

= Battle of Cannae =

The Battle of Cannae (/ ˈkæni / or / ˈkæne? /) was a major battle of the Second Punic War that took place on 2 August 216 BC in Apulia , in southeast Italy . The army of Carthage , under Hannibal , decisively defeated a larger army of the Roman Republic under the consuls Lucius Aemilius Paullus and Gaius Terentius Varro . It is regarded both as one of the greatest tactical feats in military history and as one of the worst defeats in Roman history .

Having recovered from their losses at Trebia (218 BC) and Lake Trasimene (217 BC) , the Romans decided to engage Hannibal at Cannae , with roughly 86 @, @ 000 Roman and allied troops . The Romans massed their heavy infantry in a deeper formation than usual , while Hannibal utilized the double @-@ envelopment tactic . This was so successful that the Roman army was effectively destroyed as a fighting force . Following the defeat , Capua and several other Italian city @-@ states defected from the Roman Republic to Carthage .

= = Strategic background = =

Shortly after the start of the Second Punic War , the Carthaginian general Hannibal crossed into Italy by traversing the Pyrenees and the Alps during the summer and early autumn . He quickly won major victories over the Romans at Trebia and at Lake Trasimene . After these losses , the Romans appointed Fabius Maximus as dictator to deal with the threat . Fabius used attrition warfare against Hannibal , cutting off his supply lines and avoiding pitched battles . These tactics proved unpopular with the Romans , who , as they recovered from the shock of Hannibal 's victories , began to question the wisdom of the Fabian strategy which had given the Carthaginian army a chance to regroup . The majority of Romans were eager to see a quick conclusion to the war . It was feared that , if Hannibal continued plundering Italy unopposed , Rome 's allies might defect to the Carthaginian side for self @-@ preservation .

Therefore , when Fabius came to the end of his term , the Senate did not renew his dictatorial powers and command was given to consuls Gnaeus Servilius Geminus and Marcus Atilius Regulus . In 216 BC , when elections resumed , Gaius Terentius Varro and Lucius Aemilius Paullus were elected as consuls , placed in command of a newly raised army of unprecedented size , and directed to engage Hannibal . Polybius wrote :

The Senate determined to bring eight legions into the field , which had never been done at Rome before , each legion consisting of five thousand men besides allies Most of their wars are decided by one consul and two legions , with their quota of allies ; and they rarely employ all four at one time and on one service . But on this occasion , so great was the alarm and terror of what would happen , they resolved to bring not only four but eight legions into the field .

= = = Estimates of Roman troop numbers = = =

Rome typically employed four legions each year , each consisting of four thousand foot soldiers and two hundred cavalry . Perceiving the Carthaginian army as a real threat , for the first time ever the Senate introduced eight legions , each legion consisting of five thousand foot soldiers and three hundred cavalry with allied troops numbering the same amount of foot soldiers , but nine hundred cavalry per legion ; triple the legion numbers . Eight legions , some 40 @, @ 000 Roman soldiers and an estimated 2 @, @ 400 cavalry , formed the nucleus of this massive new army . However , some have suggested that the destruction of an army of 90 @, @ 000 troops would be impossible . They argue that Rome probably had 48 @, @ 000 troops and 6 @, @ 000 cavalry against Hannibal 's 35 @, @ 000 troops and 10 @, @ 000 cavalry . Livy quotes one source stating the Romans added only 10 @, @ 000 men to their usual army . While no definitive number of Roman troops exists , all sources agree that the Carthaginians faced a considerably larger foe .

= = Roman command = =

Consuls were each assigned two of the four legions to command , rarely employing all four legions at once to the same assignment , however , the Senate feared a real threat and not only employed all four legions into the field , but all eight , including allies . Ordinarily , each of the two consuls would command his own portion of the army , but since the two armies were combined into one , Roman law required them to alternate their command on a daily basis . The traditional account puts Varro in command on the day of the battle , and much of the blame for the defeat has been laid on his shoulders . However , his low origins seem to be exaggerated in the sources , and Varro may have been made a scapegoat by the aristocratic establishment . Varro lacked the powerful descendants that Paullus had : descendants who were willing and able to protect his reputation ? most notably , Paullus was the grandfather of Scipio Aemilianus , the patron of Polybius .

= = Prelude = =

In the spring of 216 BC , Hannibal took the initiative and seized the large supply depot at Cannae , in the Apulian plain , placing himself between the Romans and their crucial source of supply . Hannibal recently harvested his crops so he had a well fed army ready for action in the city of Cannae . As Polybius noted , the capture of Cannae " caused great commotion in the Roman army ; for it was not only the loss of the place and the stores in it that distressed them , but the fact that it commanded the surrounding district " . The consuls , resolving to confront Hannibal , marched southward in search of him . After two days ' march , they found him on the left bank of the Aufidus River , and encamped six miles (10 km) away .

Reportedly , a Carthaginian officer named Gisgo commented on how much larger the Roman army was . Hannibal replied , " another thing that has escaped your notice , Gisgo , is even more amazing ? that although there are so many of them , there is not one among them called Gisgo " .

Varro , in command on the first day , is presented by contemporary sources as a man of reckless nature and hubris , who was determined to defeat Hannibal . While the Romans were approaching Cannae , a small portion of Hannibal 's forces ambushed them . Varro successfully repelled the attack and continued on his way to Cannae . This victory , though essentially a mere skirmish with no lasting strategic value , greatly bolstered the confidence of the Roman army , perhaps to overconfidence on Varro 's part . Paullus , however , was opposed to the engagement as it was taking shape . Unlike Varro , he was prudent and cautious , and he believed it was foolish to fight on open ground , despite the Romans ' numerical strength . This was especially true since Hannibal held the advantage in cavalry (both in quality and quantity) . Despite these misgivings , Paullus thought it unwise to withdraw the army after the initial success , and camped two @-@ thirds of the army east of the Aufidus River , sending the remainder to fortify a position on the opposite side . The purpose of this second camp was to cover the foraging parties from the main camp and harass those of the enemy .

The two armies stayed in their respective locations for two days . During the second day (August 1) , Hannibal , aware that Varro would be in command the following day , left his camp and offered battle , but Paullus refused . When his request was rejected , Hannibal , recognizing the importance of the water from the Aufidus to the Roman troops , sent his cavalry to the smaller Roman camp to harass water @-@ bearing soldiers that were found outside the camp fortifications . According to Polybius , Hannibal 's cavalry boldly rode up to the edge of the Roman encampment , causing havoc and thoroughly disrupting the supply of water to the Roman camp .

= = Battle = =

= = = Armies = = =

Figures for troops involved in ancient battles are often unreliable , and Cannae is no exception . Figures should be treated with caution , especially those for the Carthaginian side . The Carthaginian army was a combination of warriors from numerous regions , and may have numbered

between 40 @, @ 000 and 50 @, @ 000 . Along with the core of an estimated 8 @, @ 000 Libyans , there were 8 @, @ 000 Iberians , 16 @, @ 000 Gauls (8 @, @ 000 were left at camp the day of battle) and around 5 @, @ 500 Gaetulian infantry . Hannibal 's cavalry also came from diverse backgrounds . He commanded 4 @, @ 000 Numidian , 2 @, @ 000 Iberian , 4 @, @ 000 Gallic and 450 Liby @-@ Phoenician cavalry . Finally , Hannibal had around 8 @, @ 000 skirmishers consisting of Balearic slingers and mixed nationality spearmen . The uniting factor for the Carthaginian army was the personal tie each group had with Hannibal .

The Roman forces totaled up to 79 @, @ 000 men : 63 @, @ 000 infantry and 6 @, @ 000 cavalry , plus , in the two fortified camps , another 2 @, @ 600 heavily armed men and 7 @, @ 400 lightly armed men .

= = = Equipment = = =

Rome 's forces used typical Roman equipment including pila (heavy javelins) and hastae (thrusting spears) as weapons as well as traditional helmets , shields and body armor . On the other hand , the Carthaginian army used a variety of equipment . The Iberians fought with swords suited for cutting and thrusting , as well as javelins and various types of spears . For defense , Iberian warriors carried large oval shields and the falcata . The Gauls were likely wearing no armor , and the typical Gallic weapon was usually a long , slashing sword . The heavy Carthaginian cavalry carried two javelins and a curved slashing sword , with a heavy shield for protection . The Numidian cavalry were very lightly equipped , lacking saddles and bridles for their horses , and used no armor but carried small shields , javelins and possibly a knife or longer blade . Skirmishers acting as light infantry carried either slings or spears . The Balearic slingers , who were famous for their accuracy , carried short , medium and long slings used to cast stones or bullets . They may have carried a small shield or simple leather pelt on their arms , but this is uncertain . Hannibal himself was wearing musculata armor and carried a falcata as well .

The equipment of the Libyan line infantry has been much debated . Head has argued in favor of short stabbing spears . Polybius states that the Libyans fought with equipment taken from previously defeated Romans . It is unclear whether he meant only shields and armor or offensive weapons as well , though a general reading suggests he meant the whole panoply of arms and armor , and even tactical organization . Apart from his description of the battle itself , when later discussing the subject of the Roman legion versus the Greek phalanx , Polybius says that " ... against Hannibal , the defeats they suffered had nothing to do with weapons or formations " because " Hannibal himself ... discarded the equipment with which he had started out (and) armed his troops with Roman weapons " . Daly is inclined to the view that Libyan infantry would have copied the Iberian use of the sword during their fighting there and so were armed similarly to the Romans . Connolly has argued that they were armed as a pike phalanx . This has been disputed by Head , because Plutarch states they carried spears shorter than the Roman Triarii and by Daly because they could not have carried an unwieldy pike at the same time as a heavy Roman @-@ style shield .

= = = Tactical deployment = = =

The conventional deployment for armies of the time was placement of infantry in the center , with the cavalry in two flanking wings . The Romans followed this convention fairly closely , but chose extra depth rather than breadth for the infantry in hopes of breaking quickly through the center of Hannibal 's line . Varro knew how the Roman infantry had managed to penetrate Hannibal 's center at Trebia , and he planned to recreate this on an even greater scale . The principes were stationed immediately behind the hastati , ready to push forward at first contact to ensure the Romans presented a unified front . As Polybius wrote , " the maniples were nearer each other , or the intervals were decreased ... and the maniples showed more depth than front " . Even though they outnumbered the Carthaginians , this depth @-@ oriented deployment meant that the Roman lines had a front of roughly equal size to their numerically inferior opponents . The typical style of ancient warfare was to continuously pour in infantry into the center and attempt to simply overpower the

enemy . Hannibal understood that the Romans fought their battles like this , and he took his outnumbered army and strategically placed them around the enemy to win a tactical victory .

To Varro , Hannibal seemed to have little room to maneuver and no means of retreat as he was deployed with the Aufidus River to his rear . Varro believed that when pressed hard by the Romans ' superior numbers , the Carthaginians would fall back to the river and , with no room to maneuver , would be cut down in panic . Bearing in mind that Hannibal 's two previous victories had been largely decided by his trickery and ruse , Varro had sought an open battlefield . The field at Cannae was clear , with no possibility of hidden troops being brought to bear in an ambush .

Hannibal , on the other hand , had deployed his forces based on the particular fighting qualities of each unit , taking into consideration both their strengths and weaknesses . This aspect of Hannibal 's leadership was highlighted in the use of a Spanish unit , the Balearic Slingers , whom he placed behind the infantry to hurl their ranged missiles into the masses of Roman troops . He placed his Iberians and Gauls in the middle , alternating the ethnic composition across the front line , with himself at the front and center . Infantry from Punic Africa was on the wings at the very edge of his infantry line . These infantry were battle @-@ hardened , remained cohesive and would attack the Roman flanks .

Hasdrubal led the Iberian and Gaulish cavalry on the left (south near the Aufidus River) of the Carthaginian army . By placing the flank of his army on the Aufidus River , Hannibal prevented this flank from being overlapped by the more numerous Romans . Hasdrubal was given about 6 @,@ 500 cavalry , and Hanno had 3 @,@ 500 Numidians on the right .

Hannibal intended that his cavalry , comprising mainly medium Hispanic cavalry and Numidian light horse , and positioned on the flanks , would defeat the weaker Roman cavalry and swing around to attack the Roman infantry from the rear as it pressed upon Hannibal 's weakened center . His veteran African troops would then press in from the flanks at the crucial moment , and encircle the overextended Romans .

The Romans were in front of the hill leading to Cannae and hemmed in on their right flank by the Aufidus River , so that their left flank was the only viable means of retreat . In addition , the Carthaginian forces had maneuvered so that the Romans would face east . Not only would the morning sun shine low into the Romans ' eyes , but the southeasterly winds would blow sand and dust into their faces as they approached the battlefield . Hannibal 's unique deployment of his army , based on his perception of the terrain and understanding of the capabilities of his troops , proved decisive .

= = = Battle = = =

As the armies advanced on one another , Hannibal gradually extended the center of his line , as Polybius described : " After thus drawing up his whole army in a straight line , he took the central companies of Hispanics and Celts and advanced with them , keeping the rest of them in contact with these companies , but gradually falling off , so as to produce a crescent @-@ shaped formation , the line of the flanking companies growing thinner as it was prolonged , his object being to employ the Africans as a reserve force and to begin the action with the Hispanics and Celts . " Polybius described the weak Carthaginian center as deployed in a crescent , curving out toward the Romans in the middle with the African troops on their flanks in echelon formation . It is believed that the purpose of this formation was to break the forward momentum of the Roman infantry , and delay its advance before other developments allowed Hannibal to deploy his African infantry most effectively . While the majority of historians feel that Hannibal 's action was deliberate , some have called this account fanciful , and claim that the actions of the day represent either the natural curvature that occurs when a broad front of infantry marches forward , or the bending back of the Carthaginian center from the shock action of meeting the heavily massed Roman center .

When the battle was joined , the cavalry engaged in a fierce exchange on the flanks . Polybius described the Hispanic and Celtic horse dismounting in what he considers a barbarian method of fighting . When the Hispanic and Gauls got the upper hand , they cut down the Roman cavalry without giving quarter . On the other flank the Numidians engaged in a way that merely kept the

Roman allied cavalry occupied . When the victorious Hispanic and Gallic cavalry came up , the allied cavalry broke and the Numidians pursued them off the field .

While the Carthaginians were in the process of defeating the cavalry , the masses of infantry on both sides advanced towards each other in the center of the field . The wind from the east blew dust in the Romans ' faces and obscured their vision . While the wind was not a major factor , the dust that both armies created would have been potentially debilitating to sight . Although it made seeing difficult , troops would still have been able to see others in the vicinity . The dust , however , was not the only psychological factor involved in battle . Because of the somewhat distant battle location , both sides were forced to fight on little sleep . Another Roman disadvantage was thirst caused by Hannibal 's attack on the Roman encampment during the previous day . Furthermore , the massive number of troops would have led to an overwhelming amount of background noise . All of these psychological factors made battle especially difficult for the infantrymen .

Hannibal stood with his men in the weak center and held them to a controlled retreat . The crescent of Hispanic and Gallic troops buckled inwards as they gradually withdrew . Knowing the superiority of the Roman infantry , Hannibal had instructed his infantry to withdraw deliberately , creating an even tighter semicircle around the attacking Roman forces . By doing so , he had turned the strength of the Roman infantry into a weakness . While the front ranks were gradually advancing , the bulk of the Roman troops began to lose their cohesion , as they began crowding themselves into the growing gap . Soon they were compacted together so closely that they had little space to wield their weapons . In pressing so far forward in their desire to destroy the retreating and seemingly collapsing line of Hispanic and Gallic troops , the Romans had ignored (possibly due to the dust) the African troops that stood uncommitted on the projecting ends of this now @-@ reversed crescent . This also gave the Carthaginian cavalry time to drive the Roman cavalry off on both flanks and attack the Roman center in the rear . The Roman infantry , now stripped of protection on both its flanks , formed a wedge that drove deeper and deeper into the Carthaginian semicircle , driving itself into an alley formed by the African infantry on the wings . At this decisive point , Hannibal ordered his African infantry to turn inwards and advance against the Roman flanks , creating an encirclement in one of the earliest known examples of a pincer movement .

When the Carthaginian cavalry attacked the Romans in the rear and the African flanking echelons assailed them on their right and left , the advance of the Roman infantry was brought to an abrupt halt . The Romans were enclosed in a pocket with no means of escape . The Carthaginians created a wall and began destroying them . Polybius wrote , " as their outer ranks were continually cut down , and the survivors forced to pull back and huddle together , they were finally all killed where they stood . "

As Livy described , " So many thousands of Romans were dying ... Some , whom their wounds , pinched by the morning cold , had roused , as they were rising up , covered with blood , from the midst of the heaps of slain , were overpowered by the enemy . Some were found with their heads plunged into the earth , which they had excavated ; having thus , as it appeared , made pits for themselves , and having suffocated themselves . " Cowley claims that nearly six hundred legionaries were slaughtered each minute until darkness brought an end to the bloodletting . Only 14 @,@ 000 Roman troops managed to escape , most of whom had cut their way through to the nearby town of Canusium .

= = = Casualties = = =

= = = = Roman = = = =

Polybius writes that of the Roman and allied infantry , 70 @,@ 000 were killed , 10 @,@ 000 captured , and " perhaps " 3 @,@ 000 survived . He also reports that of the 6 @,@ 000 Roman and allied cavalry , only 370 survived .

Livy wrote , " Forty thousand foot , two thousand seven hundred horse , there being an equal number of citizens and allies , are said to have been slain . " He also reports that 3 @,@ 000

Roman and allied infantry and 1 @, @ 500 Roman and allied cavalry were taken prisoner by the Carthaginians . Although Livy does not cite his source by name , it is likely to have been Quintus Fabius Pictor , a Roman historian who fought in and wrote on the Second Punic War . It is Pictor whom Livy names when reporting the casualties at the Battle of Trebia . In addition to the consul Paullus , Livy goes on to record that among the dead were 2 quaestors , 29 of the 48 military tribunes (some of consular rank , including the consul of the previous year , Gnaeus Servilius Geminus , and the former Master of the Horse , Marcus Minucius Rufus) , and 80 " senators or men who had held offices which would have given them the right to be elected to the Senate " .

Later Roman and Greco @-@ Roman historians largely follow Livy 's figures . Appian gave 50 @, @ 000 killed and " a great many " taken prisoner . Plutarch agreed , " 50 @, @ 000 Romans fell in that battle ... 4 @, @ 000 were taken alive " . Quintilian : " 60 @, @ 000 men were slain by Hannibal at Cannae " . Eutropius : " 20 officers of consular and praetorian rank , 30 senators , and 300 others of noble descent , were taken or slain , as well as 40 @, @ 000 foot @-@ soldiers , and 3 @, @ 500 horse " .

Some modern historians , while rejecting Polybius 's figure as flawed , are willing to accept Livy 's figure . Some more recent historians have come up with far lower estimates . Cantalupi proposed Roman losses of 10 @, @ 500 to 16 @, @ 000 . Samuels also regards Livy 's figure as far too high , on the grounds that the cavalry would have been inadequate to prevent the Roman infantry escaping to the rear . He doubts that Hannibal even wanted a high death toll , as much of the army consisted of Italians whom Hannibal hoped to win as allies .

= = = = Carthaginian = = = =

Livy recorded Hannibal 's losses at " about 8 @, @ 000 of his bravest men . " Polybius reports 5 @, @ 700 dead : 4 @, @ 000 Gauls , 1 @, @ 500 Spanish and Africans , and 200 cavalry .

= = Aftermath = =

Never when the city was in safety was there so great a panic and confusion within the walls of Rome . I shall therefore shrink from the task , and not attempt to relate what in describing I must make less than the reality . The consul and his army having been lost at the Trasimenus the year before , it was not one wound upon another which was announced , but a multiplied disaster , the loss of two consular armies , together with the two consuls : and that now there was neither any Roman camp , nor general nor soldiery : that Apulia and Samnium , and now almost the whole of Italy , were in the possession of Hannibal . No other nation surely would not have been overwhelmed by such an accumulation of misfortune .

For a brief period , the Romans were in complete disarray . Their best armies in the peninsula were destroyed , the few remnants severely demoralized , and the only remaining consul (Varro) completely discredited . As the story goes , Rome declared a national day of mourning as there was not a single person who was not either related to or acquainted with a person who had died . The Romans became so desperate that they resorted to human sacrifice , twice burying people alive at the Forum of Rome and abandoning an oversized baby in the Adriatic Sea (perhaps one of the last instances of human sacrifices by the Romans , apart from public executions of defeated enemies dedicated to Mars) .

Lucius Caecilius Metellus , a military tribune , despaired so much of the Roman cause as to suggest that everything was lost , and called the other tribunes to sail overseas and hire themselves into the service of some foreign prince . Afterwards , he was forced by his own example to swear an oath of allegiance to Rome for all time . The survivors of Cannae were reconstituted as two legions and assigned to Sicily for the remainder of the war as punishment for their humiliating desertion of the battlefield . In addition to the physical loss of her army , Rome suffered a symbolic defeat of prestige . A gold ring was a token of membership in the upper classes of Roman society ; Hannibal and his men collected more than 200 from the corpses on the battlefield , and sent this collection to Carthage as proof of his victory . The collection was poured on the floor in front of the Punic Senate

, and was judged to be " three and a half measures . "

Hannibal had defeated the equivalent of eight consular armies (16 legions plus an equal number of allies) . Within just three campaign seasons (20 months) , Rome had lost one @-@ fifth (150 @,@ 000) of the entire population of male citizens over 17 years of age . Furthermore , the morale effect of this victory was such that most of southern Italy joined Hannibal 's cause . After Cannae , the Hellenistic southern provinces of Arpi , Salapia , Herdonia , Uzentum , including the cities of Capua and Tarentum (two of the largest city @-@ states in Italy) revoked their allegiance to Rome and pledged their loyalty to Hannibal . As Livy noted , " How much more serious was the defeat of Cannae than those which preceded it , can be seen by the behavior of Rome 's allies ; before that fateful day , their loyalty remained unshaken , now it began to waver for the simple reason that they despaired of Roman power . " In the same year the Greek cities in Sicily were induced to revolt against Roman political control , while the Macedonian king , Philip V , pledged his support to Hannibal , initiating the First Macedonian War against Rome . Hannibal also secured an alliance with the new King Hieronymus of Syracuse , the only independent left in Sicily .

Following the battle , the commander of the Numidian cavalry , Maharbal , urged Hannibal to seize the opportunity and march immediately on Rome . It is told that the latter 's refusal caused Maharbal 's exclamation : " Of a truth the gods have not bestowed all things upon the same person . You know how to conquer , Hannibal ; but you do not know how to make use of your victory . " Hannibal had good reasons to judge the strategic situation after the battle differently from Maharbal . As the historian Hans Delbrück pointed out , due to the high numbers of killed and wounded among its ranks , the Punic army was not in a condition to perform a direct assault on Rome . It would have been a fruitless demonstration that would have nullified the psychological effect of Cannae on the Roman allies . Even if his army was at full strength , a successful siege of Rome would have required Hannibal to subdue a considerable part of the hinterland to cut the enemy 's supplies and secure his own . Even after the tremendous losses suffered at Cannae and the defection of a number of her allies , Rome still had abundant manpower to prevent this and maintain considerable forces in Iberia , Sicily , Sardinia and elsewhere despite Hannibal 's presence in Italy . Hannibal 's conduct after the victories at Trasimene (217 BC) and Cannae , and the fact that he first attacked Rome only five years later , in 211 BC , suggests that his strategic aim was not the destruction of his foe but to dishearten the Romans by carnage on the battlefield and to wear them down to a moderate peace agreement by stripping them of their allies .

Immediately after Cannae , Hannibal sent a delegation led by Carthalo to negotiate a peace treaty with the Senate on moderate terms . Despite the multiple catastrophes Rome had suffered , the Senate refused to parley . Instead , they redoubled their efforts , declaring full mobilization of the male Roman population , and raised new legions , enlisting landless peasants and even slaves . So firm were these measures that the word " peace " was prohibited , mourning was limited to only 30 days , and public tears were prohibited even to women . For the remainder of the war in Italy , they did not amass such large forces under one command against Hannibal ; they utilized several independent armies , still outnumbering the Punic forces in numbers of armies and soldiers . The war still had occasional battles , but was focused on taking strongpoints and constant fighting according to the Fabian strategy . This finally forced Hannibal with his shortage of manpower to retreat to Croton from where he was called to Africa for the battle of Zama , ending the war with a complete Roman victory .

= = Historical significance = =

= = Effects on Roman military doctrine = =

Cannae played a major role in shaping the military structure and tactical organization of the Roman Republican army . At Cannae , the Roman infantry assumed a formation similar to the Greek phalanx . This left them vulnerable to Hannibal 's tactic of double envelopment since their inability to maneuver independently from the mass of the army made it impossible for them to counter the

strategic encirclement used by the Carthaginian cavalry . The laws of the Roman state requiring command to alternate between the two consuls restricted strategic consistency .

In the years following Cannae , striking reforms were introduced to address these deficiencies . First , the Romans " articulated the phalanx , then divided it into columns , and finally split it up into a great number of small tactical bodies that were capable , now of closing together in a compact impenetrable union , now of changing the pattern with consummate flexibility , of separating one from the other and turning in this or that direction . " For instance , at Ilipa and Zama , the principes were formed up well to the rear of the hastati ? a deployment that allowed a greater degree of mobility and maneuverability . The culminating result of this change marked the transition from the traditional manipular system to the cohort under Gaius Marius , as the basic infantry unit of the Roman army .

In addition , a unified command came to be seen as a necessity . After various political experiments , Scipio Africanus was made general @-@ in @-@ chief of the Roman armies in Africa , and was assured this role for the duration of the war . This appointment may have violated the constitutional laws of the Roman Republic but , as Delbrück wrote , it " effected an internal transformation that increased her military potentiality enormously " while foreshadowing the decline of the Republic 's political institutions . Furthermore , the battle exposed the limits of a citizen @-@ militia army . Following Cannae , the Roman army gradually developed into a professional force : the nucleus of Scipio 's army at Zama was composed of veterans who had been fighting the Carthaginians in Hispania for nearly sixteen years , and had been moulded into a superb fighting force .

= = = Status in military history = = =

Cannae is as famous for Hannibal 's tactics as it is for the role it played in Roman history . Not only did Hannibal inflict a defeat on the Roman Republic in a manner unrepeated for over a century until the lesser @-@ known Battle of Arausio , the battle has acquired a significant reputation in military history . As military historian Theodore Ayrault Dodge wrote :

Few battles of ancient times are more marked by ability ... than the battle of Cannae . The position was such as to place every advantage on Hannibal 's side . The manner in which the far from perfect Hispanic and Gallic foot was advanced in a wedge in échelon ... was first held there and then withdrawn step by step , until it had reached the converse position ... is a simple masterpiece of battle tactics . The advance at the proper moment of the African infantry , and its wheel right and left upon the flanks of the disordered and crowded Roman legionaries , is far beyond praise . The whole battle , from the Carthaginian standpoint , is a consummate piece of art , having no superior , few equal , examples in the history of war .

As Will Durant wrote , " It was a supreme example of generalship , never bettered in history ... and it set the lines of military tactics for 2 @,@ 000 years " .

Hannibal 's double envelopment at Cannae is often viewed as one of the greatest battlefield maneuvers in history , and is cited as the first successful use of the pincer movement within the Western world to be recorded in detail .

= = = " Cannae Model " = = =

Apart from being one of the greatest defeats inflicted on Roman arms , Cannae represents the archetypal battle of annihilation , a strategy that has rarely been successfully implemented in modern history . As Dwight D. Eisenhower , the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force in World War II , wrote , " Every ground commander seeks the battle of annihilation ; so far as conditions permit , he tries to duplicate in modern war the classic example of Cannae " . Furthermore , the totality of Hannibal 's victory has made the name " Cannae " a byword for military success , and is studied in detail in military academies around the world . The notion that an entire army could be encircled and annihilated within a single stroke led to a fascination among Western generals for centuries (including Frederick the Great and Helmuth von Moltke) , who attempted to emulate its tactical paradigm of envelopment and re @-@ create their own " Cannae " . Delbrück 's

seminal study of the battle had a profound influence on German military theorists , in particular the Chief of the German General Staff , Alfred von Schlieffen , whose eponymous " Schlieffen Plan " was inspired by Hannibal 's double envelopment maneuver . Schlieffen taught that the " Cannae model " would continue to be applicable in maneuver warfare throughout the 20th century :

A battle of annihilation can be carried out today according to the same plan devised by Hannibal in long forgotten times . The enemy front is not the goal of the principal attack . The mass of the troops and the reserves should not be concentrated against the enemy front ; the essential is that the flanks be crushed . The wings should not be sought at the advanced points of the front but rather along the entire depth and extension of the enemy formation . The annihilation is completed through an attack against the enemy 's rear ... To bring about a decisive and annihilating victory requires an attack against the front and against one or both flanks ...

Schlieffen later developed his own operational doctrine in a series of articles , many of which were translated and published in a work entitled Cannae .

= = Historical sources = =

There are three main accounts of the battle , none of them contemporary . The closest is Polybius , who wrote his account 50 years after the battle . Livy wrote in the time of Augustus , and Appian later still . Appian 's account describes events that have no relation with those of Livy and Polybius . Polybius portrays the battle as the ultimate nadir of Roman fortunes , functioning as a literary device such that the subsequent Roman recovery is more dramatic . For example , some argue that his casualty figures are exaggerated ? " more symbolic than factual " . Livy portrays the Senate in the role of hero and hence assigns blame for the Roman defeat to the low @-@ born Varro . Blaming Varro also serves to lift blame from the Roman soldiers , whom Livy has a tendency to idealize . Scholars tend to discount Appian 's account . The verdict of Philip Sabin ? " a worthless farrago " ? is typical .

Historian Martin Samuels has questioned whether it was in fact Varro in command on the day on the grounds that Paullus may have been in command on the right . The warm reception that Varro received after the battle from the Senate was in striking contrast to the savage criticism meted out to other commanders . Samuels doubts whether Varro would have been received with such warmth had he been in command . Gregory Daly notes that , in the Roman military , the right was always the place of command . He suggests that at the Battle of Zama Hannibal was quoted saying that he had fought Paullus at Cannae and concludes that it is impossible to be sure who was in command on the day .