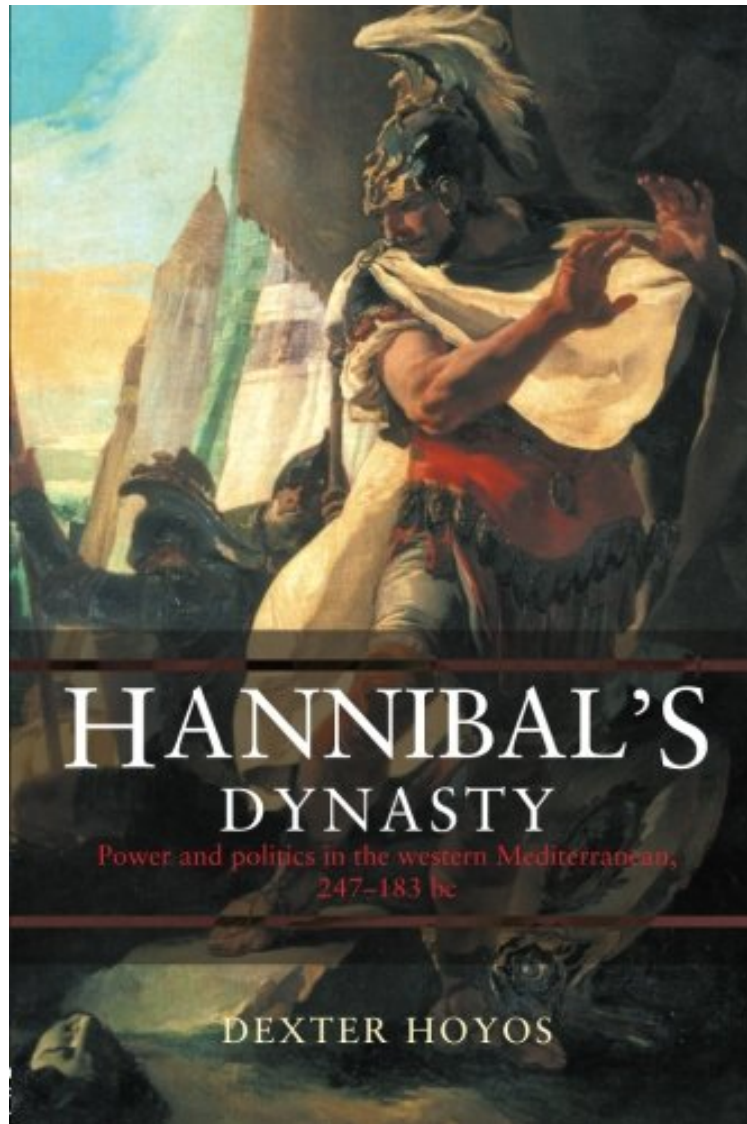


(Mobile pdf) Hannibal's Dynasty: Power and Politics in the Western Mediterranean, 247-183 BC

Hannibal's Dynasty: Power and Politics in the Western Mediterranean, 247-183 BC

Dexter Hoyos

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Dexter Hoyos : Hannibal's Dynasty: Power and Politics in the Western Mediterranean, 247-183 BC before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hannibal's Dynasty: Power and Politics in the Western Mediterranean, 247-183 BC:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Rise and fall of the Barcids...By JPSAs other reviewers have also mentioned, this is an excellent, if scholarly, book on the Barcid dynasty, and not only on Hannibal, even if the later,

unsurprisingly, gets the lions share of it some 125 pages out of slightly more than 220, without counting the appendices. It is also a book that is valuable and even original in many respects, for the light that it sheds and the interpretations that it makes, even, sometimes, when some of these may be no more the authors views or guesses. Investigating the exact relationship of the Barcid generalissimos with Carthage is a first - and very valuable - theme that runs across the whole book. In particular, the author shows that the Barcid leaders Hamilcar, Hasdrubal the Fair and Hannibal, successfully, were at the head of the most powerful political faction in Carthage for over three decades. They were not, as has sometimes been alleged, operating on their own or without the authorisation of Carthage and, as well shown by the author, the Second Punic War was not entirely Hannibals war, contrary to another older books title (from Lazenby and which happens to be very good, by the way). As the author also shows, the Barcid clan maintained its supremacy till the end and even after Carthages defeat in the second war. It is only in 195 BC, when the Romans managed to get Hannibal exiled, that it seems to have ended. Another very interesting piece, which tends to be much less well-known than the Second Punic War and Hannibal, is of course the story and achievements of the two first leaders who built Carthages new empire in Spain (Hamilcar and Hasdrubal). The author also shows with what skill they built this empire, but also, before that, how Hamilcar saved Carthage by ruthlessly destroying the mercenary revolt during a gruelling and cruel war, with plenty of atrocities on both sides. He also shows how Rome, after initially supporting Carthage, took advantage of the conflict and Carthages exhaustion to wrest Sardinia away from it, in a piece of duplicity that the Carthaginians could do nothing about. A third main theme that runs across all sections devoted to the Second Punic War shows that Hannibals general ship was far from flawless and that, however superb his victories, he never managed to deliver the decisive blow that would make the war into a Punic victory. Here, there are several aspects that are discussed and explored by the author. One is that, for all its daring and despite the ever-lasting celebrity that he achieved, Hannibals crossing of the Alps was a near disaster, and a disaster that would leave him with a reduced army that his Gallic allies could bolster in numbers, but probably not in discipline and quality. Another is that despite his three victories, and especially after Cannae, he never seriously tried to attack Rome itself or even besiege it. Here, the authors explanations, and in particular that Rome was heavily fortified, seem to fall short of the mark. Even at the time, the walls of Rome were probably quite difficult to defend given its population. Also unconvincing is the idea that Hannibal was somehow not good at sieges, with this being based on the time (about a year) that he needed to take a second order city like Saguntium at the beginning of the war. In reality, Hannibals real problem seem to have been his relative failure to incite a larger proportion of Romes allies, whether Latin or Italian, to revolt, with Etruria and Latium remaining on Romes side, so that a siege of Rome could always be threatened and broken by armies raised from these regions. It may also have been a consequence of the loss of so many of his most reliable troops when crossing the Alps, if only because the Gauls, while brave and hardy fighters, could not be expected to hold fast and carry out a lengthy siege. Yet another theme is what seems to be Hannibals apathy, for lack of a better term, with the author giving the impression that, after Cannae, the Carthaginian general was little by little pushed back, lost territory and his forces were eroded. Here again, the case made by the author is a rather powerful and convincing one. Less convincing perhaps are the explanations, or rather the lack of explanations, for Hannibals behaviour after Cannae because it seems at odds with the decisive first three years of the war when he held the initiative. He seems to have lost this initiative and was unable to either help the Carthaginians major effort to reconquer Sicily and hold onto Syracuse (of which one hears very little about in most narratives of this war) or to help his brother Hasdrubal after he had (very successfully and with hardly any loss) crossed the Alps and moved into Italy. In both cases, he seems to have been out-generaled, especially in the second one. While the author does not mention this very explicitly, the reason might be, once again, that Hannibal was just about able to immobilise half a dozen legions (or more) in Italy but could do no more than that with the limited forces that he still had. Yet another well-described piece, and another one which tends to get overlooked, is the war in Spain and the multiple mistakes made by the Carthaginian generals. This starts with their failure to operate together, allowing them to be defeated separately by the Roman forces. It continues with their inability to finish off the Roman forces after their victories and after killing their two Scipio generals (the father and the uncle of Africanus) and it ends with the remarkable campaigns and victories of the younger Scipio. What the author also makes clear, throughout the book and right up to the battle of Zama included, is Carthages willingness to fight on, despite all the defeats, and well after the loss of Spain. This attitude stands in stark contrast with the Carthaginians attitude during the First Punic War. Even after the loss of Spain, Mago the younger of the Barcids landed with an army in Liguria to carry the fight to Italy although, as the author shows clearly, the choice of location proved to be another strategic mistake since his forces were too small to make a difference and too far away from those of his elder brother for them to help each other. Interestingly, the book demonstrates that while the war was indeed won by Rome in general, and Scipio in particular, it was also lost by the Carthaginians, and by Hannibal in particular who, having failed to force a peace onto Rome when in a position of strength, seems to have largely lacked a Plan B. A final strongpoint of this book is to show that ever after Zama and the surrender and peace imposed on Carthage, the latter still inspired Romes fear that it might somehow recover yet again. Also fascinating is Hannibals exercise of power during peacetime as Suffete, his financial reforms which helped to put Carthages finances on a sound footing, and the support that he was still able to gather to this effect. There are however

three little limitations, although neither are enough to prevent me from rating this book five stars. One is the existence of multiple repetitions across the book. Another limitation is that, for some readers at least, this is a piece of (first-class!) scholarship that might put them off, even if I found it easy to read and fascinating. The third limitation is that there is perhaps not very much on the role of fleets during the war although this is partly because the sources do not focus on them as they do for the first conflict. To be fair, however, the author does provide reasons explaining the relative ineffectiveness of Punic fleets during the Second Punic War.

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Blueprint of the Barcid ascendancy to power
By B. Blanchard
This book is an excellent source for anyone who wishes to learn more about the Barca family and the dynamics of its relationship to Carthage during the first two Punic Wars. Hoyos takes all of the primary sources still available today dealing with the Punic Wars (Polybios, Cassius Dio, Livy, etc.) and pieces together the most plausible explanation for how and why the first two Punic Wars occurred. Perhaps the most important section of the book deals with Hamilcar and Hasdrubal's relationship with Carthage. Hoyos suggests that Carthage was divided into two camps (both of which desired to dominate Carthaginian politics), the Barcas and the followers of Hanno 'the Great'. This factional infighting goes a long way to explaining why, during the first and second Punic Wars, Carthage took such long periods of inaction towards Rome. Also, as stated earlier, since Hoyos takes all surviving primary sources concerning the first two Punic Wars he is able to give the most plausible narrative of the events. This is especially important because many of the primary sources contradict one another in their narratives. Naval sizes, dates of battles and other events are often confused or misrepresented in the primary sources. So what Hoyos does is to present the reader with all of the accounts and argues in favor for what he has decided to be as the most plausible account of the wars. Even if the reader does not agree with Hoyos' interpretation, since he has laid out the evidence used to come to those conclusions, the reader is able to use the same evidence to come to one's own conclusions. In short, this is an extremely valuable secondary source that can be quite helpful to anyone interested in the history of the first two Punic Wars.

Accessible and enlightening, Hannibal's Dynasty provides the full story of Carthage's achievement, going beyond the usual focus on Hannibal and military matters alone to look at a wide range of political and diplomatic issues too. Dexter Hoyos shows how the aristocratic Barcid family won dominance in the free republic of Carthage, and how they exploited family connections to lead Carthage to greatness at home and abroad. For students of Hannibal, his dynasty and his legacy - this is the book to read.

'A major new contribution: it is a work of meticulous scholarship with a novel theme ... it should figure prominently on reading lists.' - JACT
'Extremely well put together.' - BCMR