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Hannibal and the Italian Cities

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Rome's victory in the Second Punic War paved the way for her conquest of the Mediterranean. Yet that victory is bound up with Hannibal's failure in Italy, even though he brought Rome to her knees in the early stages of the war. Previous explanations for the failure of Hannibal's strategy have tended to stress either the hopelessness of this strategy, because of the loyalty of Rome's Italian allies and their willingness to be integrated into the Roman system, or the success of Rome's counter-strategy of attrition, aimed at limiting allied revolts while wearing down Hannibal's forces (see J. Lazenby in T.J. Cornell, et al., *The Second Punic War: A Reappraisal*; the debate fundamentally framed by G. De Sanctis, *Storia dei Romani* 3.2). Previous scholarship, however, neglects an important dimension of the question of the failure of Hannibal's strategy; that is, the significance of local conditions, especially local diplomacy and inter-municipal rivalries in shaping the course of the war. Ultimately, Hannibal's strategy was incapable of dealing with the complex matrix of local diplomatic ties and rivalries.

The following example will prove suggestive. Naples and Nola, two cities with close diplomatic ties, had a history of hostility toward Rome, fighting against her during the Second Samnite War. However, both cities remained loyal to Rome during the Second Punic War, despite repeated overtures by Hannibal. Meanwhile Capua, with a history of loyalty to Rome dating to the Samnite Wars, and enjoying the privileged status of *civitas sine suffragio*, rebelled to Hannibal during the Second Punic War. Capua was a regional hegemonic power (M. Frederiksen, *Campania*), and the argument that convinced the Capuan senate to rebel was that an alliance with Hannibal would yield an extension of Capuan territory and power (Liv. 23.6.1, 10.2). After rebelling, Capua attempted – without Hannibal's assistance – to capture Cumae (Liv. 23.35.1-19), and the people of Nola requested a Roman garrison specifically for fear of an attack by the Capuans (Liv. 23.19.4). These events suggest that the decision of a city to remain loyal to Rome or to revolt was rooted, at least partly, in local diplomatic concerns. In effect, by gaining Capua as an ally, Hannibal may have strengthened the loyalty of other Campanian cities fearing Capuan aggression. Second, Capua and Nola-Naples consistently opposed each other in different conflicts from 4th through 3rd centuries, regardless of their relationship with Rome during those conflicts. This suggests that some inter-municipal rivalries were long lasting, and persisted well after initial Roman conquest.

The evidence for inter-municipal rivalry is the most clear for Campanian cities; however, similar patterns of local rivalry are

visible selsewhere in Italy, especially in Apulia and Magna Graecia. By shifting the focus of the war from Rome or Hannibal to local conditions, the Second Punic War, with its significant corpus of ancient evidence, can be used as a window for exploring local municipal concerns generally overshadowed in the sources.