

If You Want to Make an Impression, Say it with a Ring: Hannibal's Brother and the Rings of
Roman Senators KIA at Cannae on the Carthaginian Senate Floor

Following the overwhelming victory at Cannae in August 216 BC, the Barca brothers Hannibal and Mago planned for the Carthaginian Senate a proud summation of the Second Roman War so far and a request for additional forces needed to achieve victory. Mago brought before the Senate the names of the many battles against the Romans, the names of killed or wounded Roman commanders, the sum of 200,000 enemies KIA, the total of 50,000 POWs taken, the Italian nations that had defected to Hannibal so far, and as the *piece de resistance*, over three *modii* of Roman equestrian and senatorial rings ostentatiously poured upon the floor of the Carthaginian Senate House (Livy 23.11-12). The intended awe inspired by the pile of rings initially had the desired effect, as the message sank in to the members of the Carthaginian Senate how many members of the Roman governing class had lost their lives, but to Mago's complete surprise and eventually Hannibal's total frustration, the Carthaginian Senate accepted the only first statement and denied the request for help, turning Hannibal's and Mago's presentation against them. This ultimately cost Carthage the war because Hannibal desperately needed more men and more elephants to wage the sort of war he knew, but Carthage insisted on waging the war half-heartedly due to a creeping suspicion that the Barca brothers planned to win the war, rule Carthage for themselves, and eliminate their rivals. The poetic irony that Polybius, Livy, Appian, and others document, but fail to analyze, is that the Barca brothers provided their enemies with the very argument they needed to deny them reinforcements, and then the Carthaginian Senate helped the Romans win the war by failing to send aid to Hannibal, thereby permitting the Roman comeback and final victory. Sophocles might call it *hubris* on both sides, but Livy would call it *Punica fides*.

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