



The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic

Robert L. O'Connell

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A stirring account of the most influential battle in history For millennia, Carthage's triumph over Rome at Cannae in 216 B.C. has inspired reverence and awe. It was the battle that countless armies tried to imitate, most notably in World Wars I and II, the battle that obsessed legendary military minds. Yet no general ever matched Hannibal's most unexpected, innovative, and brutal military victory-the costliest day of combat for any army in history. Robert L. O'Connell, one of the most admired names in military history, now tells the whole story of Cannae for the first time, giving us a stirring account of this apocalyptic battle of the Second Punic War, and its causes and consequences. O'Connell shows how a restive Rome amassed a giant army to punish Carthage's masterful commander, who had dealt them deadly blows at Trebia and Lake Trasimene, and how Hannibal outwitted enemies that outnumbered him. O'Connell describes Hannibal's strategy of blinding his opponents with sun and dust, enveloping them in a deadly embrace and sealing their escape, before launching a massive knife fight that would kill 48,000 men in close contact. The Ghosts of Cannae then brilliantly conveys how this disastrous pivot point in Rome's history ultimately led to the republic's resurgence and the creation of its empire. Piecing together decayed shreds of ancient reportage, the author paints powerful portraits of the leading players: Hannibal, resolutely sane and uncannily strategic; Varro, Rome's co-consul who was so scapegoated for the loss; and Scipio Africanus, the surviving (and self-promoting) Roman military tribune who would one day pay back Hannibal at Zama in North Africa. Finally, O'Connell reveals how Cannae's legend has inspired and haunted military leaders ever since, and the lessons it teaches for our own wars. Superbly researched and written with wit and erudition, The Ghosts of Cannae is the definitive account of a battle whose history continues to resonate.

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