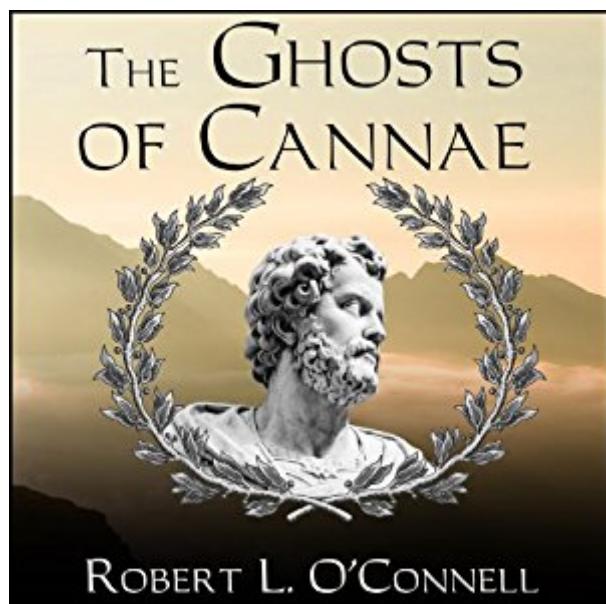


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The Ghosts Of Cannae: Hannibal And The Darkest Hour Of The Roman Republic



Synopsis

Hannibal's battle plan at Cannae became the mother of all great battle strategies - the first battle of encirclement that has been imitated (often to disastrous effect) endlessly over the past two thousand years. In this brilliant, long-overdue, and beautifully written account, Robert L. O'Connell gives listeners an epic account of one of the most dramatic battles of antiquity. The Ghosts of Cannae is at once a book about a specific battle (the massive defeat of a huge but inexperienced Roman army in southern Italy by Hannibal in 216 BC) and also an interpretation of the larger course of the Second Punic War, as well as an assessment of the historical impact of Rome's storied rivalry with Carthage. What ties the book together is the fate of the survivors, their treatment by the authorities in Rome, and ultimately their vindication nearly two decades later, when they defeated Hannibal at the decisive battle of Zama in North Africa. With an unforgettable cast of heroes and villains, The Ghosts of Cannae is history at its finest.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Great books. Does not descend into hero worship and presents Hannibal as a fully developed human being. As far as I can tell the scholarship level is very high for a popular book.

Up front, this is a review of the Kindle version of this book. There are many adequate reviews of the content already, so I won't add more than to say that this was a well done book that presented some interesting perspectives on not just the battle of Cannae but events preceding and following that battle. It should be of interest to those who are interested in military history, but probably not those

who consider themselves military history scholars. As for the Kindle version, this book was poorly done. I typically read from my Kindle when I am at home or extended travel and from my iPhone during my daily commute and routine travel. This book includes frequent, large hyperlinks to the end notes. Often these hyperlinks are in the position on the page that an iPhone reader would hit to turn the page. Once this hyperlink is followed, it becomes 'the furthest page read' thus ruining synchronization between multiple reading devices. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to correct this. Also, it appears that the publisher has limited the content to only be read simultaneously on two devices. Had I known either of these things, I would not have purchased the book. This should be fixed immediately.

Writer does make a rather interesting observation that Carthage lost almost every battle except those that Hannibal led until the last one. Actually although the writer does not mention it I was struck by the similarity of the Roman handling of Hannibal after Cannae and the Allies with Napoleon, after Russia. In both cases the side with more troops and material attempted not to battle Hannibal or Napoleon but only fight where they were not. In a pre-modern society such a strategy can often work. Overall I think it is an above average book. The big problem here is not the book or the writer's views but the issue that we have very little new on this war to report as such what we get is a repeat of the facts again. We know what will happen as we have read it before in other books. To make the story interesting the writer has to come up with an interesting slant. This writer's slant is to discuss I think too much the Roman survivors of the battle of Cannae which he thinks has an enormous impact on Roman history. I am not so sure.

The pivot point of this book is the battle of Cannae, in which Hannibal and his Carthaginian forces defeated a larger Roman army, in the process killing off huge numbers of Roman troops. But the book is about more. It provides the earlier context, the first war between Rome and Carthage, the tensions remaining between the two powers, the factors leading to the second Punic War (Rome versus Carthage), and so on. The book ends by noting how for the past 100 years, a number of generals have expressed a desire to repeat the Cannae model, hoping to annihilate the opponents. The book is, of necessity, speculative, since there is not an abundance of good information on the battle and the context in which it occurred. Indeed, one map of the battlefield, on page 147, indicates that it is not clear exactly where the battlefield was located. The book does a nice job identifying and discussing key leaders among Romans and Carthaginians. Exotic issues are explored nicely, such as the pluses and minuses of battle elephants. Or the nature of the naval

war between Rome and Carthage in the First Punic War. The book is well written, though, and provides a useful exploration of the battle and its subsequent effects.

This is a thorough, entertaining and informative commentary of The Second Punic War (218-201 B.C.). The fluid, almost chatty narrative places the reader right in the middle of the action. Considering the limited availability of historical sources and their inherent bias towards Rome, the author fulfills the role of an impartial (and amused) historian very well. I always wondered how could Hannibal win every battle, but lose the war? What on earth was he doing in Italy for 15 years? How could his army survive? The Battle of Cannae (216 B.C.) was a devastating defeat and an enormous loss of life to The Roman Empire. Yet the author argues that no matter how brilliant tactician Hannibal was, he seriously misjudged the Roman resilience and resources. How could he not? How many armies one has to beat, how many soldiers to kill, how many territories to conquer before winning it all? One of his biggest mistakes during his long campaign was not attempting the siege of Rome after the won battle and forcing the budding empire to admit complete defeat. (To his defense, he had no siege equipment or expertise and could not afford tedious attrition warfare...). Then, he allowed the Roman battle lines to re-form before the climax of The Battle of Zama (202 B.C.) (Here the master of envelopment did not anticipate the quick return of the notoriously weak Roman cavalry). The title cleverly refers both to the condemned, then redeemed Roman veteran survivors of Cannae and the Roman decisions that became the seeds of the end of the Republic. Hannibal lost the war, but he induced an archetype of a character that could beat him and later challenge the power of the Senate by crossing an insignificant and shallow river named Rubicon. There is so much else to learn about here: the economic dynamics of Rome and Carthage, political conflicts, divisions in the respective leaderships, military history, the personalities of Hannibal, Scipio, Masinissa and Syphax along with countless and hapless Roman generals, a femme fatale (Sophonisba), battles, traps, ambushes, schemes, shifting alliances, and above all: panicking elephants. This is what a memorable historical account should be. An enthusiastic two thumbs (and two halluces) up!

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