelihood a fabrication of the pro-Roman

historians, a bit of propaganda to make Scipio's victory appear more formidable and impressive. Perhaps instead of 80, there were 18, or maybe only eight, or, most probably, none.

The charge of the presumed elephants supposedly opens the battle, but we are told that they were frightened by loud noises, shield clashing, trumpets, and what not. This also does not make much sense. Ancient battles typically started with loud yelling, shield banging, and other forms of intimidation, and consequently a major part of the training of animals to be used in attacking enemy positions would have consisted of accustoming them to such sounds.

Then, it is claimed that the elephants either run blindly into corridors left open in the Roman formation for the purpose of directing the animals to harmlessly pass through—Scipio's alleged "solution" to the problem posed by an elephant charge—or they panicked and turned against Hannibal's own army, wrecking havoc with his cavalry on the flanks. This also does not hold up against logical scrutiny. Since the animals carried mahouts on their backs, in addition to one or more armed warriors, and the animals were trained to respond to the commands or pressure of their riders, they would surely have been steered to one side or the other to trample men at the edges of any such corridors. Furthermore, as Haywood (1933) and Scullard (1974) point out, it is not credible that rampaging elephants would do a lot of damage turning against their own side, because the mahouts carried a hammer and chisel to kill any elephant running out of control, as was the case at the battle of the Metaurus (Livy 27:49).³

Attempts have been made to compare the battle of Zama with Cannae, and to call Zama a "Cannae in reverse," but the comparisons simply do not hold up (Barcelo 2000, 207). The scale of Cannae was vastly larger. With 96,000 Romans and 50,000 Carthaginians, almost 150,000 men

³ It cannot be argued that these were poorly trained elephants, for if Carthage did not send any elephants with Hasdrubal Gisgo to Utica or to the Great Plains, it would have had available all its well-trained pachyderms, while had the city exhausted its supply there would not have been time, between the Great Plains battle and Zama, to capture and train more.

committed themselves to a death struggle on that fateful day, 14 years earlier. By contrast, if we accept the Roman accounts, likely to have exaggerated the number of Carthaginian combatants at Zama in order to make victory more impressive, we would have 35,000 on the Roman side and 40,000 (probably less) on the Carthaginian, or a total of 75,000—about half the number at Cannae.

At Cannae discipline and precision were extreme, and Hannibal's forces moved in clockwork fashion, leaving nothing to chance (Mosig & Belhassen, 2006). After the Carthaginian heavy horse under Hasdrubal (no relation to Hannibal's brother by the same name) defeated the Roman equites on the right wing of the Roman formation, they did not pursue the survivors, but wheeled to the right like a well-oiled machine, and swiftly rode behind the battlefield to fall upon the flank and rear of the large contingent of allied Italian cavalry under Varro, which was being kept in place by the hit and run tactics of the agile Numidian horse. When the allied cavalry broke, it was only the fast Numidian riders who undertook the pursuit, while Hasdrubal's heavy horse, with perfect discipline, wheeled to the right once more and fell on the rear of the Roman army, blocking any retreat and dooming the legions under Servilius and Minucius.

Compare the above display with the cavalry engagement at Zama. There can hardly be any doubt that there Hannibal instructed his much smaller Numidian and Carthaginian horse to feign a retreat, and, pretending to escape, draw away from the battlefield the Numidian horse under Masinissa as well as the Roman horse under Laelius on the opposite wing. This they accomplished with perfection, removing the superior cavalry forces from the battlefield (Huss 301).

With respect to the infantry engagement, only Hannibal's third line, which he held as a reserve far behind the others, was composed of seasoned veterans and elite forces from his Italian campaign. Naturally, most of them were not among the men who had crossed the Alps with him in 218 BCE, but were experienced soldiers who had defeated the legions of Rome repeatedly during the war, probably including many from Bruttium, and were determined to shake the Roman yoke. His first two lines, on the other hand, were of questionable quality. Hannibal probably expected them to cave in under the onslaught of the veteran Roman legionnaires, although not without first taking their toll from the Romans, both in terms of casualties and fatigue. He wanted to insure that not only the Roman first line—the *hastati*—but also the second and third lines—the *principes* and the *triari*—would come into the fray and gradually wear themselves out. Once Hannibal's first line broke, the retreating soldiers were not permitted to reintegrate themselves at random points in the next line, but were forced to move to the sides, extending the Carthaginian front. The same thing happened after the second line broke, and then the Romans were left facing the fresh and rested elite veterans of Hannibal's army, plus a vastly wider enemy line, threatening to engulf them from the flanks.⁴

At that point in the battle of Zama, Scipio must have realized that his situation was becoming desperate, for he was in danger of being enveloped from the sides, with an immovable barrier of rested soldiers moving in from the front, and he ordered the Roman advance stopped. In haste he displaced the *principes* and the *triari* to the sides, extending his front to match the

⁴ Hannibal had used a reserve force before. At Cannae, he had kept back his elite heavily armed Libyan troops as a reserve on both wings, and when the Roman juggernaut of 80,000 pursued his intentionally retreating forces in the center, which had initially fanned out forward in a convex semicircle (as seen from the Roman side), gradually becoming a straight line and then a concave trap, into which the Romans marched believing that victory was theirs, he put them into action. The African forces wheeled in from both sides, and acted as a giant vise, gradually compressing and then stopping the Roman advance, turning the battlefield into a slaughterhouse that ended with the annihilation of the enemy.

width of the Carthaginian line and avoid encirclement. But Hannibal must have also used the momentary lull in the fighting to reorganize his forces, and it seems likely that he may have displaced his veterans to the sides, to face the *triarii* and the *principes*, while the survivors of his first two lines got ready to deal with the exhausted *hastati*. There was nothing more that Scipio could have done at this point, and the battle resumed with increasing ferocity. In view of the rested condition of Hannibal's elite veterans, it is very likely that they were in the process of routing the *principes* and *triarii* while the center held, and defeat looked Scipio in the face. But, alas, it was not to be, because the horse under Masinissa and Laelius, tricked away from the battlefield for what must have been hours, managed to return in the nick of time, saving Scipio from an almost certain disaster. And even at this point, the Carthaginians were not completely encircled, as the Romans had been at Cannae. That they lost the battle was certainly not due to the generalship of Publius Cornelius Scipio, soon to be known as Africanus, nor to an error on the part of Hannibal, but to sheer luck and the presence of Masinissa, without whom the Romans would most certainly have been doomed. According to Polybius, the Carthaginian casualties numbered 20,000, an outcome hardly comparable with the 70,000 fallen at Cannae.

Hannibal, together with some of his officers, escaped, and the great Barcid went to Hadrumetum, and from there to Carthage, to help his people once again, this time to accept the harsh terms of surrender and later to reorganize the government. Scipio, undoubtedly aware that he would have been defeated, had he not been saved at the last moment by Masinissa, later acknowledged that Hannibal had done at Zama everything anyone could have done (Livy 30:35, 5-8). The illusion that at Zama the student had matched and outdone the teacher, part of the Scipio legend propagated by Roman historiography, does not fit what actually happened in the last battle of the Second Punic War.

Now that we have painted what we believe is a very probable picture of what transpired at the battle of Zama, we must ask, who was, really, the victor? Although Scipio was credited with the defeat of the Carthaginian army, was given a triumphal reception in Rome, and was awarded the name Africanus, clearly it was Masinissa, and not Scipio, who was ultimately responsible, he and Lady Luck, for had his cavalry been 30 minutes later in returning to the battlefield, Zama would, most probably, have been added to the string of Hannibal's victories, who surely ranks in history as one of the greatest commanders of all time. A true patriot, he sacrificed everything for his homeland, and is regarded by some as the last hero of the free world of antiquity.

It is interesting to note that the Kbor Klib monument, as described by Ross (2005), features two niches, accessible by steps, one on each side of the structure, but facing the same direction, toward the plain below. Could each have contained a likeness or effigy of one of the leaders of the victorious side at Zama, Masinissa and Scipio, with the monument overlooking the ancient battlefield? One is tempted to speculate that the Numidians might have placed their hero, Masinissa, on the right, as the real victor of Zama, with a likeness of Scipio to the left, in order not to offend the Romans.

In the long run, Masinissa reaped mixed benefits from his betrayal of Hannibal and Carthage, at least for his descendants. He did live a long life (from 238 to 148 BCE), and following Zama was recognized as king by Scipio and confirmed by the Roman senate. He continued to support Rome in its subsequent wars, and in return enjoyed support in his continuous aggression against Carthage. His bellicosity eventually provoked a response from the Punic city, which Rome used as excuse to start the Third Punic War, ending with the holocaust

and destruction of Carthage in 146 BCE, after three years of siege. Through his dealings with Rome, Masinissa saw his own territory significantly enlarged (Hornblower & Spawforth 934).

Nevertheless, the vision of the Numidian king was nearsighted, for he also sowed the seeds that would lead to the eventual destruction of his nation and the enslavement of his descendants. The consequences of his betrayal of Hannibal and his opportunism in allying himself with Rome for personal glory, bore their bitter fruit 44 years after his death. As recorded by Sallust, his eldest son and successor, the Numidian king Micipsa, adopted Masinissa's grandson, Jugurtha, although he was not within the line of succession. At Micipsa's death, the kingdom was to be divided between Jugurtha and the king's two legitimate sons, Hiempsal and Adherbal. In the ensuing power struggle, Jugurtha killed Hiempsal and captured Cirta, the capital of his other brother, Adherbal, whom he also ordered killed. The incidental deaths of Roman citizens provided Rome with an excuse to launch a war of aggression, and although it lasted years, it ended when Sulla convinced king Bocchus I to surrender Jugurtha to Marius, who had him executed, following the Roman general's triumphal entry in Rome (Sallust 6-26, 101-114; Jallet-Huant, 2006; Hornblower & Spawforth, 2003; Storm, 2001). In less than 50 years, Numidia, which had enjoyed relative autonomy and freedom in the days of its alliance with Carthage, had fallen under the expansionistic power of Rome.

Not only did Masinissa's actions influence the fate of North Africa, but the repercussions of his causing Hannibal's defeat at Zama arguably had a global effect that continues even today (Mosig & Belhassen, 2006). If we borrow a very relevant perspective on the nature of historical development from Eastern philosophy, we can look at history as occurring within an interconnected reality, where every event influences the whole, and where certain happenings significantly affect the unfolding of the future. Buddhist thought, for instance, regards the present

as the inescapable result of an infinite web of cause and effect (Mosig, 2005). Within this framework, the Second Punic War, and especially the final confrontation at Zama, can be said to represent a major turning point in world history.

A Carthaginian victory might have shifted the cultural center of the Mediterranean world to Africa rather than Europe, with the influence of Greek culture persisting due to the hellenization of the Punic city (Hahn, 1974), but manifesting itself in a different context. Carthage, most likely, would have become the model to be emulated in the centuries to follow. A commerce-oriented city-state concerned with economic growth and the resolution of conflicts through negotiation rather than warfare, Carthage did not try to impose its religion or way of life on others, being satisfied with mercantile expansion and hegemony. Would the world have been a saner and more peaceful place today if Carthage had prevailed?

The victory of Rome, on the other hand, was the prelude to the military expansionism that characterized the establishment and growth of the Roman Empire, through pre-emptive warfare and the crushing of potential rivals before they could pose a threat, real or imagined. Following the collapse of the Roman Empire, others tried to emulate and recreate it, including Adolf Hitler, with his dream of the Thousand-Year Reich. The history of the world, in the aftermath of the Roman victory at Zama, could be summarized in broad strokes as a sequence of intermittent warfare, in which might made right and the end was taken to justify the means. This is not to say that wars would have necessarily been absent in history, following a Carthaginian victory, but merely to suggest that the defeat of a commercial metropolis by a militaristic power in all likelihood enhanced the attractiveness of warfare as a means of conflict resolution, over and above the alternatives of compromise and negotiation, with long-term consequences (Mosig & Belhassen, 2006).

More recently, a number of cautionary voices have raised alarm and concern about the actions of the world's only remaining superpower, whose interventions seem to reflect imperial ambitions patterned after the model of Rome (e.g., Murphy, 2007; Chomsky, 2007, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Ewert, 2005; Bender, 2004). Naturally, it is not possible to demonstrate a direct causal connection between Zama and current events. Nevertheless, despite the fact that it represents only one critical factor among many in the infinite web of interconnected causality, it is clear that the repercussions of Masinissa's fateful charge into the battlefield of Zama continue to reverberate today.

In conclusion, we have examined the events at the battle of Zama, attempting to separate what probably transpired from historical fictions added by the pen of the victors. We have analyzed the psychological reasons that necessitated the distortion of the events at Cannae and Zama by pro-Roman historians, and have established the significance of the role of Masinissa in the Roman victory that ended the Second Punic War. We have added our speculations on the likely long term effects of the outcome of this critical conflict, as well as of the road not taken, and hope that our work will stimulate further research and discussion on the subject.

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