

HANNIBAL



MAKERS OF HISTORY SERIES

BY

JACOB ABBOTT

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The “IHS” Christogram on the title page is an ancient symbol used in the early Western church and is derived from the first three letters of Jesus’ name in the Greek alphabet. The first use of “IHS” in an English document was in 1377, in a printing of the medieval classic, *Piers Plowman*.

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FOREWORD.



IN the third century before the birth of Christ, Rome and Carthage clashed over control of the island of Sicily. This began a series of three wars between these two major powers that lasted from 264 B.C. to 146 B.C. These wars, known as the Punic Wars, were named after the Roman word for Phoenicians, since Carthage was originally established as a Phoenician colony. Although both powers were evenly matched in terms of strength, Rome won all three struggles.

As the saying goes, it is the winners who write the histories. So it was that Rome, in addition to her victories on the battlefields, won the right to write the defining accounts of those wars. The earliest sources for the life of Hannibal, the greatest Carthaginian general, are found in the histories of the Roman historian Livy and the pro-Roman Greek historian Polybius, both of whom celebrated Rome's victory over Carthage.

Even though the battlefield winners write and interpret the events, the losers often win the hearts of readers. What if, we wonder, King Harold I of England had defeated William of Normandy at the Battle of Hastings in 1066? Or what might have happened if General Robert E. Lee had won the battle of Gettysburg in July 1863? The noble warrior fighting for a lost cause—the underdog and risk taker—easily captures our imaginations. Such were men like King Harold, General Lee, and Hannibal Barca of Carthage.

The events of history are unchangeable. Past events are as solidly fixed as the laws of mathematics. Though our record of events might be flawed and interpretations might vary, historical facts cannot change. But from a human perspective, what happened is not what absolutely had to happen. History is filled with “might have beens.” The smallest change of events could have changed everything else that followed. If Pharaoh’s soldiers, rather than his daughter, had found the baby Moses, the outcome would have been drastically different. There is no end to thinking about alternative courses of history. Both professional historians and students enjoy thinking, “What if?”

From the Christian perspective, we know that things happen to fulfill God’s purposes; therefore, Rome defeated Carthage because of God’s plan. But if Carthage had won, then we would know that God had purposed that outcome as well. Our task as Christian students of history is to acknowledge both God’s sovereign rule over history and the actions and choices made by people in history.

Hamilcar Barca, a general from the First Punic War (264 to 241 B.C.), commissioned his young son Hannibal Barca to wage undying enmity against Rome. Hannibal instigated the Second Punic War by attacking Roman allies

in Spain. In this war he gained immortal fame and changed history, but he nearly succeeded in changing the course of history even more, for he nearly succeeded in defeating Rome. Whereas the First Punic War was caused by economic and territorial interests, the second war was driven by a desire for revenge. Hannibal proved to be a mighty instrument used to inflict that revenge.

After war broke out in Spain, Hannibal moved his army through what is now southern France and crossed over the Alps to invade Italy. His crossing of the Alps with an army of over 50,000 men (along with horses and elephants) is an epic and monumental story in itself. Yet the greater part of Hannibal's mission remained. For the next fifteen years, he and his troops roamed the Italian peninsula, defeating Roman armies, dividing Roman allies, and plundering Roman farms and cities.

Repeatedly, Hannibal went into battle outnumbered. His uncanny skills, use of cavalry attacks on the enemy's flanks, and sheer audacity won him battle after battle. Hannibal made wise use of the terrain and took advantage of the divided Roman command system. He put fear into the Roman people and dissension into the Roman government. The most fearful saying among the Romans was *Hannibal ad portas*, meaning "Hannibal is at the gates." By carefully choosing his battles and marshalling his forces, Hannibal managed to capture everything Roman except for the city of Rome itself. Yet all the time that Hannibal was winning battles, he was losing the war.

Hannibal could frighten or depress the Romans, but he could never suppress their will to survive. When horrendous reports of battlefield dead were announced in Rome, new recruits readily enlisted. When Hannibal's army was camped near Rome, the Romans defied him by auctioning

off the land on which his army was camped. The land sold at a high price, which signified that the Romans believed the invaders were a temporary nuisance rather than a long-term threat.

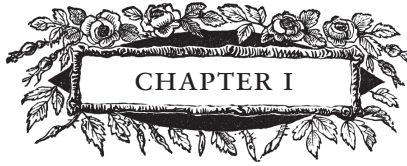
This unveils what is surely the great lesson of the story of Hannibal and the Second Punic War. For fifteen years, Hannibal controlled portions of the Italian peninsula and threatened the whole Roman world. Had the Romans been subjected to depressing nightly news reports, opinion polls, and expert analyses, Rome's future would have looked doubtful. Hannibal's presence was a real threat for fifteen years, which might seem to be a lifetime to a teenager, but is but a moment in the lifespan of a nation. What matters in the long term is not the enemy at the gates or the grim statistics of battlefield casualties. What matters in the long term is the long term.

Hannibal's boldness wins our hearts. His tactics on the battlefield awe both the military expert and the young student of history. His willingness to risk his own life along with that of his army, like a gambler throwing his fortune on one turn of the wheel, shows Hannibal's confidence and competence as a general. Although he is consistently rated as one of the greatest military generals of history, in the end, Hannibal is one of history's losers.

The clever man does not rule history; nor does the passing fad, the momentary opinion, or the current trend determine the future. God rules past, present, and future. Through the centuries, the Christian Church witnessed persecutions, heresies, and setbacks that threatened to extinguish the light of truth. In the long term, the dangers subsided and the truth prevailed. Men like Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Knox were men who labored for the long-term perspective.

In the long term, Rome triumphed over Carthage. In the end, Hannibal, long after the Third Punic War, ended his life by taking poison to evade capture by the Romans. Roman victory over Carthage paved the way for the future advent of a still greater kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

BEN HOUSE
Trinity Season 2009



THE FIRST PUNIC WAR.



ANNIBAL was a Carthaginian general. He acquired his great distinction as a warrior by his dangerous struggles with the Romans. Rome and Carthage grew up together on opposite sides of the Mediterranean Sea. For about one hundred years they waged against each other the most dreadful wars. There were three of these wars. Rome was successful in the end, and Carthage was entirely destroyed.

There was no real cause for any disagreement between these two nations. Their hostility to each other was mere rivalry and spontaneous hate. They spoke a different language; they had different origins; and they lived on opposite sides of the same sea. So they hated and devoured each other.

Those who have read the history of Alexander the Great, in this series, will remember the difficulty he experienced in besieging and subduing Tyre, a great maritime city situated about two miles from the shore on the eastern

coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Carthage was originally founded by a colony from this city of Tyre, and it soon became a great commercial and maritime power like its mother. The Carthaginians built ships and explored all parts of the Mediterranean Sea. They visited all the nations along the coasts, purchased the commodities they had to sell, carried them to other nations, and sold them at great profit. They soon began to grow rich and powerful. They hired soldiers to fight their battles and began to take possession of the islands of the Mediterranean and, in some instances, of points on the mainland. For example, some of their ships travelling to Spain found that the natives had silver and gold, which they obtained from veins of ore near the surface of the ground. At first the Carthaginians obtained this gold and silver by selling commodities of various kinds to the natives, which they had procured in other countries; paying, of course, to the producers only a very small price compared with what they required the Spaniards to pay them. Finally, they took possession of that part of Spain where the mines were situated and worked the mines themselves. They dug deeper; they employed skillful engineers to make pumps to raise the water, which always accumulates in mines and prevents the mines from being worked to any great depth. They founded a city there, which they called New Carthage—*Nova Carthago*. They fortified the city with military posts and made it the center of their operations in Spain. This city is called Cartagena to this day.

Therefore, the Carthaginians did everything by the power of money. They extended their operations in every direction, each new extension bringing in new treasures and increasing their means of extending even more. They had, besides the merchant vessels which belonged to private

individuals, great ships of war belonging to the state. These vessels were called galleys and were rowed by oarsmen, tier above tier, there being sometimes four and five banks of oars. They had armies too, drawn from different countries, in various troops, according to how the different nations excelled in the different methods of warfare. For instance, the Numidians, whose country extended in the neighborhood of Carthage, on the African coast, were famous for their horsemen. There were great plains in Numidia and good grazing, and it was, consequently, one of those countries in which horses and horsemen naturally thrive. On the other hand, the natives of the Balearic Isles, now called Majorca, Minorca, and Ibiza, were famous for their skill as slingers.

The tendency of the various nations to adopt and cultivate different methods of warfare was far greater in those ancient times than now. The Balearic Isles, in fact, received their name from the Greek word *ballein*, which means to throw with a sling. The youth there were trained to perfection in the use of this weapon from a very early age. It is said that mothers used to practice the plan of putting the bread for their boys' breakfast on the branches of trees, high above their heads, and not allow them to have their food to eat until they could bring it down with a stone thrown from a sling. So the Carthaginians, in making up their forces, would hire bodies of cavalry in Numidia and of slingers in the Balearic Isles; and for similar reasons, they got excellent infantry in Spain.

In this way the Carthaginian power became greatly extended. The whole government, however, was exercised by a small body of wealthy and aristocratic families at home. It was very similar to a government like that of Victorian England, only the aristocracy of England was based on

ancient birth and landed property, whereas in Carthage it depended on commercial greatness, combined with hereditary family distinction. The aristocracy of Carthage controlled and governed everything. None but its own sons could obtain office or power. The great mass of inhabitants were kept in a state of servitude and subjection. The government of an oligarchy sometimes makes a very rich and powerful state, but a discontented and unhappy people. Such was the Carthaginian power at the time it commenced its dreadful conflicts with Rome.

Rome itself was very differently situated. It was built by some wanderers from Troy, and it grew, for a long time, silently and slowly, by a sort of internal principle of life and energy. One region after another of the Italian peninsula was merged in the Roman state. They formed a population which was stationary and agricultural. They tilled the fields; they hunted the wild beasts; they raised great flocks and herds. They seem to have been a race possessed of a very refined and superior organization, which, in its development, gave rise to a character of firmness, energy, and force, both of body and mind, which has justly gained the admiration of mankind. The Carthaginians had discernment—the Romans called it cunning—and activity, enterprise, and wealth. Their rivals, on the other hand, were characterized by genius, courage, and strength, giving rise to a certain calm and unconquerable resolution and energy, which has since, in every age, been strongly associated in the minds of men with the very word “Roman.”

The progress of nations was much slower in ancient days than now, and these two rival empires continued their gradual growth and extension, each on its own side of the great sea which divided them, for five hundred years before they came into collision. At last, however, the collision came.

The island of Sicily is separated from the mainland by a narrow strait called the Strait of Messina. This strait derives its name from the town of Messina, which is situated on it, on the Sicilian side. Opposite Messina, on the Italian side, there was a town named Rhegium. Now it happened that both of these towns were taken over by lawless bodies of soldiers. The Romans came and delivered Rhegium and severely punished the soldiers who had seized it. The Sicilian authorities advanced to the deliverance of Messina. The troops there, finding themselves threatened, sent to the Romans requesting that they come and protect them, and offering in return to deliver Messina into their hands.

The question of what answer to give to the request was brought before the Roman senate, and caused them great confusion. It seemed inconsistent to take sides with the rebels of Messina, when they had punished so severely those of Rhegium. Still the Romans were becoming very jealous of the growth and extension of the Carthaginian power. Here was an opportunity to meet and resist it. The Sicilian authorities were calling for direct aid from Carthage to recover the city, and the situation would probably result in establishing a large body of Carthaginian troops within sight of the Italian shore, and at a point where it would be easy for them to make hostile incursions into the Roman territories. In a word, it was a case of political necessity; that is to say, a case in which the interests of one of the parties in a contest were so strong that all considerations of justice, consistency, and honor were sacrificed to promote them.

The contest for Messina was, after all, considered by the Romans merely as a pretext, or rather as an occasion, for starting the struggle which they had long desired. They displayed their characteristic energy and skill in the plan

which they adopted at the outset. They knew that the power of Carthage rested mainly on her command of the seas and that they could not hope to successfully cope with her until they could meet and conquer her on her own territory. In the meantime, however, they had not a single ship and not a single sailor, while the Mediterranean was covered with Carthaginian ships and seamen. Not at all daunted by this extraordinary inequality, the Romans decided to begin at once the work of creating for themselves a naval power.

The preparations took quite some time; for the Romans not only had to build the ships, but they first had to learn *how* to build them. They took their first lesson from a Carthaginian galley which was cast away in a storm on the coast of Italy. They seized the galley, collected their carpenters to examine it, and set woodmen at work to cut trees and collect materials for imitating it. The carpenters studied their model very carefully, measured the dimensions of every part, and observed the manner in which the various parts were connected and secured together. The heavy shocks which vessels are exposed to from the waves make it necessary to secure great strength in the construction of them; and though the ships of the ancients were very small and imperfect, compared with the warships of the present day, it is still surprising that the Romans were able to succeed at all in such a hasty attempt at building them.

They did, however, succeed. While the ships were being built, officers appointed for the purpose were training men, on shore, in the art of rowing them. Benches, like the seats which the oarsman would occupy in the ships, were arranged on the ground, and the intended seamen were drilled every day in the movements and action of rowers. The result was that a few months after the building of the ships began, the Romans had a fleet of one hundred galleys of five banks of oars ready. They remained in harbor with them for some

time, to give the oarsmen the opportunity to see whether they could row on the water as well as on the land, and then boldly put to sea to meet the Carthaginians.

One part of the arrangements made by the Romans in preparing their fleets was strikingly characteristic of the determined resolution which marked all their conduct. They constructed machines containing grappling irons, which they mounted on the prows of their vessels. The engines were designed so that the moment one of the ships that contained them should encounter a vessel of the enemy, the grappling irons would fall on the deck of the enemy ship and hold the two firmly together, so as to prevent the possibility of either escaping from the other. The idea that the Romans would have any wish to withdraw from the encounter seemed entirely out of the question. Their only fear was that the Carthaginian seamen would employ their superior skill and experience in naval maneuvers in making their escape. Mankind has always regarded the action of the Romans as one of the most striking examples of military courage and resolution which the history of war has ever recorded.

The result was as might have been expected. The Romans captured, sank, destroyed or chased away the Carthaginian fleet that came to oppose them. They took the prows of the ships which they captured, carried them to Rome, and built what is called a *rostral pillar* of them. A rostral pillar is a column decorated with prows, which were, in the Roman language, called *rostra*. This column was nearly destroyed by lightning about fifty years afterward, but it was repaired and rebuilt again. It stood for many centuries, a very striking and appropriate monument of this extraordinary naval victory. The Roman commander in this case was the consul Duilius, and the rostral column was erected in his honor.

The Romans now prepared to carry the war into Africa. Of course it was easy, after their victory over the Carthaginian fleet, to transport troops across the sea to the Carthaginian shore. The Roman commonwealth was governed at the time by a senate, who made the laws, and by two supreme executive officers called consuls. They thought it was safer to have two chief magistrates than one, as each of the two would naturally be a check or balance on the other. The result was, however, that mutual jealousy often involved them in disputes and quarrels. In modern times, it is thought that to have one chief magistrate in the state is best, and other methods are provided to put a check on any action he might take to abuse his powers.

The Roman consuls, in time of war, took command of the armies. The name of the consul on whom it fell to carry on the war with the Carthaginians, after this first great victory, was Regulus, and his name has been celebrated in every age on account of his extraordinary adventures in the military operations and his untimely fate. How far the story is strictly true it is now impossible to know, but the Roman historians relate the following story:

At the time when Regulus was elected consul he was a plain man, living simply on his farm, sustaining himself by his own work, and displaying no ambition or pride. His fellow citizens, however, observed those qualities of mind in him which they were accustomed to admire and made him consul. He left the city and took command of the army. He enlarged the fleet to more than three hundred vessels. He put one hundred and forty thousand men on board and sailed for Africa. One or two years were spent in making the preparations, during which time the Carthaginians had improved in building new ships; so that, when the Romans set sail and were moving along the coast of Sicily,

they soon came in sight of a larger Carthaginian fleet assembled to oppose them. Regulus advanced to the contest. The Carthaginian fleet was beaten as before. The ships which were not captured or destroyed made their escape in all directions, and Regulus went on, without further opposition, and landed his forces on the Carthaginian shore. He set up camp as soon as he landed and sent back word to the Roman senate asking what was next to be done.

Now that the great difficulty and danger of driving back the Carthaginian fleet was past, the senate ordered Regulus to send home nearly all the ships and a large part of the army and with the rest he was to continue his march toward Carthage. Regulus obeyed: he sent back the troops which had been ordered home and with the rest began to advance on the city.

Just at that time, however, news came to him that the farmer who was caring for his land at home had died, and that his little farm, on which rested his sole reliance for the support of his family, was going to ruin. Regulus sent word to the senate, asking them to place someone else in command of the army and to allow him to resign his office that he might go home and take care of his wife and children. The senate sent back orders that he should go on with his operation and promised to provide support for his family and to see that someone was appointed to take care of his land. This story is thought to illustrate the extreme simplicity of all the habits of life among the Romans in those days. It is, however, very extraordinary that a man who was entrusted with the command of a fleet of a hundred and thirty vessels and an army of a hundred and forty thousand men, should have a family at home dependent for subsistence on the hired cultivation of seven acres of land. Still, such is the story.

Regulus advanced toward Carthage, conquering as he came. The Carthaginians were beaten in one field after another and were reduced to near ruin when an occurrence took place which changed the balance of power. This was the arrival of a large body of troops from Greece, with a Grecian general at their head. These were troops which the Carthaginians had hired to fight for them, as was the case with the rest of the army. But these were *Greeks*, and the Greeks possessed the same qualities as the Romans. The newly-arrived Grecian general quickly displayed such military superiority that the Carthaginians gave him the supreme command. He prepared the army for battle. He had one hundred elephants in the front division of the army. They were trained to rush forward and trample down the enemy. He had the Greek phalanx in the center, which was a close, compact body of many thousand troops, bristling with long, iron-pointed spears, with which the men pressed forward, bearing everything before them. Regulus was, in a word, ready to meet Carthaginians, but he was not prepared to encounter Greeks. His army was scattered and he was taken prisoner. Nothing could exceed the triumph in the city when they saw Regulus and five hundred other Roman soldiers brought in as captives. A few days before, they had been in terror at the imminent danger of his coming in as a ruthless and vindictive conqueror.

The Roman senate was not discouraged by this disaster. They fitted out new armies, and the war went on. Regulus was kept the whole time at Carthage as a prisoner. At last the Carthaginians authorized Regulus to go to Rome as a sort of commissioner, to propose to the Romans an exchange prisoners to make peace. They exacted from him a solemn promise that if he was unsuccessful he would return. The Romans had taken many of the Carthaginians

as prisoners in their naval combats and held them captive at Rome. It is customary, in such cases, for the warring nations to make an exchange and restore the captives on both sides to their friends and home. It was such an exchange of prisoners as this which Regulus was to propose.

When Regulus reached Rome he refused to enter the city, but he appeared before the senate from outside the city walls, in a very humble garb and with the most subdued and unassuming demeanor. He was no longer, he said, a Roman officer, or even citizen, but a Carthaginian prisoner, and he disavowed all right to direct, or even to counsel, the Roman authorities in respect to the proper course to be pursued. Nevertheless, he offered his opinion and said that the Romans ought not to make peace or to exchange prisoners. He himself and the other Roman prisoners were old and infirm and not worth the exchange; moreover, they had no claim whatever on their country, as they could only have been made prisoners in consequence of want of courage or patriotism to die in their country's cause. He said that the Carthaginians were tired of the war and that their resources were exhausted. He suggested the Romans press forward in it with renewed vigor and leave himself and the other prisoners to their fate.

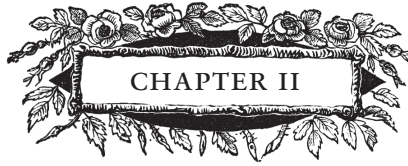
The senate very slowly and reluctantly decided to follow his advice. They all earnestly attempted to persuade Regulus that he was under no obligation to return to Carthage. His promise, they said, was extorted by the circumstances of the case and was not binding. Regulus, however, insisted on keeping his faith with his enemies. He sternly refused to see his family, and bidding the senate farewell, he returned to Carthage. The Carthaginians, exasperated that he intervened to prevent the success of their mission, tortured him for some time in the most cruel manner, and finally put

him to death. One would think that he ought to have counseled peace and an exchange of prisoners, and not refused to see his unhappy wife and children; but it was certainly very noble of him to refuse to break his word.

The war continued for sometime longer, until finally, both nations became weary of the contest and made peace. The following is the treaty which was signed. It shows that the advantage, on the whole, in this first Punic war, was on the part of the Romans:

“There shall be peace between Rome and Carthage. The Carthaginians shall evacuate all of Sicily. They shall not make war upon any allies of the Romans. They shall restore to the Romans, without ransom, all the prisoners which they have taken from them and pay them within ten years three thousand two hundred talents of silver.”

The war had continued twenty-four years.



HANNIBAL AT SAGUNTUM.



THE name of Hannibal's father was Hamilcar. He was one of the leading Carthaginian generals. He occupied a very prominent position because of his rank, wealth, and high family connections at Carthage, and also because of the great military strength which he displayed in the command of the armies abroad. He carried on the wars which the Carthaginians waged in Africa and in Spain after the conclusion of the war with the Romans, and he longed to commence hostilities with the Romans again.

At one time, when Hannibal was about nine years of age, Hamilcar was preparing to set off on an expedition into Spain, and as was usual in those days, he was celebrating the occasion with games and displays and various religious ceremonies. It has been the custom in all ages of the world, when nations go to war with each other, for each side to take measures to satisfy the wrath and win the favor of Heaven. Christian nations at the present day do it

by prayers offered for the success of their troops. Heathen nations do it by sacrifices and offerings. Hamilcar made arrangements for such sacrifices, and the priests were offering them in the presence of the whole assembled army.

Young Hannibal was present. He was a boy of great spirit and energy, and he entered into the scene with much enthusiasm. He wanted to go to Spain with the army, and he went to his father and began to make his request. His father would not consent to it. He was too young to endure the lack of basic necessities and fatigues of such an adventure. However, his father brought him to one of the altars, in the presence of the other officers of the army, and made him lay his hand on the consecrated victim and swear that, as soon as he was old enough and had it in his power, he would make war on the Romans. This was done, no doubt, in part to amuse young Hannibal's mind and to relieve his disappointment in not being able to go to war at that time, by promising him a great and mighty enemy to fight at some future day. Yet Hannibal remembered it and longed for the time to come when he could go to war against the Romans.

Hamilcar bid his son farewell and departed for Spain. He extended his conquests there in all directions west of the River Iberus, flowing southeast into the Mediterranean Sea. Its name, Iberus, has gradually changed, in modern times, to Ebro. By the treaty with the Romans, the Carthaginians were not to cross the Iberus. They were also bound by the treaty not to interfere with the people of Saguntum, a city lying between the Iberus and the Carthaginian dominions. Saguntum was in alliance with the Romans and under their protection.

Hamilcar was, however, very restless and uneasy at being required to refrain from hostilities with the Roman

power. He began, immediately after his arrival in Spain, to form plans for renewing the war. He had under him, as his principal lieutenant, a young man who had married his daughter. His name was Hasdrubal. With Hasdrubal's aid Hamilcar went on extending his conquests in Spain, strengthening his position there and gradually maturing his plans for renewing war with the Romans, when after some time he died. Hasdrubal succeeded him. Hannibal was probably about twenty-one or -two years old and still in Carthage. Hasdrubal sent to the Carthaginian government a request that Hannibal might receive an appointment in the army and be sent out to join him in Spain.

There was a great debate in the Carthaginian senate on the subject of complying with this request. In all cases where questions of government are controlled by votes, it has been found, in every age, that parties will always be formed, of which the two most prominent will usually be nearly balanced one against the other. At the time, the Hamilcar family was in power; however, there was a strong party in Carthage in opposition to them. The leader of the party in the senate, whose name was Hanno, made a very earnest speech against sending Hannibal. He was too young, he said, to be of any service. He would only learn the vices and follies of the camp and thus become corrupted and ruined. "Besides," said Hanno, "at this rate, the command of our armies in Spain is getting to be a sort of hereditary right. Hamilcar was not a king. Why should his authority descend first to his son-in-law and then to his son? This plan of making Hannibal, while yet scarcely arrived at manhood, a high officer in the army is only a stepping-stone to putting the forces totally under his command, when, for any reason, Hasdrubal ceases to command them."