THE FALL OF CARTHAGE: THE PUNIC WARS 265–146 BC[1]

REVIEWED BY MAJOR BRIAN HARLAN[2]

If we are to learn from the past then history must first be understood on its own terms.[3]

I. Introduction

The Fall of Carthage: The Punic Wars 265–146 BC (*The Fall of Carthage*) is Dr. Adrian Goldsworthy's endeavor to "provide an accessible account and analysis" of the entire span of the Punic Wars in a single volume.[4] Goldsworthy succeeds, and his work provides an enjoyable read that blends in equal measures insightful scholarship and captivating prose.

This review will focus on the book's relevance for the Soldier, to whom an understanding of military history is as vital now[5] as it has ever been.[6] Current Army doctrine reminds us that "warfare in the 21st century retains many of the characteristics it has exhibited since ancient times."[7] Any exploration of those "retained characteristics" would be well-served to begin with an examination of the seminal period in Western history, and the greatest factor in its development and expansion—the Punic Wars.[8] *The Fall of Carthage* provides an ideal vehicle for understanding that period in its own context.[9]

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[1] ADRIAN GOLDSWORTHY, THE FALL OF CARTHAGE: THE PUNIC WARS 265–146 BC (Phoenix 2006) (2000).

[2] U.S. Army. Written while assigned as a Student, 56th Judge Advocate Officer Graduate Course, The Judge Advocate General's Legal Ctr. & Sch., U.S. Army, Charlottesville, Va.

[3] GOLDSWORTHY, *supra* note 1, at 368.

[4] *Id*. at 10.

[5] "This is a game of wits and will. You've got to be learning and adapting constantly to survive." U.S. DEP'T OF ARMY, FIELD MANUAL 3-24, COUNTERINSURGENCY ix (15 Dec. 2006) [hereinafter FM 3-24] (quoting General Peter J. Schoomaker, U.S. Army).

[6] "One means currently employed to assist in preparing for and planning for war is the study and analysis of military history." AMERICA'S FIRST BATTLES: 1776–1965, at ix (Charles E. Heller & William A. Stofft eds., 1986).

[7] FM 3-24, *supra* note 5, at 1-1.

[8] *See* GOLDSWORTHY, *supra* note 1, at 13. "Had the Romans lost the Punic Wars then the history of the world would have been very different." *Id.* At the same time, "Roman imperialism . . . was greatly accelerated by the struggle with Carthage." *Id.* at 12–13.

[9] *Id.* at 18.

II. Why *This* Study of the Punic Wars?

Goldsworthy's thesis is that "each society and culture tends to have a unique view of warfare which affects how they fight and as a result how they may be beaten," and that the Punic Wars are among the best historical example of that principle.[10] Several themes emerge as principal components of the divergent Roman and Punic views of warfare, and much of Goldsworthy's analysis is devoted to examining key decisions and battles in relation to the distinct views of the respective sides of the conflict.[11] Goldsworthy's methodology, combined with the clarity and brevity of his presentation, make *The Fall of Carthage* a particularly valuable exploration of the Punic Wars.

Goldsworthy hints at his motive in writing on the subject by lamenting that "the Punic Wars have disappeared from the wider consciousness in Europe and North America."[12] Goldsworthy's retelling of this seminal period in the history of Western civilization[13] in an accessible and compact format can only help to reverse this trend. Nevertheless, the author acknowledges that "it might well be asked what more can be added" to the body of writings on the Punic Wars.[14]

Goldsworthy responds by noting that although the wars are the subject of substantial scholarly writing, "in some respects the wars have not been properly treated," and although a few books have dealt with the entire period in one volume, they are not "entirely satisfactory."[15] He highlights areas where historians have, in his opinion, "fallen into the trap of judging events by modern standards," such as the causes of the

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[10] *Id.* at 368 ("[T]he difference between two philosophies of war has rarely been as clearly illustrated as it was during the Punic Wars.").

[11] *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 36 (explaining that in the Hellenistic system, experienced armies were "a precious thing" and Carthaginian commanders were consequently less willing to commit them). This theme is revisited throughout the text. *See id. passim*. Similarly, Goldsworthy often returns to an analysis of booty and glory as primary components of morale in ancient armies. *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 153 (Hannibal in Spain), 165 (perseverance in the Alps), 169 (Hannibal recruiting Gauls), 172–73 (effect of victories in skirmish).

[12] *Id.* at 9.

[13] *Id.* at 365; *see also id.* at 13 (discussion of long-term effects of Roman victory), 15 (Punic Wars as impetus for written history of Roman Empire), 16 (continuing applicability to military studies).

[14] *Id.* at 17.

[15] *Id*.

Second Punic War,[16] the nuances of the Roman political system,[17] and the exclusive use of modes of analysis that contradict primary sources.[18] The author is not immune to the temptation to draw parallels with modern military analogies.[19] He scrupulously avoids, however, the practice of "suggesting alternative and perhaps better courses of action" with the advantage of hindsight.[20] His goal, instead, is to "place the Punic Wars firmly within the context of the military theory and practice of the third to second centuries BC."[21]

This answers the question of what more can be added to the body of work on the Punic Wars. The question remains, what relevance does a "satisfactory" and "proper treatment" of all three wars have for the modern reader? Goldsworthy answers with new analysis of old sources,[22] and with an organizational approach that is methodical and intellectually honest.[23] He also plainly states when a particular debate is beyond the scope of the book.[24] *The Fall of Carthage* also uses recent archaeological evidence[25] and experimentation[26] to illuminate ancient debates.

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[16] *Id.* at 143. Compare the "comparative narrative history" approach favored by Donald Kagan. DONALD KAGAN, ON THE ORIGINS OF WAR 9 (1995). This approach measures historical decisions in part on their outcome, including questions such as "what choices were available." *Id.* at 10. Kagan's comparative analysis faults the Romans for incurring the "price of a long, bloody, costly, devastating, and almost fatal war" because they were "unwilling to commit themselves clearly and firmly to the price of defending the peace." *Id.* at 274.

[17] *See* GOLDSWORTHY, *supra* note 1, at 183 ("It is important not to confuse modern concepts of 'popular support' with Roman.").

[18] Goldsworthy notes that "[a]ncient authors continually explain major wars as inspired by the lust for glory of kings, emperors, and princes, and we would be rash to wholly ignore this view." *Id.* at 150. However, "historians are generally reluctant to attribute important events to the moods and actions of individual leaders, preferring to seek explanation in more general trends." *Id.* at 147.

[19] *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 113 (explaining the difficulty of successful navies adapting to novel tactics by comparing the introduction of the Roman *corvus* in the First Punic War to the emergence of the aircraft carrier circa World War II).

[20] *Id.* at 19.

[21] *Id.* at 18.

[22] *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 48 (ascribing faulty assumptions as to the composition and introduction of Roman *velites*, or light infantry, to the "dubious interpretation of a single passage in Livy").

[23] *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 104 (addressing the ongoing debate regarding fleet composition and acknowledging that his choice of data is speculative).

[24] *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 158 (specific route of Hannibal's army through the Alps).

[25] *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 104 (analyzing debate over skill of Roman shipwrights in light of recent shipwreck discovery).

The Fall of Carthage relies most heavily on the best ancient sources available: Polybius, Livy, and other Greek and Roman historians in that order of precedence.[27] The lay historian will benefit from the author's detailed examination and critique of these sources, as Goldsworthy specifically references the difficulties associated with his sources throughout the text, and examines them in fine detail in relation to contentious issues.[28] He regularly explains why he chooses one interpretation over another.[29] By doing so, Goldsworthy illustrates how the differing interpretations may affect the reader's understanding of events, without interrupting the course of the narrative.[30] In addition, Goldsworthy routinely provides secondary sources on both sides of an issue when a contestable fact or assumption is presented.[31]

Goldsworthy's style impressively re-creates and maintains the suspense of the campaigns despite the reader's knowledge of the outcome.[32] He answers how the factors he identified in the introduction influenced the outcome of key events, returning the reader to the academic thesis while satisfying the reader's curiosity as to why potential outcomes were not realized.[33]

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[26] *See, e.g., id.* at 98 (archaeological evidence tested by recent reconstruction of a period Trireme).

[27] *See id.* at 20–22.

[28] *See, e.g., id.* at 199 (examining views on the roles of Varro and Paullus in the Cannae defeat).

[29] *See, e.g., id.* at 201 (discussing varying viewpoints on the positioning of forces at Cannae).

[30] *See, e.g., id.* "Such a positioning makes the movements of both armies more intelligible and will be followed here." *Id.*

[31] *See, e.g., id.* at 215–16 (discussing ongoing debate as to whether Rome would surrender if the city were besieged after Cannae). The debate began almost immediately after the battle, and Goldsworthy tells the story of Punic officer Maharbal offering to take the cavalry directly to Rome and when rebuffed, telling Hannibal "'Truly the gods do not give everything to the same man: you know how to win a victory, Hannibal, but you do not know how to use one.'" *Id.* at 215. The author's notes include multiple references for and against Livy's conclusion. *See id.* at 382 n.26.

[32] *See, e.g., id.* at 166 ("Hannibal had done what the Romans had not expected or believed impossible . . . [i]t now remained to be seen what his invading army could achieve now that it had reached its destination"), 339 (In 151 BC Rome demanded Punic submission, and "Carthage now appeared to be at their mercy, unprepared and unarmed. Yet the war was to last until 146 and prove far harder than the consuls expected.").

[33] *See, e.g., id.* at 166. Hannibal, of course, "failed to win the war in Italy," despite having "not been defeated in a single important battle" in sixteen years of campaigning in Italy. *Id.* at 244. Hannibal's strategy was doomed from the outset, for even though the "Romans were beaten and ought to have the sense to realize it," the Roman view of warfare dictated that "the Senate refused even to see" the Punic delegation. *Id.* at 217.

Goldsworthy's use of sources is neither flawless,[34] nor exhaustive,[35] but provides ample basis for further research. Those who lack a passing familiarity with the chronology and personalities of the Punic Wars, and the form and function of the Roman government of the period, should start with a review of the useful chronology, glossary, index, and other reference materials.[36]

III. Ancient Lessons for Modern Soldiers

Military scholars throughout history have sought to apply wisdom from the experiences of the Punic Wars to their time.[37] *The Fall of Carthage* adroitly explores areas of interest for the military reader that comprise the full spectrum of factors in twenty-first century warfare, including insurrection,[38] military discipline,[39] atrocities and their effects,[40] strategic and tactical initiative,[41] strategic intelligence,[42]

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[34] Perhaps the most glaring failure to identify a source is in his twice citing General Norman Schwarzkopf without reference. *See id.* at 16 ("as recently as the Gulf War in AD 1991, the UN commander claimed to have drawn inspiration for his swift and highly successful operation from Hannibal's campaigns"), 197 ("The UN Commander in the Gulf War, General Norman Schwarzkopf, claimed to have employed principles based on study of Hannibal's campaigns and Cannae in particular in the planning and control of his own brief and devastatingly effective campaign").

[35] *See id.* at 10 ("I have not attempted to provide references to the entire literature dealing in some way with aspects of these wars, nor have I included every theory or interpretation advanced by scholars . . . .").

[36] *See id.* at 369–412. These materials include notes to the text, a chronology, appendices on the republican political system and the consular army, detailed index, and sixteen maps highlighting key battles and areas of operation included within corresponding chapters.

[37] *See id.* at 16.

[38] *See id.* at 249. Roman arrogance in small unit actions were seen by Spanish tribes as a "display of strength," and allowed the small Roman forces to forge alliances with strong tribal leaders who "were able to persuade more of the tribes to join them." *Id*. On the other hand, Punic commanders in Spain "tended to concentrate on the problems of the area under his immediate control" which "frequently prevented the effective co-ordination of and mutual support between the Punic forces." *Id.* at 251.

[39] *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 50 (the punishment was death for sleeping sentries, camp thieves, and practicing homosexuals), 132 (Punic commanders were crucified after failures), 351 (Roman officers cut down routed Roman soldiers), 353 (those who plundered without permission were barred from division of spoils).

[40] *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 168 (Hannibal's "calculated display of ruthlessness" with Gallic tribes), 186 (Hannibal "deliberately provoking Romans with the savagery of his depredations"). The effects of such policies varied, in some cases displaying "the inability of the enemy to oppose him." *Id.* at 192–93. In other cases, Romans were "desperate to fight and avenge the devastation Hannibal's progress had wrought on Italian fields." *Id.* at 200.

prisoners of war,[43] and myriad other areas applicable to the modern profession of arms.

In addition, the professional warrior and casual student of military history alike will find valuable context in Goldsworthy's recounting of numerous ancient figures and folkloric events.[44] Other events are of particular interest to the military professional, including well developed sketches of the "ideal of Hellenistic generalship."[45] Goldsworthy's narrative skill juxtaposes the heroic legends of such men with their sad fates.[46] Goldsworthy also captures the timeless and peculiar sense of morbid humor on the battlefield.[47] Perhaps most poignantly, he illustrates the tragedy of soldiers cast aside by their society.[48]

The thesis of *The Fall of Carthage* contrasts the distinct Roman and Punic views of warfare: the Roman view of warfare as a mortal struggle, and the Carthaginian view, reflecting the Hellenistic ideal of war as a

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[41] *See, e.g., id.* at 153 (description of difficulties of the Alpine crossing and the Romans' shock at Hannibal's success), 176 (Hannibal took bold risks, but only on his own terms).

[42] *Id.* at 163 ("[T]he poor strategic intelligence available to commanders . . . . must always be borne in mind by modern historians attempting to analyse their decisions."). Goldsworthy supports this assertion with numerous examples. *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 162 (Hannibal and the Romans' chance encounter on march to Italy), 163 (arriving in Po Valley, Hannibal assumed that Scipio's personal presence meant that another consular army was also present).

[43] *See, e.g., id.* at 186 (Roman volunteers brought chains to use for enslaving captured enemies), 189 (those few Romans who survived at Lake Trasimene became slaves themselves after their defeat).

[44] *See, e.g., id.* at 91 (moral play of Regulus dutifully facing cruel death by torture); *id.* at 122 (Claudia's aristocratic arrogance, wishing her brother would lose another naval battle so that she might have fewer poor citizens to deal with), 145 (Fabius' famous oratory to Carthage at the start of the Second War, in which he "carried in the folds of his toga both peace and war, and could let fall from it whichever the Carthaginians chose").

[45] *Id.* at 157. The best example is Hannibal, whose martial traits included diligence, boldness, and physical and moral courage. *See id.* These traits influenced generations of leaders, including Dwight Eisenhower, whose boyhood hero was Hannibal. *See* STEPHEN E. AMBROSE, EISENHOWER: SOLDIER AND PRESIDENT 19 (rev. ed. 1990).

[46] *See* GOLDSWORTHY, *supra* note 1, at 27 (Hannibal's fate), 324 (Scipio's fate).

[47] *See, e.g., id.* at 203. "[T]he size of the Roman army was daunting, and one of Hannibal's officers, a certain Gisgo . . . commented on their superiority." *Id.* Hannibal "is said to have looked solemn and then quipped that whilst there may be a lot of Romans over there, there is not one called Gisgo . . . ." *Id.*

[48] *See, e.g., id.* at 218, 266–67, 288, 319–20. The survivors of Cannae were sent to Sicily, "not allowed discharge or return to Italy until the end of the war," and played a major role in several later battles. *Id.* at 218.

means to increase economic and political influence.[49] Goldsworthy does not compare either to later Western views,[50] but again restrains his focus to the context of the period.[51] The outcome of the Third Punic War was presaged as much by the Carthaginian view of the scope and purpose of warfare as it was by Rome's "customary stubbornness."[52] The destruction of Carthage as a physical and cultural entity may be somewhat exaggerated in the public consciousness,[53] but its destruction as a political and military entity was complete and final.[54]

Goldsworthy identifies the willingness of Roman civilians in all levels of society to bear the burdens of war as a key element of Roman resilience.[55] Goldsworthy contrasts the uninterested attitudes of the Punic aristocracy and citizens.[56] This element of the thesis is supported

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[49] *See id.* at 315. The "fundamental difference in the behaviour of Rome and Carthage when under threat" was that "the Carthaginians expected a war to end in negotiated peace," whereas "[t]he Romans expected a war to end in total victory or their own annihilation." *Id.*

[50] The U.S. view is that "[w]arfare remains a violent clash of interests between organized groups characterized by the use of force. Achieving victory still depends on a group's ability to mobilize support for its political interests . . . and to generate enough violence to *achieve political consequences*." FM 3-24, *supra* note 5, at 1-1 (emphasis added). The British view has been similar: none of Britain's wars between the late sixteenth century and the Second World War ended in unconditional surrender. *See* RICK ATKINSON, AN ARMY AT DAWN: THE WAR IN NORTH AFRICA, 1942–1943, at 294 (2002).

[51] *See* GOLDSWORTHY, *supra* note 1, at 18 (discussing analysis of decisions "within the context of the military theory and practice of the third to second centuries BC").

[52] M. ROSTOVTZEFF, ROME 64 (Elias Bickerman, ed., Oxford University Press 1960) (1927).

[53] *See* GOLDSWORTHY, *supra* note 1, at 354 ("The oft repeated story of the ground being ploughed up and the earth sown with salt to prevent future cultivation is a much later invention."). For an example of the exaggerated view, see PAUL SEABURY & ANGELO CODEVILLA, WAR: ENDS AND MEANS 10 (1989) ("Whereas the first target of nuclear weapons, Hiroshima, is today a thriving city, Carthage was erased forever by fire, sword, and Roman plows followed by men spreading salt.").

[54] *See* GOLDSWORTHY, *supra* note 1, at 357 ("Carthage the political entity . . . was utterly destroyed in 146," but "[a]spects of its culture persisted in the region.").

[55] *See id.* at 123. "The Roman élite clearly identified themselves very strongly with the state in a way which modern cynicism should not make us doubt." *Id*. The citizenry shared this commitment: "On the whole this expansion [of the army] was made possible by the willingness of ordinary citizens to submit to years of harsh military discipline and extremely dangerous campaigning." *Id.* at 315.

[56] *See, e.g.*, *id*. at 126 ("The Punic aristocracy . . . made no attempt to follow the example of the Roman élite and put their private wealth at the disposal of the state"). Punic armies were generally comprised of mercenaries and foreign soldiers, while "[c]itizens were only obliged to undergo military service to face a direct threat to the city itself." *Id.* at 31–32.

by analysis of the Roman resistance, that stiffened despite tremendous losses of citizen-soldiers.[57]

The Hellenistic model of warfare usually involved negotiated peace after a single decisive engagement.[58] The Punic Wars generated numerous major battles and, in turn, carnage on a scale "rivaling even the industrialized slaughter of the twentieth century."[59] Goldsworthy compellingly describes how the above-average casualty figure for Hannibal's victorious army at Cannae was produced partly by the "long and ghastly struggle fought to destroy the surrounded Roman host."[60] Although "[t]his phase of the battle is passed over briefly by our sources," he describes in detail the struggle not "of tactical brilliance, but of prolonged butchery," during which "Punic soldiers had to overcome their exhaustion . . . . the edges of their swords blunted by so much killing."[61]

The Fall of Carthage returns here to the peculiar Roman view of war, demonstrating how the crises caused by Hannibal's victories drove Rome to "obsessive adherence to obscure religious rites,"[62] even to the "rare recourses to human sacrifice,"[63] yet never to concede defeat and end the conflict.[64] Indeed, at no time "did the Roman Senate or any Roman commander seriously consider conceding defeat and negotiating with the enemy."[65]

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[57] *Id.* at 217. "In the first two years of [the Second Punic War], the Romans and their allies had suffered at least 100,000 casualties, over 10 per cent of population eligible for military service" *Id*. The elite were not excluded, as "at least one third of the Roman Senate had been killed in battle." *Id*. Goldsworthy's deft comparison of Cannae's approximately 50,000 Roman dead "heaped up in a few square miles of open plain" to the Somme's estimated 19,000 killed "along a 16 mile front" is particularly effective. *Id.* at 213.

[58] *See id*. at 259 ("Like any other Hellenistic state, they expected wars to be concluded by a negotiated settlement.").

[59] *Id.* at 197.

[60] *Id.* at 213.

[61] *Id.* at 212–13.

[62] *Id.* at 220.

[63] *Id*.

[64] *See id.* at 217 ("[B]y the standards of the day [Hannibal] had very clearly won the war."). Pyrrhus and Hannibal, after "inflict[ing] a string of disasters . . . . [b]oth sent ambassadors to Rome and could not understand when the Senate refused even to speak to them unless they, the victors, conceded defeat." *Id.* at 92.

[65] *Id.* at 315.

By contrast, defeats routinely motivated Carthage to seek peace.[66] Goldsworthy convincingly argues that even Hannibal, who so readily adapted to an aggressive posture, thrusting in the Roman style at his enemy's strategic center of gravity,[67] never intended to destroy or subjugate Rome.[68] The notable exception is the fierce Punic resistance in the Third War, and even then only "[w]hen the very existence of their city was under threat."[69] Goldsworthy summarizes his thesis by noting that Rome had been fighting that way from the beginning.[70]

IV. Conclusion

The Fall of Carthage has tremendous value as an accessible study of the Punic Wars. It is sufficiently reliable, well-referenced, and concise to be used as a primer by the military professional seeking a greater understanding of classical warfare. Whether for the purpose of illuminating the characteristics of ancient warfare common to modern conflicts, or providing professional development as an entertaining entrée into a general study of military history, *The Fall of Carthage* merits a place in any military professional's reading list.

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[66] *See id.* at 315.

[67] *See id.* at 145. "In the First War the Carthaginians had invariably responded to Roman moves . . . . From the beginning the Second War was to be very different and the main reason for this was the influence of one man, Hannibal Barca." *Id.* at 152.

[68] *See id.* at 217. Hannibal fought not "to destroy Rome, but for 'honour and power,' desiring to remove the limitations imposed on Carthage after the First War and reassert her dominance in the western Mediterranean." *Id.*

[69] *Id.* at 355.

[70] *See id.* at 356. Roman efforts from the outset relied on "brute force (*bia*) in all their activities, throwing massive resources into a project and expecting success through effort alone." *Id.* at 116. Goldsworthy notes, however, that by the time of the Third Punic War, this virtue had turned to a liability as inexperienced soldiers "believed . . . that success was their due simply because they were Roman." *Id.* at 334.

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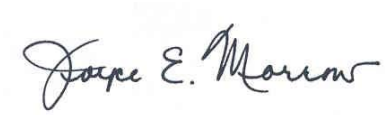

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