

Source: The Histories of Polybius V2 by Polybius □ (translated by Evelyn S. Shuckburgh 1889)

BOOK XIV

PREFACE

PERHAPS a *resumé* of events in each Olympiad may arrest the attention of my readers both by their number and importance, the transactions in every part of the world being brought under one view. However, I think the ^{144th Olympiad,} events of this Olympiad especially will do so; ^{B.C. 204-200.} because in it the wars in Italy and Libya came to an end; and I cannot imagine any one not caring to inquire what sort of catastrophe and conclusion they had. For everybody, though extremely interested in details and particulars, naturally longs to be told the end of a story. I may add that it was in this period also that the kings gave the clearest indication of their character and policy. For what was only rumour in regard to them before was now become a matter of clear and universal knowledge, even to those who did not care to take part in public business. Therefore, as I wished to make my narrative worthy of its subject, I have not, as in former instances, included the history of two years in one book. . . .

Elected Consul for B.C. 205 (see 11, 33) Scipio had Sicily assigned as his provincia, with leave to cross to Africa if necessary (Livy, 28, 45). He sent Laelius to Africa in B.C. 205, but remained himself in Sicily. Next spring (B.C. 204) he crossed to Africa with a year's additional imperium. In the course of this year he ravaged the Carthaginian territory and besieged Utica (Livy, 29, 35), and at the beginning of B.C. 203 his imperium was prolonged till he should have finished the war (id. 30, 1).

1. While the Consuls were thus engaged,¹ Scipio in Libya

¹ Caepio was commanding in Bruttium, Servilius in Etruria and Liguria. Livy, 30, 1.

learnt during the winter that the Carthaginians were fitting out a fleet; he therefore devoted himself to similar preparations as well as to pressing on the siege of Utica. He did not, however, give up all hopes of Syphax; but as their forces were not far apart he kept sending messages to him, convinced that he would be able to detach him from the Carthaginians. He still cherished the belief that Syphax was getting tired of the girl¹ for whose sake he had joined the Carthaginians, and of his alliance with the Punic people generally; for the Numidians, he knew, were naturally quick to feel satiety, and constant neither to gods nor men. Scipio's mind, however, was distracted with various anxieties, and his prospects were far from seeming secure to him; for he shrank from an engagement in the open field on account of the enemy's great superiority in numbers. He therefore seized an opportunity which now presented itself. Some of his messengers to Syphax reported to him that the Carthaginians had constructed their huts in their winter camp of various kinds of wood and boughs without any earth; while the old army of the Numidians made theirs of reeds, and the reinforcements which were now coming in from the neighbouring townships constructed theirs of boughs only, some of them inside the trench and palisade, but the greater number outside. Scipio therefore made up his mind that the manner of attacking them, which would be most unexpected by the enemy and most successful for himself, would be by fire. He therefore turned his attention to organising such an attack. Now, in his communications with Scipio, Syphax was continually harping upon his proposal that the Carthaginians should evacuate Italy and the Romans Libya; and that the possessions held by either between these two countries should remain *in statu quo*. Hitherto Scipio had refused to listen to this suggestion, but he now gave Syphax a hint by the mouth of his messengers that the course he wished to see followed was not impossible. Greatly elated at this, Syphax became much bolder than before in his communications with Scipio;

¹ Sophanisba, the daughter of Hasdrubal son of Gisco. Livy, 29, 23; 30, 12, 15.

the numbers of the messengers sent backwards and forwards, and the frequency of their visits, were redoubled; and they sometimes even stayed several days in each other's camps without any thought of precaution. On these occasions Scipio always took care to send, with the envoys, some men of tried experience or of military knowledge, dressed up as slaves in rough and common clothes, that they might examine and investigate in security the approaches and entrances to both the entrenchments. For there were two camps, one that of Hasdrubal, containing thirty thousand infantry and three thousand cavalry; and another about ten stades distant from it of the Numidians, containing ten thousand cavalry and about fifty thousand infantry. The latter was the easier of approach, and its huts were well calculated for being set on fire, because, as I said before, the Numidians had not made theirs of timber and earth, but used simply reeds and thatch in their construction.

2. By the beginning of spring Scipio had completed the reconnaissances necessary for this attempt upon the enemy; and he began launching his ships, and getting the engines on them into working order, as though with the purpose of assaulting Utica by sea. With his land forces he once more occupied the high ground overlooking the town, and carefully fortified it and secured it by trenches. He wished the enemy to believe that he was doing this for the sake of carrying on the siege; but he really meant it as a cover for his men, who were to be engaged in the undertaking described above, to prevent the garrison sallying out, when the legions were separated from their lines, assaulting the palisade which was so near to them, and attacking the division left in charge of it. Whilst in the midst of these preparations, he sent to Syphax inquiring whether, "in case he agreed to his proposals, the Carthaginians would assent, and not say again that they would deliberate on the terms?" He ordered these legates at the same time not to return to him, until they had received an answer on these points. When the envoys arrived, the Numidian king was convinced that Scipio was on the point of concluding the agreement, partly from the fact that the ambassadors said that they would not go away until they got his answer, and partly

Spring of
B.C. 203.

because of the anxiety expressed as to the disposition of the Carthaginians. He therefore sent immediately to Hasdrubal, stating the facts and urging him to accept the peace. Meanwhile he neglected all precautions himself, and allowed the Numidians, who were now joining, to pitch their tents where they were, outside the lines. Scipio in appearance acted in the same way, while in reality he was pushing on his preparations with the utmost care. When a message was returned from the Carthaginians bidding Syphax complete the treaty of peace, the Numidian king, in a state of great exaltation, communicated the news to the envoys; who immediately departed to their own camp to inform Scipio from the king of what had been done. As soon as he heard it, the Roman general at once sent fresh envoys to inform Syphax that Scipio was quite satisfied and was anxious for the peace; but that the members of his council differed from him, and held that they should remain as they were. The ambassadors duly arrived and informed the Numidians of this. Scipio sent this mission to

Scipio's ruse to
deceive Syphax.

avoid the appearance of a breach of truce, if he should perform any act of hostility while negotiations for peace were still going on between the parties. He considered that, by making this statement, he would be free to act in whatever way he chose without laying himself open to blame.

3. Syphax's annoyance at this message was great, in proportion to the hopes he had previously entertained of making the peace. He had an interview with Hasdrubal, and told him of the message he had received from the Romans; but though they deliberated long and earnestly as to what they ought to do, they neither had any idea or conjecture as to what was really going to happen. For they had no anticipation whatever as to the need of taking precautions, or of any danger threatening them, but were all eagerness and excitement to strike some blow, and thus provoke the enemy to descend into the level ground. Meanwhile Scipio allowed his

Scipio discloses
his project.

army generally, by the preparations he was making and the orders he was issuing, to imagine that his aim was the capture of Utica; but summoning the most able and trusty Tribunes at noon, he im-

parted to them his design, and ordered them to cause their men to get their supper early, and then to lead the legions outside the camp as soon as the buglers gave the usual signal by a simultaneous blast of their bugles. For it is a custom in the Roman army for the trumpeters and buglers to sound a call near the commander's tent at supper time, that the night pickets may then take up their proper positions. Scipio next summoned the spies whom he had sent at different times to reconnoitre the enemy's quarters, and carefully compared and studied the accounts they gave about the roads leading to the hostile camps and the entrances to them, employing Massanissa to criticise their words and assist him with his advice, because he was acquainted with the locality.

4. Everything being prepared for his expedition, Scipio left a sufficiently strong guard in the camp, and got the rest of the men on the march towards the end of the first watch, the enemy being about sixty stades distant. Arrived in the neighbourhood of the enemy, about the end of the third watch, he assigned to Gaius Laelius and Massanissa half his Roman soldiers and all his Numidians, with orders to attack the camp of Syphax, urging them to quit themselves like brave men and do nothing carelessly; with the clear understanding that, as the darkness hindered and prevented the use of the eyes, a night attack required all the more the assistance of a cool head and a firm heart. The rest of the army he took the command of in person, and led against Hasdrubal. He had calculated on not beginning his assault until Laelius's division had set fire to the enemy's huts; he therefore proceeded slowly. Destruction of the camp of Syphax by C. Laelius and Massanissa, The latter meanwhile advanced in two divisions, which attacked the enemy simultaneously. The construction of the huts being as though purposely contrived to be susceptible of a conflagration, as I have already explained, as soon as the front rank men began to set light to them, the fire caught all the first row of huts fiercely, and soon got beyond all control, from the closeness of the huts to each other, and the amount of combustible material which they contained. Laelius remained in the rear as a reserve; but Massanissa, knowing the localities through which those who fled from the fire would be sure to retreat, stationed his

own soldiers at those spots. Not a single Numidian had any suspicion of the true state of the case, not even Syphax himself; but thinking that it was a mere accidental conflagration of the rampart, some of them started unsuspectingly out of bed, others sprang out of their tents in the midst of a carouse and with the cup actually at their lips. The result was that numbers of them got trampled to death by their own friends at the exits from the camp; many were caught by the flames and burnt to death; while all those who escaped the flame fell into the hands of the enemy, and were killed, without knowing what was happening to them or what they were doing.

5. At the same time the Carthaginians, observing the proportions of the conflagration and the hugeness of the flame that was rising, imagined that the Numidian camp had been accidentally set on fire. Some of them therefore started at once to render assistance, and all the rest hurried outside their own camp unarmed, and stood there gazing in astonishment at the spectacle. Everything having thus succeeded to his best wishes, Scipio fell upon these men outside their camp, and either put them to the sword, or, driving them back into the camp, set fire to their huts. The disaster of the Punic army was thus very like that which had just befallen the Numidians, fire and sword in both cases combining to destroy them. Hasdrubal immediately gave up all idea of combating the fire, for he knew from the coincidence of the two that the fire in the Numidian camp was not accidental, as he had supposed, but had originated from some desperate design of the enemy. He therefore turned his attention to saving his own life, although there was now little hope left of doing so. For the fire was spreading rapidly and was catching everywhere; while the camp gangways were full of horses, beasts of burden, and men, some of them half dead and devoured by the fire, and others in a state of such frantic terror and mad excitement that they prevented any attempts at making a defence, and by the utter tumult and confusion which they created rendered all chance of escape hopeless. The case of Syphax was the same as that of Hasdrubal, as it was also that

of the other officers. The two former, however, did manage to escape, accompanied by a few horsemen: but all those myriads of men, horses, and beasts of burden, either met a miserable and pitiable death from the fire, or, if they escaped the violence of that, some of the men perished ignominiously at the hands of the enemy, cut down naked and defenceless, not only without their arms, but without so much as their clothes to cover them. The whole place was filled with yells of pain, confused cries, terror, and unspeakable din, mingled with a conflagration which spread rapidly and blazed with the utmost fierceness. It was the combination and suddenness of these horrors that made them so awful, any one of which by itself would have been sufficient to strike terror into the hearts of men. It is accordingly impossible for the imagination to exaggerate the dreadful scene, so completely did it surpass in horror everything hitherto recorded. Of all the brilliant achievements of Scipio this appears to me to have been the most brilliant and the most daring. . . .

6. When day broke, and he found the enemy either killed or in headlong flight, Scipio exhorted his ^{Hasdrubal at} Tribunes to activity, and at once started in pur-Anda, ^{see Appian,} suit. At first the Carthaginian general seemed ^{8, 24.} inclined to stand his ground, though told of Scipio's approach, trusting in the strength of the town [of Anda]; but when he saw that the inhabitants were in a mutinous state, he shrank from meeting the attack of Scipio, and fled with the relics of his army, which consisted of as many as five hundred cavalry and about two thousand infantry. The inhabitants of the town thereupon submitted unconditionally to the Romans, and were spared by Scipio, who, however, gave up two neighbouring towns to the legions to plunder. This being done he returned to his original entrenchment. Baffled in the hopes which they had entertained of the course which the campaign would take, the Carthaginians were deeply depressed. They had expected to shut up the Romans on the promontory near Utica, which had been the site of their winter quarters, and besiege them there with their army and fleet both by sea and land. With this view all their preparations had been made; and when they

Dismay at
Carthage.

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