Just as the rebel leaders hoped, the massacres at Hippacra re-energised their war. With the temper of the conflict now hugely embittered, talking and any scheming for peace disappeared. They were able to sharpen resistance to Hamilcar in the field, even though they themselves dared not face him directly. As the year 239 advanced, the war-situation would shift in their favour.

Some days after the bloodshed, Carthaginian heralds came to the camp to ask that the bodies be handed over for burial. The heralds came via Tunes under safe conduct or else from Carthage by sea to Hippacra. This response was surely no surprise to the rebel leaders. Heralds, messengers protected by sacred conventions, were at times the only way for warring enemies to communicate. Tellingly, for one side to ask the other to be allowed to gather its dead was a token of humiliation. That the Carthaginians were willing to offer this shows how concerned they were to ensure proper rites for Gisco and his fellow-victims.1

For Mathos and his confrères, it meant an extra opportunity to heighten the propaganda of frightfulness. They did not harm the heralds—hardly from lingering scruples, but because they wanted to send back a message. They announced that they would receive none in future, nor any envoys. If any did come, they would be handled in the same way as Gisco and his fellows. The gesture, though not

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1 Carthaginian appeal for the bodies: Pol. 1.81.2; Diod. 25.3.1 (largely or entirely from Polybius). La Bua (1966) 237, and Loreto (1995) 104 n. 91, hold that these two accounts are so different in detail that Diodorus cannot be directly using Polybius (‘divergenza che conferma la non derivazione del secondo dal primo’, as Loreto puts it); in fact the two versions are remarkably close (as La Bua’s own quotations show, 237 n. 17). Cf. Hoyos (1999), under ‘Sources’. ‘Some days later’: allowing two days for word to reach the city, at least one for the citizens and authorities to react, and two for the heralds to travel. Heralds: Mosley (1973) 81, 84–9. Polybius writes ‘heralds’ (κηρύκας), Diodorus ‘a herald’ (κηρυκάς). Normally only one herald was sent on an errand (cf. Mosley, 84–5); King Darius, though, had sent at least two each to Athens and Sparta before 490 (cf. Herodotus 7.133–6). Maybe one herald went to the Hippacra camp and one to Tunes, if Mathos, generally seen as the rebel chief, was there.
the added threat, was a recognised one. To refuse to receive heralds, messengers whose sacred function was universally recognised, was a gesture of defiance, announcing war à outrance. Polybius does not point this out, surely because it seemed obvious. The Ten Thousand Greeks marching through the Persian empire in 399 had voted just such a decree—interestingly enough, to prevent enemy agents from trying to corrupt the troops. Some ‘heraldless’ wars did, in reality, continue to have heralds active, but in this one the leadership firmly enforced the ban. In turn, their threat to kill by mutilation was an extra refinement to underline (to their own men as much as to the enemy) their uncompromising defiance. The war, by virtual definition, was indeed now a ‘Truceless War’.²

This pronouncement was, it seems, made by the generals on their own authority. But they followed it up by reconvening the army-assembley to issue the formal threat already mentioned—one intentionally bloodcurdling. ‘They made a decree and exhorted themselves’ to torture and kill all future Carthaginian prisoners in Gisco’s fashion. With captured allies of the Carthaginians, they would cut their hands off and send them to the city in that state. ‘This decision, moreover,’ Polybius states, ‘they persisted in practising carefully.’ The decree’s context, as noted above, is still the army in camp outside Hippacra, but Polybius’ comment shows that it was obeyed by all rebel forces. It must have been ratified by the forces at Tunes—still much the largest body of rebels. Its plain intent was to extend indefinitely the rebellion’s bonding through blood. Carefully obeyed, it was in effect a ritual for reinforcing participants’ complicity in unrelenting war—a ritual of which Mathos, Spendius and Autaritus were the secular priests. Thus the killings and maimings would never stop, nor would Carthaginian retaliation. In this way, at the cost of much suffering, the leaders riveted home their control of the movement. The drama at Hippacra was in effect their second coup against doubters and potential rivals, one no less successful than the first.³

² Heralds and envoys banned: 1.81.3; Diod., ibid.; cf. Prologue, n. 4. Resolution by the Ten Thousand in 399: Xenophon, *Anabasis* 3.3.5, δόγμα ποιήσωσθαι τῶν πόλεμον ἀκάρπωτον εἶναι; but they did not firmly keep to this in practice.
³ Rebel decree: 81.4 (‘exhorted themselves’, παρῄνεσαν αὐτοῖς); Diod. 25.3.1, ἐνοχύφθησαν, ‘legislated’ (sometimes treated as evidence of Diodorus using a different source: cf. Chapter 24).