

PUBLIUS CORNELIUS SCIPIO "AFRICANUS"
THE MAN AND THE MODEL

by Greg DiFranco

The Man -

It was 211 BC and the two most powerful city-states of their time were locked in the mortal combat of the Second Punic War. It was the wealthy maritime power of Carthage pitted against Republican Rome. By now Carthage had brought Rome to the brink of total destruction, and arguably to the lowest point in its history. Hannibal and his fellow commanders had successfully defeated many Roman armies, and had completely annihilated a number of them in the process. Most notable was Hannibal's annihilation of one of the largest armies Rome had ever assembled (70,000 troops) at the battle of Canne. Many of Rome's most prominent citizens were lost in this battle, as in keeping with Republican Roman tradition, the most important citizens fought in the front ranks. The city of Rome itself was left almost helplessly exposed and was in chaos with the expectation of a siege. And if things weren't desperate enough for the Romans, the Carthaginians now took complete control of Iberia (Spain), one of the most important economic areas of the region. In the process two of the most highly respected and admired Roman commanders were killed on the same day, they were the Scipio brothers.

Although Rome fielded formidable armies, armies that in fact had beaten Carthage in the first Punic wars, they were proving no match for Hannibal's troops and tactics. Rome fielded a non-professional citizen army with rather static legionary tactics based on breaking the enemy's center, and without a strong cavalry contingent. On the other hand, Hannibal had successfully trained and honed an array of professional foot and mounted troops from African, Iberian (Spain) and Celtic stock, into a superior fighting force capable of flexible tactical maneuvers. To this he applied brilliant tactics, including classic flanking maneuvers the Roman legions were unable to counter.

Somehow, in the middle of the carnage that was Rome's defeat at Canne, the young son of Scipio the Elder managed to survive. In an unprecedented move, the desperate Romans elected this young patrician to lead the remnants of the Roman army in Spain, he was just in his early twenties. Young Scipio immediately exhibited an uncanny ability for leadership and quickly set about retraining and improving the moral of the defeated Roman army of Spain. With the winter season as his respite, Scipio began laying plans for correcting the Roman legions weaknesses, and laying the groundwork for an army that could match Hannibal's. No detail was left unattended, from the complex work of adding flexibility to legionary level tactics, to strengthening man to man fighting techniques, to details such as which sword would be most effective in close quarter combat. But Scipio's abilities were not limited to tactical activities, he also quickly grasped the strategic significance of his position and saw a risky but critical opportunity.

Because the three Carthaginian commanders in Spain, Mago and the two Hasdrubals, were at odds they had separated themselves at such a distance that none could quickly

support the other. To them however, there was little to fear from the remnants of the defeated Roman forces in Spain who were to be lead by a twenty-year old! Here Scipio devised a perilous plan, which is now considered to be one of the brilliant military maneuvers of ancient history. He organized a joint land and sea operation to slip by and allude the unsuspecting Carthaginian armies and attack the most important commercial city of the Carthaginian colonies, New Carthage (Cartagena). Cartagena was the center of Carthaginian coinage and was extremely wealthy, in fact it contained the monetary and military stores of the Carthaginian armies. The Carthaginians would never in their wildest imagination have predicted an attack on New Carthage from what was left of the Romans.

Scipio's long-standing friend, Laelius, led the sea operation to box in the city and Scipio the land. The land side was assaulted by the legionnaires with ladders but the unsuspecting Carthaginians provided a tough defense and the land side siege faltered until a weakness in the defenses was discovered. This was a relatively undefended section of the sea side of the city, which was approachable only by a lagoon. Late in the day it was discovered that the lagoon was low enough for foot assault, and here Scipio attacked the walls. The city was quickly overcome.

Needless to say the Carthaginians were shocked at the loss of New Carthage, but expected little more opposition from Scipio. However the Roman victory at New Carthage was just the beginning of the reversal of Rome's fortunes in the war and the first victory of Scipio's brilliant career. Scipio went on to defeat Mago and the Hasdrubals in other classic battles ending all Carthaginian opposition in Spain, and in the process perfected his improvements to the legions. These included the critical flanking tactics in which portions of the legion could maneuver to the flanks in the thick of combat. Also, Scipio created allies from enemies with his magnanimous and magnetic personality, solidifying alliances with Masinissa and in the process gaining critical horsemen for Scipio's forces. Scipio went on to lead the Romans in the defeat of Carthage, culminating in his victory over Hannibal at Zama (thus Africanus). But the unpredictable and magnanimous Scipio then successfully protected Carthage from total annihilation and Hannibal from execution, against vehement Roman opposition in the Senate. He was one of the few who understood that the total destruction of Carthage was not in Rome's best interest as it would too drastically alter the balance of power in the Mediterranean. Scipio then exhibited his indomitable nobility by continually turning down the public's pleading to make him King in favor of preservation of the Republic.

It is fair to say that Scipio's transformations and improvements to Roman arms laid the ground for the mighty military machine that brought Rome to world dominance over the next 100 years. It is somewhat bewildering that, in the modern English speaking world at least, he is almost an obscure figure while Hannibal is so well remembered. I guess it is not uncommon for the vanquished to be more remembered than the victors. Throughout history however Scipio was one of the most admired men of the ancient world, with cults even forming in his name. I have sort of taken on the task of trying to re introduce him to the Military Model world.

The Model -

It would not come as a surprise to my friends that I have tremendous admiration for Scipio, and he is one of my favorite people from history. My admiration comes not only from Scipio's brilliance as a military commander, but also for his nobility, few people in history have walked away from so much power in favor of their country, and few have been so altruistic in their motives.

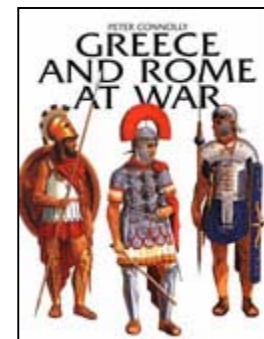
Ever since seeing the Sovereign mounted Roman General kit, and the excellent horse it came with, I have thought of converting it to Scipio. However, not having any reference on his facial features soured my interest. Unfortunately at the time of the Punic Wars it was not common for people to have busts of themselves made, and the only one I found of Scipio was as a much older man. To me it seemed pointless to create an historical personality figure when I had no idea how he looked, it would be more like a fantasy figure? However, my friend and ancient history scholar Mike Smoleski fixed this when he obtained for me the classic book "Scipio Africanus, Soldier and Politician" by the noted historian Scullard. To my excitement, the book contained pictures of coins with Scipio's profile which were minted at the time of the New Carthage victory. I immediately set to



sketching out what the model would look like. I always find it especially helpful to sketch out a picture for any original or major conversions. These sketches become like design drawings which I constantly refer to while building up the model. For those who can't draw, a

mock up using Historex components or even a stick figure will do.

My idea was to depict him right after the victory at New Carthage, by the edge of the lagoon and raising the standard of the wealthy city to his victorious troops arrayed before its walls. I also wanted to give him a distinctly Republican Roman look as opposed to the more commonly seen costume of commanders of the Empire. For research into his armor and costume I relied heavily on Peter Connolly's now classic book, "Greece and Rome at War". This has good primary source information as well as excellent drawings of the Punic War period. There were other details I worked in which were unique to Scipio's person. Such as the emblem of the Scipio's patrician family, a description of which is in Scullard's book. It consists of lightning bolts and a staff, which I chose to sculpt on Scipio's breast armor. Some other details were found in the classical "The War with Hannibal" by Livy which described Scipio as having very long hair at the time of New Carthage for instance (probably in deference to the Spartans).



To create the model I first created a mannequin by stripping all detail from the torso and pelvic sections of the Sovereign General and carving them down with a motor tool. I carved enough material off to allow room to build up putty later. The kit's legs were

unfortunately dressed in pants, but I liked the boots so much that I carved off the pants down to the boots which I left in tact. I re-sculpted the leg muscles in A&B putty. For the head I found a spare head from the old Amati Tournament Knight kit to be just the right size and a reasonable resemblance to Scipio. This face is beautifully sculpted and has the added benefit of having no crown on it so I did not have to remove any unwanted helmets or hair, etc. One thing to be careful of when changing heads on figures is to carefully match the size of the head to the body. Too many conversions I have seen have heads that are two small or large for the body. Don't be fooled by the advertised scale, even within the same scale the head sizes vary so much that you really need to test the head first for a proper match.



As usual I first tacked the various components of the figure together to determine the pose, and uncover any anatomical problems. Then I glued the legs, pelvis, torso, and a temporary head together to finalize the pose, this is one of the most critical phases, since a poorly posed or anatomically incorrect body cannot be corrected easily later. Also, I glued a brass rod pin in the groin of the pelvis and a mating whole in the top of the saddle blanket. This keyed the two pieces together to allow a good match when sculpting the toga skirt and the cloak where they meet the saddle.

I thought the horse for the Sovereign kit would require only minor adjustments, but they proved to be more tricky than expected. First, I felt the horse's head was too long in the snout for my liking so I cut it in half by the nose strap and removed some of the metal. I then pinned the two pieces and epoxied them back together and reformed the muscles with some A&B putty. I also felt the legs were too short for this figure and wanted to change the way they were pointed. Horse legs look more natural, as with humans, when they are pointed slightly away and off-parallel from each other, especially the rear horse legs. I cut each leg off at the shoulder and then cut each leg in two. After lengthening the legs by inserting a brass rod pins, epoxying and filling the gap with A&B, I reattached the entire leg to the body with pins and epoxy. All gaps, and the shoulder muscles were resculpted with A&B putty. Two unforeseen problems occurred. The putty in the leg gaps cracked, and I had to fix them by running some Super-Glue into the gap and wiping it clean. Also, the rear quarters of the horse did not look correct with the outwardly turned legs, so I had to resculpt the hindquarters. For lessons learned, when lengthening limbs on lead kits you need to insure a real solid attachment at the pinning point, soldering is best but more epoxy might have worked also. The super glue has luckily held up so far however.

I next enhanced the harness with embossed disks and an armor plate, which were scratchbuilt from putty. Details hanging on the leather straps were either sculpted in putty or modified from Historex spare parts. The embossed disks on the horse's shoulder and back harness are actually photo-etched pieces from a DollHouse furniture kit that happened to fit perfectly. I added some flowing tassels to the saddle blanket cut from wire, to enhance the effect of blowing wind.

Scipio's face was modified to recreate the likeness of Scipio found on the coin from New Carthage. The main changes being the addition of new eyes, hair, and changes to the



nose and chin. These were build up with Duro putty, and then any defects smoothed over with Hobby Putty brushed out and thinned with liquid plastic cement (don't do this without good ventilation). The helmet was next sculpted, the basic form in A&B putty, sanded to shape. The helmet is a Corinthian style that was popular with Roman officers of the time. It has been "Romanized" with the wreath and figure detail of the Roman mythological figures Castor and Pollux. These were sculpted in

Duro and a piece of thin wire super glued around the crown. The base of the crest was crafted from sheet plastic with details in Duro, and the horsehair crest itself was carved from a piece of balsa wood with the upper edge roughed up, which had the perfect "in-scale" texture of horse hair. The feathers were made from thin sheet plastic with the edges scraped thin with a modelling knife. I like to use Duro for sculpting details because of its wax-like consistency, which holds detail well. I find using a bit of linseed oil on my tools allows the Duro to smooth out without sticking, and the oil absorbs into the putty while drying so that there is almost not residue left. In order to get small amounts of Duro to stick it is usually necessary to first apply a small drop of Super Glue or to clean the section with lacquer thinner.

Anatomically the biggest challenge to me on the figure was the length and musculature of the arms. As I became aware, a straight outstretched arm is not as easy as it looks to sculpt. It is easy to make it too straight, and too long or short. Needless to say, I lengthened and shortened the arm two or three times before I was happy. The hands and arms on the Sovereign kits are very good, and I used as much of them as possible, although some of the muscles had to be resculpted. Next I sculpted the toga in Duro, being careful to insure a good match between the skirt and the saddle blanket. The hanging sleeves of the Toga were made from lead foil, stiffened with Super Glue and then folds sculpted on to it in putty. For the waist Pteryges I sculpted the bottom layer in Duro and the top layer was added from pieces of sheet styrene. The sword was scratchbuilt from styrene and putty for the details. I chose to have Scipio wearing the short semi-armor breastplate, which was sculpted in A&B putty and sanded to shape. Details, such as the Roman She-Wolf and hinge ornaments were added in Duro.

The cloak was a challenge because it could not be sculpted directly onto the figure's body as I wanted it to drape over the rear of the horse. To solve this I made the cloak in two sections, a top section which was sculpted right onto the figure and the bottom section which was sculpted separately. The bottom section was sculpted by first rolling out a thin sheet of Duro putty in-between plastic sheets which had been coated with powder, and letting it set up or semi-cure. Then it was cut to size and shape and dry fitted over the figure and horse. It was temporarily tacked to the figure and allowed to fully cure. I propped up the "flying edge" with a small ball of clay to create a look of a blowing sea breeze. When fully cured, additional folds were sculpted on in Duro and then the piece was removed until later. It was not attached until after the figure was painted and assembled onto the horse, and at that time additional putty was applied to

blend the top and bottom pieces of the cloak together. Duro can be blended into itself when linseed oil is used on the tools and the edge of the wet putty is pressed into the cured Duro.

All horsehair, including the helmet tail, was made from colored cotton thread (embroidery floss), which is found at craft or sewing shops. The brand I use is manufactured in France under the name “DMC – Coton a broder 8m”. There seems to be two camps when it comes to creating horsehair, those who like the sculpted look and those who like the “hairy” look. Before I discovered embroidery floss I usually avoided the “hairy” look because most available material is out of scale. But to me embroidery floss is thin enough to appear in scale and I like the color variety it comes in. To use it you first unravel and tease it out with an old toothbrush and then cut off clumps. The short clumps are used for the mane and the long ones for the tail, keeping one end uncut and frayed. For the mane, I next attach the cut end of the thread to a thin wire with white glue and then epoxy the wire to a groove pre-carved in the top of the horse’s neck. For the tail, I collect varying longer lengths of the hair and glue them together at the cut end with white glue. Once dried most of the glued end is inserted into a pre-drilled hole in the horse’s rump. Finally I “styled” the hair by brushing in linseed oil, which is the best agent I have found to hold the threads in place without making them stick together and ruin the effect. Over time the linseed oil dries, which helps to hold the threads in place so they do not fray out, such as crepe hair tends to do.



Before painting began I had to determine the color combinations. There is no information on what colors Scipio might have worn, and the research on the color of Roman military clothing is uncertain at best. During the Republican period most historians acknowledge that there was more individuality than uniformity. This allowed me some artistic license in determining the colors of Scipio’s costume, but within historical constraints. I wanted to stay with primary colors, which seems to have been the Roman preference, but avoid the ubiquitous red. I also wanted to work purple into the costume to represent Scipio’s patrician status. I found it most useful in this instance to make a line drawing chart of the uniform and experimented with various color combinations until I found the one I like best. I included the horse’s color in the chart, as this was important to the overall effect.

I decided that his tunic would be best painted black rather than a bright color to contrast with the richly decorated white standard of New Carthage, with the idea that it would help signify Scipio's underdog status at New Carthage.

The figure was first gray primed, and then undercoated in acrylics. I finished the tunic in acrylics (Jo Sonja's), black with a brownish gray for the middle tones and highlights. All



skin areas were painted in oils, with some linseed oil mixed into the painting medium to enhance the sheen or flesh. I have no set formula for flesh, as I like to experiment with various mixtures. In this case I used a base of Rembrandt Flesh Ochre, Gold Ochre, Titanium White and Vermilion. For shading I use Burnt Umber for the cooler areas and Burnt Sienna with a bit of Indian Red for the warmer areas of the body. Highlights were painted using Naples yellow and white, and Alizarin Crimson was mixed in for the lips

and a touch of Prussian blue for the beard area. One thing to remember when painting human skin is that different areas of the body are different colors. For instance notice that the inner skin of the arm is grayer than the backside and of the hands are pinker. Also, there are details in the body that many painters forget. On the arms I added veins by painting subtle blue/flesh lines and adding a slight shadow below. To simulate body hair on the arm and legs I mixed a bit of burnt umber into the flesh and brushed it into the wet flesh paint without blending, this allowed small streaks to remain. The key to painting body hair is to keep it subtle, any attempt to paint straight brown, or worse, individual hair lines, would have been completely out of scale and ineffective.

Painting the armor held a unique challenge since no bronze paint I had tried was acceptable, bronze paint tends to be much too grainy. However, when I discovered Phil Kessling's technique the problem was solved. Phil's method is to first undercoat the area in a good low grain gold paint, such as Printer's Ink Gold, or in this case from a "Pilot" Gold Leaf Pen. After drying, the gold is overpainted with two or three thin coats of Liquitex Iridescent Bronze acrylic paint. When first applied this paint looks lumpy and horrible, you could not imagine that it would dry to such a metal like appearance (I still haven't figured out how Phil decided to use it). It dries to a beautiful bronze metallic appearance. All that is necessary is to then pick out the details with Burnt Umber oils.

The horse was painted completely in oil paints, in this case burnt sienna mixed with a touch of orange and white as the base color. White and Naples Yellow were added for the highlights and Burnt Umber for the shadows. Veins were painted into the legs by lining in slight highlights and shadows, and nodules were painted on the inner leg. I prefer oil paint for horses because the finish is very effective in recreating the look of horsehair. The minute brush strokes and the sheen of dried oil paint are a realistic representation of horsehair. You can use the texture to your advantage by working the brush strokes into the same direction as horsehair would be.

The saddle blanket was painted in purple pelican plaka with oil paint shadows. Since this purple is such a vibrant color, only limited highlights were necessary, I concentrated on varying degrees of middle to dark shadows to get the value transition. The gold tassels

were painted in acrylic yellow ochre mixed with burnt umber, and when dry a light dry brushing of metallic gold paint was added.

For the base I chose to place Scipio in the shallow area of the lagoon in front of the walls of New Carthage. I first carved out part of the surface of the wooden base to allow for a recessed look. The lagoon floor was then sculpted along with the sandy beachhead and rocks from A&B putty. This was painted in acrylics, the stones getting a wash or two of raw umber oil paint. The beach sand was painted in a light brown/cream color, and not yellow. Next holes were drilled and the horse was dry fitted to the base, with putty sculpted around the hooves before the horse was finally epoxied to the base. I was not completely sure how the surf would look so I took photos of the ocean surf in order to study how it flows around rocks, etc. Note that the surf is flowing back from the shore, and forward from the other side, with the foam flowing in opposite directions. The water is made from three layers of Envirotex (clear casting resin), the last or "wave" layer being

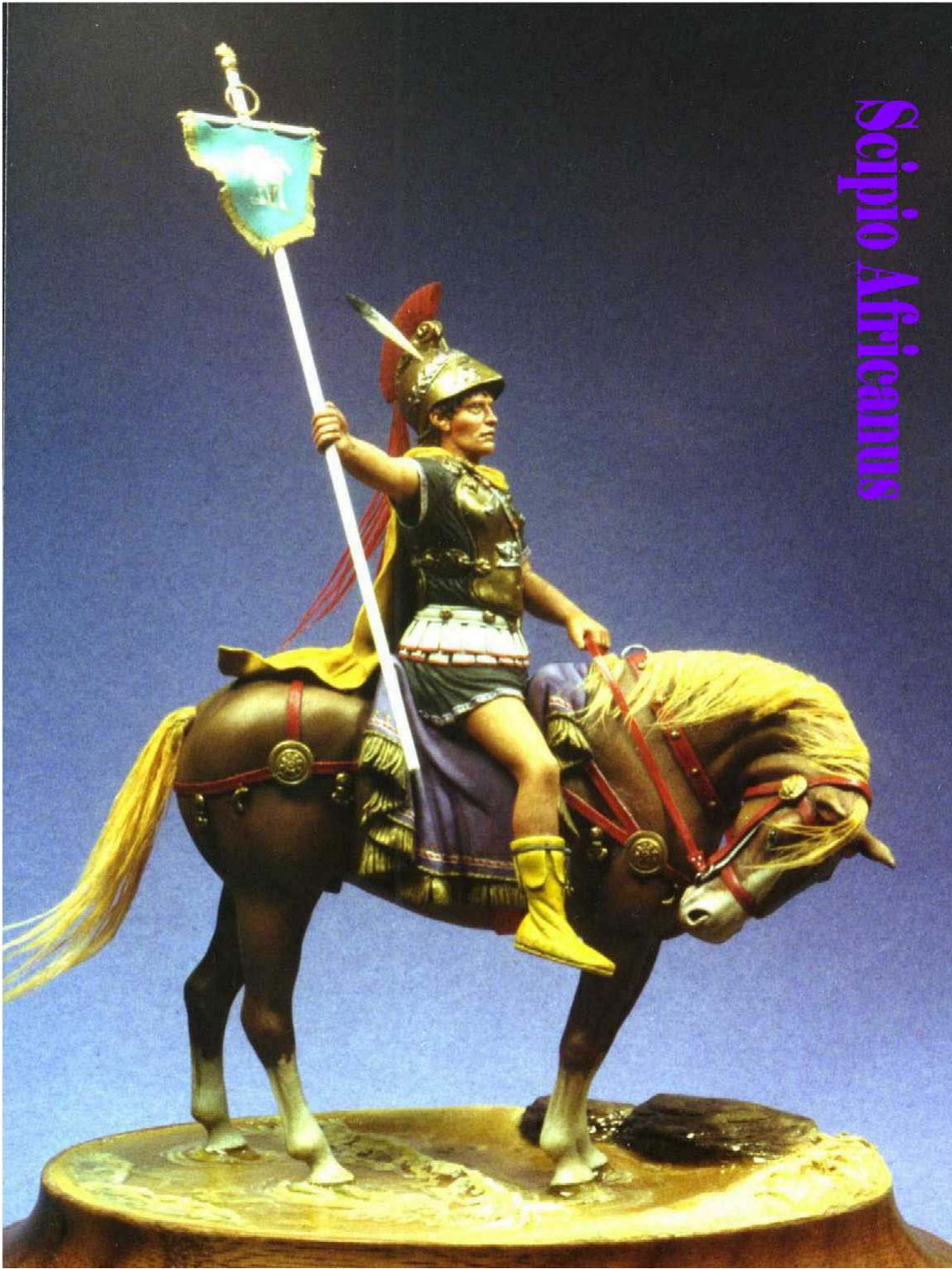


formed by creating a barrier with acid free clay such as Sculpy. Then all water details were sculpted with Acrylic Gel and painted in oils. The location and movement of the white foam was important in indicating the various flow of water. The white foam is actually a very light grayish brown color, stark white being much too unrealistic looking.



The figure was finally epoxied to the horse, and the bottom half of the cloak added as described earlier. The cloak was painted with Humbrol Yellow mixed with a touch of German Purple, with Hull Red mixed in for the shadows. The final task was to add the reins and the Carthaginian standard. The reins were made from cut pieces of paper impregnated with white glue and attached to harness rings made from pieces of wire bent around a circular object. The Carthaginian standard was made from a rolled out piece of Duro, which was allowed to dry over forms to get the flowing look. This was attached to poles made from brass rod. The ornate tip of the pole was made from Historex parts. I painted the standard in aqua blue, a color used by the Phoenicians which Carthage was a part. Then the horse/palm tree/moon emblem was painted in acrylics, and finally a thinned out gray oil paint washed into the shadows. There is little evidence left of how the Carthaginians looked, but thanks again to the coin minters, there are Carthaginian coins that survive with this emblem.

Making this figure for me was more of an experience than a model-making project. I thought about it for years and it consumed many hours, as my wife can attest. But I could not rest until it was out of my system, and overall it was a great modelling experience in which I learned a tremendous amount. In the end, my favorite models are the ones I learn the most with and successfully tackle new challenges. What's next, something with Napoleon and Josephine, maybe I'll finish it by the 2000 show!



Scipio Africanus