

Caput II. Varro Fights with Hannibal

The speaker of this account of the Second Punic War, jaw-jaws of persons and places; from the perspective that you are familiar with the daily fric-and-frac of Roman life. This orientation provides a sense of immediacy and freshness in the telling

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unus homo nobis cunctando restituit rem
One man, by delaying, restored the state to us
Quintus Ennius
A writer of Republican prose and poetry

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Cum alterum iam annum Hannibal in Italia esset, neque Romani ei usquam resistere possent, dictatorem populus creavit Quintum Fabium Maximum ¹, hominem prudentissimum. Isque muros et tures urbis confirmare et praesidia disponere iussit: "Italiam amisistis," inquit, "urbem vero et domos adhuc defendere potestis." Itaque plures per menses Romani pugnam evitare

Tum demum pertaesum est eos bellum tam diu trahi; itaque Gaium Varronem ², hominem e populo, ad consulatum sustulerunt. Isque ferociter in patres invectus est; es dixit statim vincere quam diu imperare malle. Itaque octo legionibus coactis Hannibalem in Apuliam persecutus est

Diris tamen omnibus di Romanos monuere, malum quoddam insigne instare. Namque lapidibus pluit: defluit de statutis sanguis; gallina cecinit; homines de caelo tacti sunt

Aemilius igitur, qui Varroni collega in consulatu erat, Fabium consuluit. "Spero quidem," inquit, "omnia feliciter eventura; sed cum videam collegam meum tutis consiliis celeria praelaturum; timeo ne temeritas eius magnum quoddam malum nobis adferat"

Tum Fabius: "duo certe certamina tibi, Luci Aemili ³, erunt, unum cum Hannibale, alterum cum Gaio Varrone ⁴, quorum utrum maius adferat periculum, nescio. Uno ratio belli contra Hannibalem gerendi ea est, qua ego gessi: quod utinam nostril ex eventu ne discant ! stultorum iste magister est. Sed idem tui, quod hostium milites volent: idem Varro consul Romanus, quod Hannibal Poenus imperator cupiet. Duobus ducibus unum te resistere oportebit"

Varro tamen sententia sua non cessit

- Footnotes:**
- 1 Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus** with the agnomen of **Cunctator**. Roman statesman and general. Though Fabius had had a distinguished civic career: consul five-time, dictator twice and censor once; he is remembered for his generalship against Hannibal. The conferred agnomen is usually translated as 'the Delayer.' Hannibal's force was larger in number with disciplined troops. Fabius in response attacked supply lines, ambushed and, harassed the opposing force. This approach was denounced as non-warlike, but its effectiveness was proven. For Fabian's tactics were those of guerrilla warfare: a smaller force wearing down a superior force. Cunctator had been a dishonour, it was now an honour
 - 2 Gaius Terentius Varro** was a plebian by birth, but rose as a populist politician. He was elected consul in the year 216 BCE. As Consul, Varro led a Roman Army against Hannibal. He was decisively defeated at the Battle of Cannae. (**Lucius Aemilius Paulus**, co-Consul, was wounded. He was offered a horse to escape, but chose to remain on the battlefield. Aemilius died a Roman hero.) Varro escaped with 4,500 soldiers out of an initial force of 85,000 troops. Varro marched his men to Canusium, to join waiting troops. Rome, on hearing the defeat, was in a state of panic. Varro was re-called to Italy. Varro, on arrival in Italy, was greeted as a hero for his resolve to continue to fight. Varro held a succession of appointments at Apulia and Picenum. He then quelled a rebellion by the Etrurian town of Arretium. Varro does not feature in the remainder of the Second Punic War. He disappears from history. How he ended his days is not known, but Varro was a survivor. Maybe, he died as an old man, in his bed
 - 3 Luci Aemili**, a familiar reference to: **Lucius Aemilius Paulus** . See footnote 2
 - 4 Gaio Varrone**, a familiar reference to: **Gaius Terentius Varro**. See footnote 2