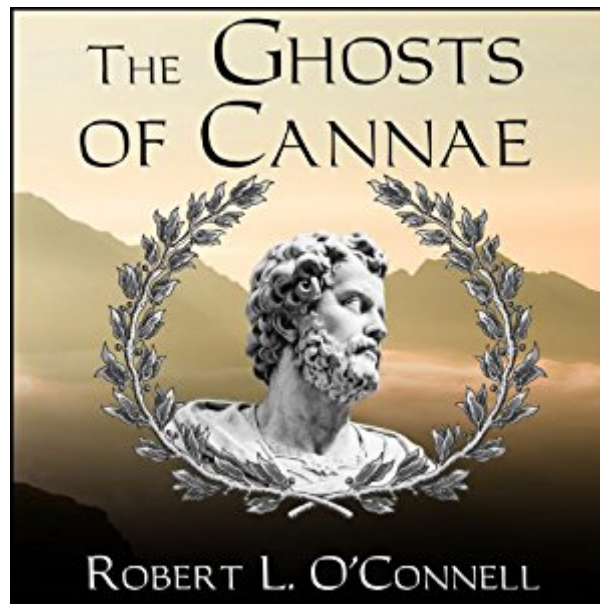


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The Ghosts Of Cannae: Hannibal And The Darkest Hour Of The Roman Republic



Synopsis

Hannibal's battle plan at Cannae became the mother of all great battle strategies - the first battle of encirclement that has been imitated (often to disastrous effect) endlessly over the past two thousand years. In this brilliant, long-overdue, and beautifully written account, Robert L. O'Connell gives listeners an epic account of one of the most dramatic battles of antiquity. The Ghosts of Cannae is at once a book about a specific battle (the massive defeat of a huge but inexperienced Roman army in southern Italy by Hannibal in 216 BC) and also an interpretation of the larger course of the Second Punic War, as well as an assessment of the historical impact of Rome's storied rivalry with Carthage. What ties the book together is the fate of the survivors, their treatment by the authorities in Rome, and ultimately their vindication nearly two decades later, when they defeated Hannibal at the decisive battle of Zama in North Africa. With an unforgettable cast of heroes and villains, The Ghosts of Cannae is history at its finest.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an interesting and easy-to-read narrative for the beginner history fan of Ancient Rome's military tactics and battles during the Punic Wars. Robert O'Connell presents an introduction to Rome's early Republic years before delving into the Second Punic War. Ancient Roman historians such as Polybius and Livy are often quoted (not that historians have a lot to go on, either) but credit must go to O'Connell for also wanting to present the Carthaginian point of view, of which many pages are dedicated. He uses his own vast knowledge to add his analysis of why certain tactics failed and others were successful. History is written by the victors and the losers just fade away. The

curious reader will want to understand why Hannibal and his followers took the route they did, why they wanted to attack Rome where they did, and why it all mattered. This is a book not just about Hannibal, but about Hasdrubal, Scipio Africanus and Quintus Fabius Maximus. Maps are included to show the progress made by Hannibal from Spain to Italy. What should have been a victory for Hannibal turned out to be a deafening defeat, and O'Connell goes into impressive analysis of why Hannibal's strategy failed. Although I can't verify all facts in this book, this is an easy-to-read and inquisitive narrative of the Second Punic Wars and the aftermath. A non-military-trained historian would be able to understand O'Connell's work. I just finished a semester of Ancient History and found this book perfect for some citations on the Roman Republic. I enjoyed this book. It is not too heavy into military tactics, nor is it too scholarly for everyman's history fan. But the author also asks the "How" and "Why" of the strategies used by the commanders and why they all failed.

Author Robert O'Connell acknowledges up front that a lack of contemporary sources from the time period limit what we know, but he makes exceptionally good use of what information is available. He explains that the Battle of Cannae during the Second Punic War was a turning point for Republican Rome (216 BC). Rome was beaten badly by Hannibal, the Carthaginian general who led his troops over the Alps in a daring and highly successful raid. But for all Hannibal's military genius and victories, he lost the war and Rome went on to become a great power. The "Ghosts" in the title refer to Roman soldiers who lost at Cannae and were exiled in shame, but later played a pivotal role when Scipio Africanus (gotta love the names!) recruited them and finally defeated Carthage. I remember Hannibal from history classes long ago but didn't recall the Battle of Cannae - even had to look up the pronunciation which surprisingly turns out to be kan-EE (the emphasis can actually be on either syllable). Hannibal really was the star of this book for me, and I found it rather boring (almost stopping for something else) until it reached his trek into the Alps. Then the book takes off and was almost impossible to put down as he explains Hannibal's military strategies, and how he adapted and took advantage of situations (like positioning his troops upwind so the dust blew in the Romans faces). While I think O'Connell tries to make the book accessible for those without much knowledge of early Roman history, some prior exposure might be useful to follow the narrative. I also appreciated that O'Connell explains the limitations on the record from that early time, and throughout debates on the merits of various records and why or why they might not be reliable. His writing style is...

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