PART THREE

LIMITATIONS
Hans Burgkmair’s *Battle at Cannae* of 1529 presents an image of violent warfare (See figure 8, also in color section). The painting is congested with clashing bodies, the landscape largely obscured by the battle, which occupies a full two-thirds of the panel’s height. The opposing armies attack each other on foot and from horseback in three rows stacked one upon the other. The image resembles a mosaic of bodies and limbs, some wielding swords and standards, while others lie unrecognizably twisted or crushed underfoot. Flashes of red, ocher and white on banners and costumes serve as the only relief from an otherwise dingy palette of steely gray and muddy brown, tones that evoke the turbulent sky and riverbed terrain of the historical battlefield. Small inscriptions in Roman capital letters are scattered across the painting’s surface. These tiny labels name the participants in the action—the leaders ANIBAL, LUCIUS AEMILIUS PAULUS, TERENTIUS VARRO, and their troops, the NUMIDIER, AFRICANI, GALLI, HISPANI, ROMANI—as well as geographic markers for the city VENUSA and the River AUFIDUS. In larger capitals at the top left of the panel, the words CLADES. ROM. AD. CANNAS. appear in the sky identifying the painting’s subject: the defeat of the Romans at Cannae.

The *Battle at Cannae* depicts the decisive defeat of the Romans by Hannibal during the Second Punic War in 216 B.C. The Carthaginian commander Hannibal had led a huge army across the Pyrenees into Gaul, and continued marching with elephant chargers over the Alps into Upper Italy with the aim of delivering the peninsula from Roman control. In attempting to thwart Hannibal, the Roman armies of Terentius Varro and Aemilius Paullus aggressively fought him at Cannae (now Canne) near the mouth of the Aufidus River (now the