

The first challenge to Roman domination in Spain

Hannibal's excuse for attacking Saguntum

All Roman historians agree, with respect to Saguntum, that the treaty Rome made with Hasdrubal in 228 B.C. contained two essential elements, i.e.: 1) that the extreme limit of Carthaginian expansion to the North East was to be the Ebro; and 2) that although Saguntum lay south of the Ebro the Carthaginians had to abstain from incorporating it within their expansion and to respect its independence¹.

In spite of this second element Hannibal in 219 actually attacked Saguntum and when Roman ambassadors came to remonstrate and to ask him to withdraw he not only did not comply with their request but even refused to give them an interview. And when the envoys went to Carthage in Africa, the Carthaginian Senate, after hotly debating the matter and in spite of one party strongly objecting to the attack on Saguntum, by a majority vote, decided to uphold Hannibal. Although at an interview they had given to a previous Roman embassy the Carthaginian Senate had repudiated Hasdrubal's treaty with Rome as not having been ratified by them², still, the fact that the matter was long

1 Cf. Livy, 21, 2: «Cum hoc Hasdrubale, ... foedus renovaverat populus romanus, ut finis imperii esset amnis Hiberus, Saguntinisque mediis inter imperia duorum populorum libertas servaretur». Livy's words make it clear that Saguntum lay south of the Hiberus. In 21, 5 (sub fine), Livy, looking at the Ebro from the Roman territory which lay north of the river writes: «et iam omnia trans Hiberum praeter Saguntinos Carthaginiensium erant». *Trans Hiberum*, for anyone looking from the north side of the river, means south of that river.

2 Cf. Polybius, 3, 21, 1.