

Scipio Africanus Major



Biography Workbook Series

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SCIPIO AFRICANUS MAJOR

(235-183 B.C.E.)

P. Cornelius Scipio, Africanus Major (“Scipio”), was the son of that P. Cornelius Scipio who was defeated by the Carthaginian general, Hannibal, at the Ticinus. If it be true that at the age of seventeen Scipio fought in this battle, and rescued his wounded father, he must have been born in 235 B.C.E.

1. Who was Scipio’s father?

Scipio was in the battle of Cannæ (216 B.C.E.) as a tribune, and was among those who, after the defeat, escaped to Canusium. Here the chief command of the remaining troops was unanimously entrusted to him and another. On this occasion it was owing to Scipio’s presence of mind that the remnants of the Roman army did not, in their despair, quit Italy.

In 212 B.C.E., Scipio was curule ædile, though he had not yet attained the legitimate age. The tribunes of the people endeavored to prevent his election, but they were obliged to give up their opposition, for the people, who seem to have perceived the

extraordinary abilities of the young man, elected him almost unanimously.

In 211 B.C.E., Scipio’s father and uncle fell in Spain (the Iberian Peninsula), and the Carthaginians again took possession of the country, which they had almost entirely lost. When Capua had fallen again into their hands, and Italy no longer required their exclusive attention, the Romans determined to act with more energy against the Carthaginians in Spain. On the day of the election, no one ventured to come forward to undertake the command in this war. Young Scipio, then scarcely twenty-four years of age, at last offered to take the command of the army in Spain. The people were struck with admiration at the courage of the young man, and gave him command, with proconsular power, which was afterward prolonged to him for several years (210-206 B.C.E.).

2. Where did Scipio volunteer to command Italian troops?

- a. Carthage
- b. Gaul
- c. Sicily
- d. Spain

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The extraordinary power which young Scipio exercised over his contemporaries was perhaps partly owing to superstition, for he was believed to be a favorite of the gods. Ever since he had risen to manhood, he went every morning into the Capitol, where he spent some hours in solitude and meditation. Hence all he did was considered by the people to be the result of his intercourse with the gods. Scipio himself partook in this opinion, and cherished it; and the extraordinary success of all his enterprises must have strengthened his belief.

3. Why was Scipio able to exercise great power over the Roman people?

Toward the end of the summer, in 210 B.C.E., or, as Livy says, at the beginning of spring, Scipio set out for Spain with an army of 11,000 men, landed at the mouth of the Iberus, and undertook the command of the whole Roman forces in Spain. He was accompanied by his friend, Lælius.

Scipio's first object was to gain possession of New Carthage, where

the Carthaginians kept their Spanish hostages. Lælius made the attack with the fleet from the seaside, while Scipio conducted the operations on land. The town soon fell into the hands of the Romans, and the generosity with which Scipio treated the Spanish hostages gained over a great number of Spaniards. The hostages of those tribes who declared themselves allies of the Romans were sent home without ransom. It is also related that a very beautiful maiden having fallen to his special lot in the division of the booty, Scipio finding her sad, inquired the cause, and learning that she was betrothed to a neighboring chief, sent for the lover, and personally restored the maid in all honor to his arms. A short time after the conquest of this place Scipio went to Tarraco, where he received embassies from various Spanish tribes, who offered to become the allies of the Romans or to recognize their supremacy.

4. Why was Scipio liked by the people living in Iberia (Spain)?

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Scipio is said not to have set out against Hasdrubal until the year following, but it can scarcely be conceived why the Carthaginians should have been so long inactive. It is a probable supposition that the battle with Hasdrubal, which Livy and Polybius assign to the year 209 B.C.E., was fought very soon after the taking of New Carthage. In this battle Scipio gained a great victory. Eight thousand Carthaginians were slain, and 22,000, with their camp, fell into the hands of the victor. Many of the Spaniards now wished to proclaim Scipio their king, but he refused the honor.

5. How many Carthaginians died in the battle between Scipio and Hasdrubal (209 B.C.E.)?

Hasdrubal fled with the remainder of his army toward the Tagus and the Pyrenees. Scipio did not follow him, partly because he thought his enemy too much weakened to be dangerous, and partly because he feared lest he might expose himself to the combined attacks of the two other Carthaginian generals, Mago, and Hasdrubal, son of Gisco.

Hasdrubal Barcas, the defeated general, however, had carried

considerable wealth with him in his flight, and with these means he raised an army in Spain. Hasdrubal did so in order to lead into Italy to the assistance of his brother Hannibal, hoping thus to bring the war to an end in Italy.

During these preparations of Hasdrubal, Scipio was engaged against the two other Carthaginian generals, one of whom (Mago) was defeated, in 208 B.C.E., by the proprætor Silanus, in the country of the Celtiberians, and Hanno, who came with an auxiliary army from Africa, was taken prisoner. After this success of the proprætor, Scipio united his forces with those of Silanus to attack Hasdrubal, son of Gisco. But as this general had retired to the south of Spain, and had distributed his army in the fortified places on the Bætis as far as Gades, Scipio (through his brother Lucius) only took the important town of Oringis, and then gradually returned across the Iberus. The power of the Carthaginians in Spain was, however, already broken, and in the year following (207 B.C.E.) Scipio gained possession of nearly all Spain by a victory, the place of which is not clearly ascertained, some calling it Silpia or Bæcula, some Ilipa, and others Carmo.

6. In what year did Scipio win most of Spain from the Carthaginians?

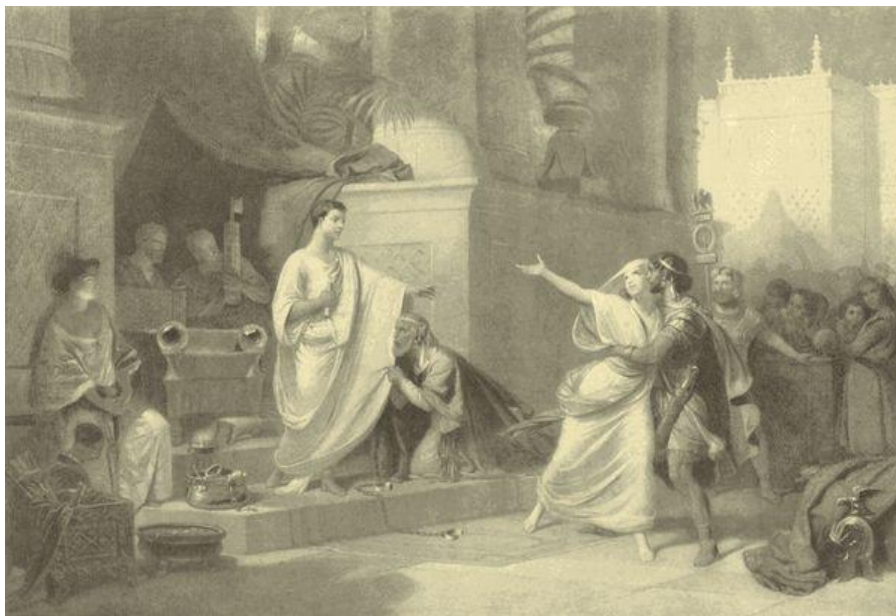
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Scipio, now in the almost undisputed possession of Spain, began to turn his eyes to Africa. Accompanied by his friend Lælius, Scipio ventured to pay a visit to King Syphax, with whom Lælius had already commenced negotiations. Here Scipio is said to have met Hasdrubal, son of Gisco, and to have made a very favorable impression on Syphax as well as on Hasdrubal.

After a short stay in Africa, Scipio returned to Spain, where he first punished several towns for their faithlessness, and subdued some of the Spanish chiefs who ventured to claim their former independence. During these occupations Scipio was attacked by a severe illness, from which,

however, he recovered in time to quell an insurrection of 8,000 Roman soldiers, who were discontented from not having derived from their conquests those advantages which they had expected, and who are said also to have been bribed by the Carthaginians. Mago had in the meantime withdrawn to the Balearic Islands, and thence to Liguria. Gades, the last place which the Carthaginians possessed in Spain, was now taken from them, and thus the war in Spain was at an end.

7. Why was there an insurrection among the Roman troops in Spain?



Generosity of Scipio.

Toward the close of the year 206 B.C.E., Scipio surrendered the command of the Roman forces in Spain to the proconsuls L. Lentulus and L. Manlius Acidinus, and returned to Rome. He delivered to the ærarium the immense treasures which he brought from Spain. He evidently wished for a triumph (a type of parade honoring a military hero), but the senate paid no attention to his wishes, for no one had ever triumphed at Rome before he had held the consulship.

In the year 205 B.C.E., Scipio was made consul with P. Licinius Crassus, who was at the same time pontifex maximus (chief religious leader), and was consequently not allowed to leave Italy. If, therefore, a war was to be carried on abroad, the command necessarily devolved upon Scipio. His wish was immediately to sail with an army to Africa, but the more cautious senators, and especially Q. Fabius, were decidedly opposed to his plan. This was partly because Hannibal, as long as he was in Italy, appeared too formidable to be neglected, and partly because they were influenced by jealousy.

All that Scipio could obtain was that Sicily should be assigned to him as his province, with thirty vessels, and with permission to sail over to Africa in case he should think it advantageous to the republic. But he

did not obtain from the Senate permission to levy an army. Scipio therefore called upon the Italian allies to provide him with troops and other things necessary for carrying on the war. As they were all willing to support the conqueror of the Carthaginians in Spain, he was soon enabled to sail to Sicily with nearly seven thousand volunteers and thirty ships.

Soon after Scipio's arrival in Sicily, he sent his friend Lælius with a part of his fleet to Africa. This was done in part to keep up the connection which he had formed there, on his visit from Spain, with Syphax and Massinissa (for to the latter Scipio had sent back a nephew who had been taken prisoner in the battle of Bæcula), and in part to show to his timid opponents at Rome how groundless their fears were. He himself employed his time in Sicily most actively, in preparing and disciplining his new army.

8. Who did Scipio send with part of his fleet to Africa?

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9. Many of Scipio’s plans, which (if successful) would have resulted in good things for Rome, were thwarted by other patricians. Most historians blame this on political and personal jealousy. If not for such jealousy, it is possible that Scipio could have triumphed over the Carthaginians much sooner, saving countless Roman lives. In your opinion, why did so many politicians allow their own petty rivalries to interfere with the goals of the Roman state? In your own country today, do politicians allow their own political and personal bickering and rivalries to detract from the business of government?

Massinissa, dissatisfied with the Carthaginians, was anxious for the arrival of Scipio in Africa, but Syphax had altered his policy, and again joined the Carthaginians. The enemies of Scipio at Rome at last got an opportunity of attacking him, and they nearly succeeded in depriving him of his post. Without being authorized by the Senate, Scipio had taken part in the conquest of Locri, in Southern Italy, and had left his legate, Q. Flaminius, as commander of the Roman garrison in that place. The legate treated the Locrians with such severity and cruelty that they sent an embassy to Rome to lay their complaints before the Senate. As Scipio, although acquainted with the conduct of Flaminius, had nevertheless left him in command, his enemies attacked him on this and other grounds, and Fabius Maximus even proposed that Scipio should be recalled.

A commission was sent out to inquire into the state of affairs and to bring Scipio home, if the charges against him were found true. Scipio proved that his army was in the best possible condition. The commissioners were so surprised at what they saw, that instead of recalling the consul, they bade him sail to Africa as soon as he might think it proper, and to adopt any measures that he might think useful.

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10. Why did Scipio find himself under investigation?

Scipio, in consequence of this, sailed in 204 B.C.E. as proconsul, with a large army, from Lilybæum to Africa, and landed in the neighborhood of Utica. Here he made successful incursions into the neighboring country, and Hasdrubal, who attempted to prevent them, suffered a great defeat. But Scipio could not gain possession of Utica, which was of the greater importance to him and his fleet as the winter was approaching. Scipio was therefore obliged to spend the season on a piece of land extending into the sea, which he fortified as well as he could.

Toward the close of the winter, the Carthaginians, united with Syphax, intended to make a general attack on Scipio's army and fleet. But, being informed of their plans, Scipio surprised the camps of Hasdrubal and Syphax in the night, and only a small number of the enemy escaped. Syphax withdrew into his own dominions, but

was defeated by Massinissa and Lælius, and taken prisoner with his wife and one of his sons. Massinissa married Sophonisba, the wife of Syphax, who had formerly been engaged to him, but had been given to Syphax for political reasons. Scipio, fearing the influence she might have on Massinissa (for she was a Carthaginian), claimed her as a prisoner belonging to the Romans, and Massinissa poisoned her, to save her from the humiliation of captivity.

11. Imagine that you are Sophonisba—engaged to one man, then given to another, then returned to your fiancée, only to be forced to commit suicide—during a time when women held no political power. What might you think of war and politics?

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The fears and apprehensions of the Carthaginians now increased to such a degree that they thought it necessary to recall Hannibal from Italy. At the same time they sued for peace. The terms which Scipio proposed would have concluded the war in a manner honorable to the Romans. The Carthaginians, however, whose only object was to gain time, made no objections to the conditions, but only concluded a truce of forty-five days, during which an embassy was to be sent to Rome. Before this truce was at an end, the Carthaginian populace plundered some Roman vessels with provisions, which were wrecked off Carthage, and even insulted the Roman envoys who came to demand reparation. Scipio did not resent this conduct and allowed the Carthaginian ambassadors, on their return from Rome, to pass on to Carthage unmolested.

About this time (it was the autumn of the year 203 B.C.E.), Hannibal arrived in Africa, and soon collected an army in numbers far exceeding that of Scipio. Hannibal first made a successful campaign against Massinissa. Scipio was at this time informed that the consul Tiberius Claudius Nero would come with an army to cooperate with him against Hannibal.

Scipio, who wished to bring the war to a conclusion, and was unwilling

to share the glory with anyone else, determined to bring Hannibal to a decisive battle. The Carthaginian general at first avoided an engagement. But when Scipio, in order to deceive the enemy, hastily retreated as if he intended to take to flight, Hannibal followed him with his cavalry and lost a battle in the neighborhood of Zama. A tribune of Scipio soon afterward cut off a large convoy of provisions which was on its way to the camp of Hannibal, and this suddenly threw him into such difficulties that he began to negotiate with Scipio for peace.

The conditions, however, which Scipio now proposed were so humiliating, that the Carthaginians would not accept them. Hannibal, therefore, though he saw the impossibility of gaining any further advantages, was compelled to decide the affair by a last and desperate effort. In a personal interview between the two generals Scipio was inexorable as to the conditions. Hannibal's army was in a bad condition. In the ensuing battle, to the west of Zama, the victory of Scipio was complete. This defeat (in 202 B.C.E.) was the death blow to Carthage.

12. What battle was the “death blow” to Carthage?

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Scipio, on his return to Italy, was received with the greatest enthusiasm. He entered Rome in triumph, and was henceforward distinguished by the name of Africanus. He now for several years continued to live at Rome, apparently without taking any part in public affairs. In 199 B.C.E. he obtained the office of censor with P. Ælius Pætus, and in 194 B.C.E. he was made consul a second time with Tib. Sempronius Longus, and princeps senatus, a distinction with which he had already been honored in 196 B.C.E., and which was conferred upon him for the third time in 190 B.C.E.

In 193 B.C.E., during one of the disputes between the Carthaginians and Massinissa, Scipio was sent with two other commissioners to mediate between the parties. But nothing was settled, though, as Livy observes, Scipio might easily have put an end to the disputes. Scipio was the only Roman who thought it unworthy of the republic to support those Carthaginians who persecuted Hannibal.

There was a tradition that Scipio, in 193 B.C.E., was sent on an embassy to Antiochus, and that he met Hannibal in his exile, who in the conversation which took place, declared Scipio the greatest of all generals. Whether the story of the conversation be true or not, the

judgment ascribed to Hannibal is just; for Scipio as a general was second to none but Hannibal himself.

13. According to a well-told story, who declared Scipio to be a great general, second only to himself?

In the year 190 B.C.E., some discussions arose in the Senate as to what provinces should be assigned to the two consuls, Lælius and L. Cornelius Scipio, brother of the great Scipio Africanus. Scipio Africanus, although he was princeps senatus, offered to accompany his brother, as legate, if the Senate would give him Greece as his province, for this province conferred upon Lucius the command in the war against Antiochus. The offer was accepted, and the two brothers set out for Greece, and thence for Asia.

Scipio Africanus took his son with him on this expedition, but by some unlucky chance the boy was taken prisoner, and sent to Antiochus. The king offered to restore him to freedom, and to give a considerable sum of money, if the father would interpose his influence to obtain favorable terms for the king. Scipio Africanus refused. But the king, notwithstanding, soon after sent the

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boy back to his father, who just then was suffering from illness, and was absent from the camp. To show his gratitude, Africanus sent a message to Antiochus, advising him not to engage in a battle until he himself had returned to the Roman camp. After the great battle near Mount Sipylus, Antiochus again applied to Scipio for peace, and the latter now used his influence with his brother Lucius and the council of war, on behalf of the king. The conditions of the peace were tolerably mild, but they were afterward made much more severe when the peace was ratified at Rome.

14. Why do you imagine that Scipio was unwilling to negotiate good terms for Antiochus in exchange for the safe return of his own son?

The enemies of Africanus at Rome had now another charge against him. The peace with Antiochus, and the conditions proposed by Africanus and his brother Lucius, were regarded by the hostile party as the result of bribes from Antiochus, and of the liberation of the son of Africanus. A charge was therefore brought against the two brothers, on their return to Rome, of having accepted bribes of the king, and of having retained a part of the treasures which they ought to have delivered up to the *ærarium*. At the same time they were called upon to give an account of the sums of money they had taken from Antiochus.

Lucius was ready to obey; but his brother Africanus with indignation snatched the accounts from the hands of his brother and tore them to pieces before the Senate. The tribune of the people, C. Minucius Augurinus, however, fined Lucius; and when he was going to be thrown into prison until he should pay the heavy fine, Africanus dragged him away. The tribune Tiberius Gracchus, though disapproving of the violence of Africanus, liberated Lucius from imprisonment. Africanus himself was now summoned before the people by the tribune M. Nævius. But instead of answering the charges, he reminded the people that it was the anniversary of his victory at Zama, and bade them

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rather thank the gods for such citizens as he.

15. Do you believe that the actions of Scipio Africanus were justified in this incident? Why or why not?

After these troubles, Scipio withdrew to his villa near Liternum, and it was owing to the interposition of Tiberius Gracchus that he was not compelled to obey another summons. The estates of his brother Lucius, however, were confiscated (187 B.C.E.), but the sum produced by their sale did not make up the amount of the fine. His friends and clients not only offered to make up the sum, but their generosity would even have made him richer than he had been before. But he refused to accept anything beyond what was absolutely necessary for his support.

16. Where was Scipio's villa located?

Africanus never returned from his voluntary exile, and he spent the last years of his life in quiet retirement at his villa. He is said to have wished to be buried on his estate. But there was, as Livy says, a tradition that he died at Rome, and was buried in the tomb of his family near the Porta Capena, where statues of him, his brother Lucius, and their friend Q. Ennius, were erected. The year of his death is not quite certain; for, according to Polybius, he died in the same year with Hannibal and Philopœmen (183 B.C.E.); according to others, two years earlier (185 B.C.E.).

In judging of Scipio Africanus as a general, we may adopt the judgment ascribed to Hannibal. But as a Roman citizen, he is very far from deserving such praise. His pride and haughtiness were intolerable to many, and the laws of the constitution were set at nought whenever they opposed his own views and passions. As a statesman he scarcely did anything worth mentioning. By his wife Æmilia, daughter of Æmilius Paullus, he had two daughters, one of whom married P. Cornelius Scipio Nasica Corculum, the other, the celebrated Cornelia, married Tiberius Sempronius

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Gracchus, and was the mother of the two Gracchi, the famous tribunes of the people.

17. Do you agree with the conclusion that pride and haughtiness make for a bad citizen and political figure? Why or why not?

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Africanus
Antiochus
bribes
Carthage
charge
command
expedition

general
Hannibal
negotiate
ratified
Scipio
Senate
Spain

18. Examining the life of Scipio, what would you most like to emulate in your own life? What would you most like to avoid? Explain your reasoning.

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