

# Great Battles of History Scenario

## Hannibal's First Battle

The Battle of the Tagus River, 220 BC -SPQR Scenario

by Dan Fournie

Before Hannibal crossed the Alps to battle Rome, he fought a series of campaigns in Spain for three years. His greatest challenge came when he was faced with a massive uprising of the Olcalde, Carpetani and Vaccaei tribes. Encumbered with booty, the Carthaginians were suddenly confronted by a tribal army double their own size. Taking a leaf from his father Hamilcar's book of war, Hannibal crossed the Tagus River and executed a brilliant feigned retreat. He then turned back to crush the rebel army on the river's bank.

### Historical Background

Carthage Conquers Spain, 238-221 BC

Hamilcar Barca led an army to Spain in 238 (all dates BC), following his victory over mercenary rebels in the Truceless War. He planned to develop a new empire in Spain, to replace the loss of Sicily and Sardinia. From this base, he could seek vengeance on the treacherous Romans, who had violated the Peace of Lutatius to seize Sardinia in 239. In 236, Hamilcar's eldest son, Hannibal, pled feverishly to be allowed to accompany his father. Hamilcar told his nine-year old he would first have to come to the Temple of Melquart, where they sacrificed and Hannibal swore "never to be a friend of Rome." The course of world history was forever altered by this oath.

Hamilcar rapidly expanded the Carthaginian coastal enclave in Spain into a continental empire. He allied himself with Hasdrubal the Splendid, a democratic politician with a substantial following back in Carthage. Hamilcar gave Hasdrubal one of his daughters in marriage, cementing their alliance. Hasdrubal was also an able admiral, administrator and diplomat and became Hamilcar's deputy commander. Hamilcar built an army of 50,000 foot, 6,000 horse and 100 war elephants. The infantry were both African and Spanish mercenaries, long-term professionals that were molded into crack troops. The cavalry included Spanish mercenaries, heavy African horse and especially Numidian light cavalry. Unfortunately, few details of Hamilcar's campaigns have been recorded.

In 229, Hamilcar's army was hard pressed by a powerful Spanish tribe. A retreat was ordered, and Hamilcar personally commanded the rear guard. Caught at a river crossing near Acra Leuce, Hamilcar sent the 16-year old Hannibal and his 14-year old brother Hasdrubal Barca ahead to safety. While covering the retreat of his men, Hamilcar was thrown from his horse by the wild barbarians and drowned.

Hasdrubal the Splendid was chosen by the army to succeed Hamilcar. More by adroit diplomacy than force of arms, Hasdrubal expanded and solidified the Barcid Kingdom in Spain. He founded New Carthage (*Nova Carthago*, modern Cartagena) which soon became the capital of the growing province and the second city of the Carthaginian Empire. Hasdrubal reportedly expanded the army to a size of 60,000 foot, 8,000 horse and 200 war elephants. Rome took note of Hasdrubal's success, and forced him to sign a treaty promising not to cross the Ebro River under arms. Hannibal became Hasdrubal's chief lieutenant during these years, displaying fearlessness in action that endeared him to the army. Hamilcar's old veterans swore they saw in the son the same vigor and fire that his father had possessed. Then, in 221 Hasdrubal the Splendid was assassinated by a Celt, due to a personal grievance.

### Second Punic War Preliminary

Hannibal's Early Operations

So, at the age of 25, Hannibal was acclaimed by the army as the commander in chief. After witnessing the deaths of his father and brother-in-law, Hannibal wasted no time. Polybius assures us he undertook the final conquest of Spain only as a precursor to his war with Rome. Yet much remained to be done in Spain. Hannibal's first campaign was directed against the Olcades, a Celtic Spanish tribe whose lands lay to the south of the Ebro. After routing the Olcade levies, Hannibal stormed and sacked Carteia, their capital. The weaker neighboring tribes quickly submitted, and the Carthaginian army returned to winter quarters laden with booty.

In 220 Hannibal set his sights on the Vaccaei (in northwest Spain in the valley of the Durius) and Carpetani (located in the central highlands, about the headwaters of the Tagus), the only major tribes south of the Ebro that had not yet bowed to Carthage. These were also Celtic tribes that had settled in Spain. He probably led no more than 20,000 foot and 6,000 horse, considering the large kingdom that had to be garrisoned. Hannibal also counted on a cadre of supremely capable lieutenants. Chief among these marshals was his deputy, Maharbal. His other subordinate generals included Hasdrubal, his chief of staff and quartermaster, his nephew Hanno son of Bomilcar and his younger brothers Hasdrubal and Mago.

The Carthaginian army marched first against the Vaccaei city of Hermandica (modern Salamanca) which was stormed with only moderate resistance. Arbocala, the Vaccaei, capital put up much stiffer resistance. Hannibal was forced to lay siege to the city. This siege of a small tribal hill-city by a large professional army inevitably ended with the sack of Arbocala. Hannibal, his army laden with booty, headed back to New Carthage to regroup before moving against the Carpetani.





### The Battle of the Tagus River

The Spanish Tribes Strike Back

Meanwhile, the remnants of the Olcade and Vaccaei armies had gathered for action. Lacking the strength to

**SPQR Great Battles of History, Vol. II**

The Art of War in the Roman Republic 275-197BC  
**Published:** 1992 **Winner:** CSR & Origins Awards  
**Game Design:** Mark Herman and Richard H. Berg  
**Art Director:** Rodger B. MacGowan  
**Counter Art:** Rodger B. MacGowan  
**Map Art:** Mark Simonitch

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**Contents:** 800 die-cut Counters; Four 22x34 inch Maps; Rulebook and Scenario Book; One 10-sided die; Charts & Tables; Bookcase Box  
**Time Scale:** 15-20 minutes per game turn  
**Map Scale:** 70 yards per hex  
**Unit Scale:** 300-1000 men per counter  
**Players:** 1-4

## The Tagus River, 220 BC: SPQR Battle Scenario

confront the Carthaginians on their own, these fugitives convinced the Carpetani to mobilize. It had become clear that all the Spanish tribes would be sequentially subjugated by Hannibal if each tribe acted alone. So the Carpetani made common cause with the Olcade, Vaccaei and neighboring lesser tribes to march against Hannibal.

While still north of the Tagus, Hannibal's scouts brought word that a large tribal army was in pursuit. The tribal army was said to number 100,000 by Polybius, but a more reasonable estimate would be on the order of 40,000 warriors. Far from his base, Hannibal was in a precarious position. If he abandoned his booty, his fast moving army could easily leave the barbarian host behind. But a mercenary army fought for its booty, and any delay in the conquest of Spain would affect his long-term plans for war with Rome. Yet, to accept battle in the open field with a force nearly double his in size would be to court an even greater disaster.

Hannibal chose to maneuver for advantage, and fight a battle on his own terms. He copied a maneuver his father Hamilcar had used to defeat the mercenary rebels at Tunis in 241. His army raced south, in apparent fear. The Spanish rebels stormed after the slower Punic column. Hannibal crossed the Tagus River in

great haste, further baiting the rebels. Covered by a screen of skirmishers, the Carthaginian army moved in four columns. On his flanks, Hannibal placed his elephants in the van, followed by the cavalry. In the center he formed two columns, first the light infantry, then the medium and finally the phalanx. Therefore the slowest troops were nearest the river, the quickest were farthest away. The Spanish tribal forces, thinking nothing of the difficulty of crossing the river,

streamed on in pursuit. However, once across the river, Hannibal's army executed a complex retrograde wheeling movement that brought the African phalanx, auxiliaries, cavalry and elephants back to the riverbank even as the rebels were wading across.

A brutal struggle ensued. The Punic cavalry charged first, cutting down thousands of rebels struggling up the bank through mud and slime. Here the elephants proved invaluable, crushing Spanish warriors scrambling up the bank with their massive feet. Hannibal's Spanish auxiliaries showered the barbarians with javelins. When the rebel assault was

completely halted and thrown into confusion, Hannibal ordered his phalanx to re-cross the river and finish them off. Hannibal had converted a situation fraught with danger into a dramatic, decisive victory.

### Epilogue

#### Consolidation and War with Rome

Hannibal followed up his victory by pursuing the Carpetani into their homeland, completing the subjugation of all tribes south of the Ebro. Now with even more booty, he led his army back to its winter quarters. The news of Hannibal's astonishing victory at the Tagus added to his growing fame, echoing as far away as Rome and Greece. In 219, Hannibal laid siege to the Roman allied city of Saguntum. This completed his conquest of Spain south of the Ebro. More importantly, the sack of Saguntum after an eight-month siege provoked war with Rome. The chain of events that would lead to Trebbia, Trasimene, Cannae and ultimately Zama was inexorably set in motion. Hannibal's first campaign of the Second Punic War, however, was not directed against Rome, but at the Spanish tribes north of the Ebro. In a lightning two-month campaign, by advancing in three parallel columns, Hannibal subjugated this large region before heading off for the Alps and Italy.

Unlike many similar Roman operations, Hannibal's campaign of 220 did not cripple the fighting power of the

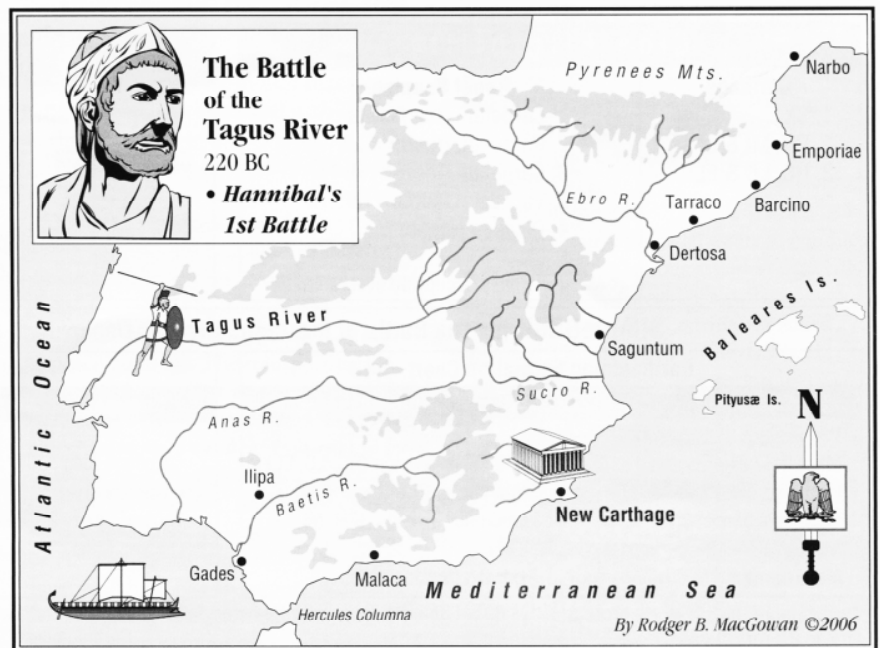
targeted tribes. Hannibal simply wished to establish his hegemony, and then rally these tribes to join his army. As the Second Punic War opened, a unit of 3,000 Carpetani warriors was included in Hannibal's expeditionary army. Another unit of Olcades, probably numbering about 3,500 foot and 400 horse, was assigned to the army sent back to garrison Africa. Although not mentioned again in the sources, it seems likely that Carpetani, Olcades and Vaccaei warriors continued to serve in the armies of Hasdrubal and Mago Barca and Hasdrubal Gisgo throughout the Spanish campaign, 218-206.

### Sources

Polybius and Livy both provide descriptions of this battle, however, they are contradictory in many details. Polybius' less detailed account has been preferred here. Diodorus provides some details of Hamilcar's campaigns, including the story of his death. The best secondary accounts are by Lazenby, Caven, and Dodge.

### Author's Note

Readers are invited to address questions, comments or feedback regarding this article and scenario to the author via email at [danfournie@yahoo.com](mailto:danfournie@yahoo.com). Feedback on earlier C3i articles by the author is also welcome.



# The Battle of the Tagus River, 220 BC: C3i Magazine Scenario

## Map

Use the *Heraclea* Map from the *Pyrrhic Victory* Module. (The *Granicus* Map from *Deluxe Great Battles of Alexander* may be substituted, or less suitably, the *Cannae* Map from *SPQR*).

Carthaginian Deployment	
<b>Hannibal (OC) w/Surus</b>	3222
• <i>Skirmish Line</i>	
<b>Mago Barca</b> , 2720; Iberian (brown) SK (a) (1-4) [or Cretan SK] Iberian (brown) SK (s) (5-10) every third hex from 2708 to 2735.	
• <i>Right Flank Column (in column heading South)</i>	
<b>Maharbal</b>	3232
Elephants (1-4)	3634, 3734, 3835, 3935
Numidian LC (1-5)	3031, 3131, 3232, 3332, 3433, 3533
African HC (6-7)	2930, 3031
Sacred Band HC (1)	2830
• <i>Right Center Column (in column heading South)</i>	
<b>Hanno son of Bomilcar</b>	3627
Iberian (brown) LI (1-6)	3928, 4029, 4129, 4230 & 2 units off map [or Numid MI/LI]
N. African MI (1-5)	3426, 3526, 3627, 3727, 3828 [or Maur/NA MI/LI]
African PH (1-3)	2823-2923, 3024-3124, 3225-3325
• <i>Left Center Column (in column heading Southeast)</i>	
<b>Hasdrubal Barca</b>	
Iberian (brown) LI (7-12)	3915, 4015, 4114, 4214 & 2 units off map [or Numid MI & LI]
N. African MI (6-10)	3418, 3517, 3617, 3717, 3816 [or Maur/NA MI/LI]
African PH (4-6)	2821-2920, 3020-3119, 3219-3318
• <i>Left Flank Column (in column heading Southeast)</i>	
<b>Hasdrubal the QM</b>	3212
Elephants (5-8)	3510, 3610, 3709, 3809
Numidian LC (6-10)	3013, 3112, 3212, 3311, 3411
African HC (8-9)	2814, 2913
<b>CARTHAGINIAN COMMAND</b>	
The Carthaginian Command Rule (4.6) is in effect.	

Line Eligibility	
Carthage	Rebel Spanish
1. SK	1. Carpetani (Iberian) LI
2. PH, MI & LI	2. Carpetani (Iberian) MI
3. HC, LC & EL	3. Carpetani (Iberian) HI
	3. Vaccae (Ligurian) MI
	4. Olcades (Celtic) MI
	5. LN
	* May form lines occupying every third hex.

## SimpleGBoH for The Battle of the Tagus River – Deploy both armies as indicated.

Carthaginian Formation Chart	
Commander	Formation
Hannibal [OC] / 6	
Maharbal / 3	Right Flank Division (HC, LC, EL)
Hanno son of Bomilcar	Right Center Division (PH, MI, LI)
Hasdrubal Barca / 2	Left Center Division (PH, MI, LI)
Hasdrubal the Quartermaster / 2	Left Flank Division (HC, LC, EL)
Mago Barca	Skirmish Division (SK)

**Carthaginian Units with Reduced Side**  
African PH (or HI) units  
Sacred Band HC unit

**Rebel Spanish Units with Reduced Side**  
None

**Army Withdrawal Levels**  
Carthaginian: 135 Rout Points.  
Spanish: 150 Rout Points

**Special Rules**  
• The Carthaginian player goes first. There is no die roll

## Counters

All counters from *SPQR*, with preferred alternates from *Africanus* Module. Leader counters and unit alternates are included in this issue of *C3i Magazine* (Nr18). Replacements are listed.

Rebel Spanish Deployment	
• <i>The CARPETANI (light blue)</i>	
<b>Carpetani King (OC)</b> (use Regulus); Carpetani (Iberian) HI (1-10) [or Brutian HI (1-10)]; Carpetani (Iberian) MI (1-8) [or Italian MI (8)]; Carpetani (Iberian) LI (1-15): Deploy North of hexrow 16xx, between 1624 and 1634.	
<b>Carpetani Chief</b> (use Philocles); Carpetani (Iberian) LN (1-5): Deploy within 2 hexes of 1538.	
• <i>The OLCADES &amp; VACCAEI (light green)</i>	
<b>Vaccae Chief</b> (use Nicanor); Vaccae (Ligurian) MI (1-17) [or Macedonian, Illyrian, Aetolian & Thracian]; Olcades (Celtic) MI (1-21): Deploy North of hexrow 16xx, between 1610 and 1622.	
<b>Olcades Chief</b> (use Athngras); Olcades & Vaccae (Celtic) LN (1-6): Deploy within 2 hexes of 1506.	

Deployment for Other Maps	
• Place Hannibal's army in 4 columns moving away from the river, with SK screening the bank. Order of march is EL, LC then HC; or LI, MI, then PH.	
• Rebels begin anywhere 10 hexes from the bank (or off map if you must use the Cannae Map)	

## Victory Conditions & Withdrawal Levels

- A player wins by forcing his opponent to withdraw.
- Carthaginian Army withdraws when units with TQ points totaling 135 have been eliminated.
- Rebel Spanish Army withdraws when units with TQ points totaling 150 have been eliminated.

Army Size and TQ Levels					
Army	SP	Size	TQ	Rout	Quality
<b>Carthage</b>	241	18,000 inf 6,100 cav 40 el	344	40%	1.42
<b>Spanish</b>	406	36,200 inf 4,400 cav	488	30%	1.20