

The Punic Wars Begin

Once the Romans completed their wars of conquest across the Italian Peninsula, they found themselves facing opposition from outside Italy. After acquiring the Greek colonies of southern Italy, for example, the Romans found themselves in control of the island of Sicily, off the coast of the toe of the Italian boot. (Sicily was the site of both Greek colonies and trading posts occupied by the Carthaginians.)

With their takeover of Greek trade colonies in Sicily, the Romans inherited a long-standing rivalry between the Greeks and the Carthaginians. This competition led the Romans to fight a series of wars with the Phoenicians of Carthage. Since the Romans referred to the Carthaginians as the Punic, their word for Phoenicians, the wars became known as the Punic Wars. In all, the Romans fought three such wars with the Carthaginians over a 120-year period.

The Carthaginians were a formidable foe. As a Phoenician colony located in modern-day Tunisia, Carthage was the centerpiece of an extensive trading empire which stretched throughout the entire western Mediterranean Sea. Founded around 800 B.C., the colony and its satellites had been doing business for hundreds of years prior to the rise of the Romans.

In fact, business was such an important part of life in the Carthaginian Empire, that the government of the city-state was an oligarchy, consisting of 30 royal merchants who served as the power base of the Carthaginian Senate.

The civilization established by the Carthaginians was one based on prosperity and luxury. The Phoenician religion, however, had a reputation for the gruesome practice of child sacrifice. Such rituals involved the unthinkable acts of slicing the throats of infants and young children, placing them on an altar, and then dropping the bodies into a fire dedicated to a Phoenician-Canaanite god. All this took place at a holy site called a *topheth*, which was a combination temple altar and fiery furnace.

The First Punic War began in 264 B.C. with the invasion of the Roman army onto the island of Sicily, following an appeal from the city-state of

Messana. There the Romans engaged the Carthaginians in battle. This first of the Punic Wars was to last an entire generation, covering the years from 264–241 B.C.

To ensure an ultimate victory in this war, the Roman Senate was prepared to spend as much money as it might take and sacrifice as many troops as needed. As a result, Roman losses against the Carthaginians were staggering: at least 250,000 men and 500 ships were lost by the Romans in this single Punic war.

But victory did come. With it, the Romans gained control of the island of Sicily. In addition, the Carthaginians were forced to pay war damages to the Romans amounting to millions of dollars in silver. With the annexation of Sicily, the Romans were later able to take over from Carthage the neighboring islands of Sardinia and Corsica.

Within a generation of the end of the First Punic War, the Romans conquered additional territory in northern Italy. In 222 B.C., a Roman army defeated the Gauls in the Cisalpine region, north of the Po River.

Within 50 years, the Romans had extended their power considerably. They controlled, by the end of the 3rd century B.C., 120,000 square miles of territory, extending from southern Italy to the Alpine region, as well as the Mediterranean islands of Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica.



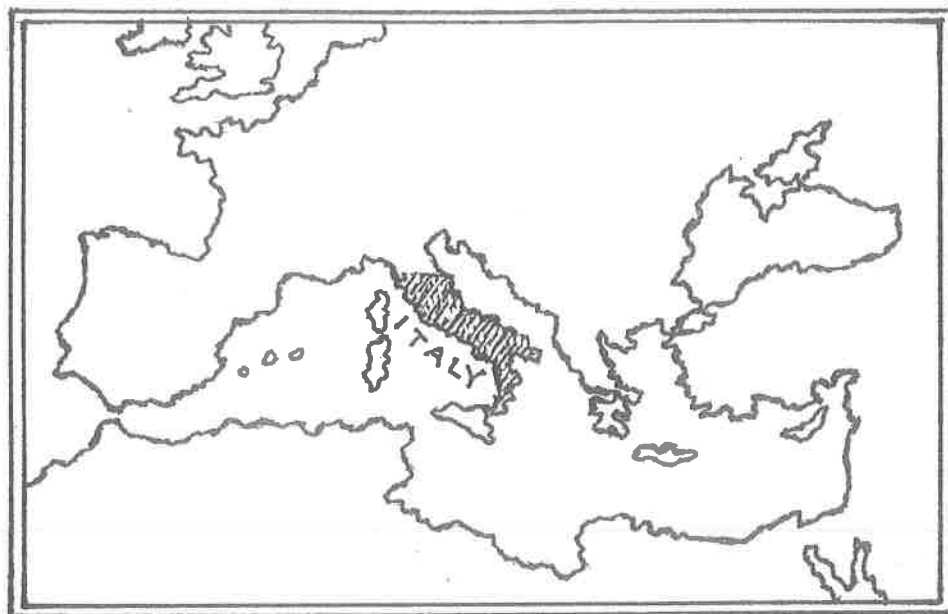
Review and Write

Describe the culture and society of Carthage on the eve of the First Punic War.

Rome vs. Carthage: A Map Study

Prior to the First Punic War, Rome had come to control the entire Italian Peninsula south of the Po River. Following the war, and over the generation to follow, the Romans expanded their presence outside the Italian Peninsula. The Roman army made this expansion possible.

The Carthaginians, prior to the First Punic War, controlled a vast western Mediterranean trading empire, which included territory in northern Africa, the southern portion of modern-day Spain, and various islands in the Mediterranean, including Corsica, Sardinia, the Balearic Islands, and part of Sicily.

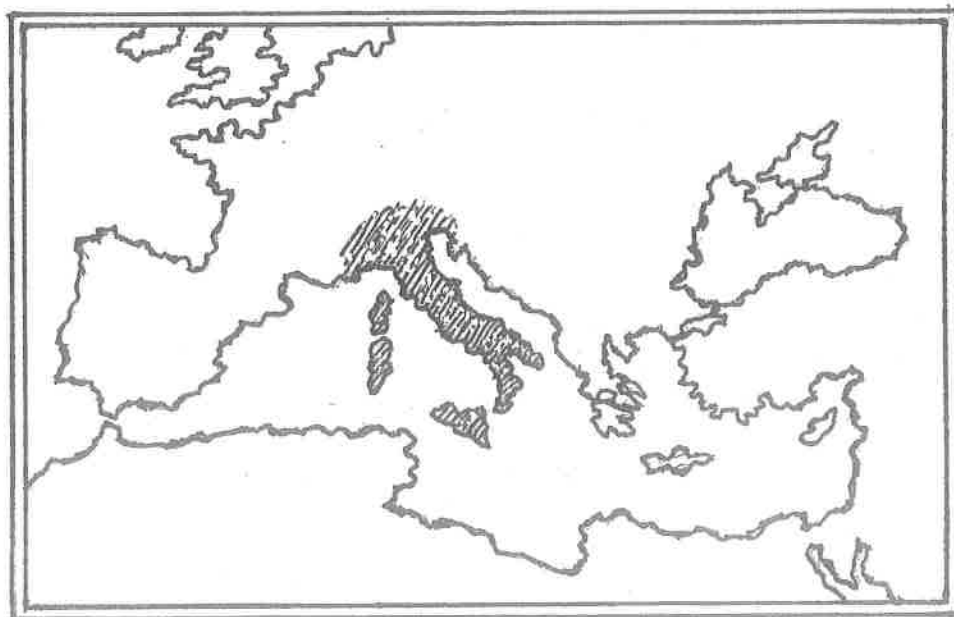


Map Exercise I

The map at the left shows the extent of Roman domination prior to the outbreak of the First Punic War (261–241 B.C.). Using additional sources, shade in the lands which were under Carthaginian control in 261 B.C. (Use a colored pencil.) Also, identify on the map each of the following: Rome, Sicily, Syracuse, Carthage, Corsica, Sardinia, and Cisalpine Gaul.

Map Exercise II

This map is dated just prior to the beginning of the Second Punic War (218–201 B.C.). What territories in northern Italy and throughout the Mediterranean Sea did the Romans come to control by 219 B.C.?



Review and Write

1. What regions of control did the Carthaginians still maintain after the First Punic War?
2. How important were the losses of Carthaginian islands in the Mediterranean Sea to the Carthaginians?

A Defeated Carthage Rebuilds

During the First Punic War, the Carthaginians suffered because they could not find a strong, capable general who could win battles against the Romans—not until the rise of a general named Hamilcar Barca (huh MIL kahr BAHR kuh). Hamilcar was made leader of a Carthaginian army in Sicily in 248 B.C. and fought brilliantly. If only he had been born sooner, the Carthaginians might have won their war with the Romans.

For years, Hamilcar fought the Romans successfully, never losing a land battle to them. He raided the Italian coast repeatedly and dashed across Sicily so swiftly that the Romans had trouble keeping up with his whereabouts.

However, ultimately, the Romans won the war even though they never defeated Hamilcar. They defeated the Carthaginian naval fleet in 242 B.C., forcing an end to the war. Hamilcar himself helped negotiate the peace in 241, bringing the First Punic War to its conclusion.

Despite Carthage's defeat in this war, General Hamilcar never forgot that he had not lost a battle to the Romans. His hatred of the Romans continued long after the First Punic War was over. As Rome continued its expansion into the Mediterranean Sea after the end of the war, it targeted and gained control of the islands of Corsica and Sardinia. This was only possible for Rome to accomplish as long as Carthage was weak.

With the threat of Rome growing even after the end of the First Punic War, Hamilcar soon realized that Carthage would have to fight Rome a second time. But Carthage would need to be strengthened. To ensure a stronger Carthage, Hamilcar placed himself in Spain to lead an expedition. Hamilcar's army expanded Carthaginian power in southern Spain. He established new cities, such as Barcino (BAHR shi noh), which he named for himself. Today, it is known as the city of Barcelona. However, in 228 B.C., his campaigns were cut short with his death.

A son-in-law to Hamilcar, Hasdrubal (HAS droo bal) continued where his father-in-law had left off. He extended Carthaginian

control over additional Spanish tribes. He founded a city which he named Carthago Nova. In Latin, it meant "New Carthage." (Today, the city is known as Cartagena.)

Through these years, the Romans were preoccupied with their own campaigns in Italy, especially in the Cisalpine Gaul region. They did not pay much attention to what the Carthaginians were doing in Spain. By the time they realized that Carthage had once again become a powerful force in the Mediterranean, it was nearly too late.

Rome did manage to force Hasdrubal to agree to limit Carthaginian power in Spain to the region south of the Ebro River. The Carthaginians also agreed to allow independence to the Greek city-state of Saguntum (suh GUN tum), which was located 80 miles south of the Ebro.

The threat of Hasdrubal was soon eliminated, however. In 221 B.C., he was assassinated. In his place, another Carthaginian general rose to the front. He was the son of Hamilcar Barca. His name was Hannibal.

From his youth, Hannibal had been taught to hate the Romans. As a boy, his father had taken him to Spain on a military campaign. Raised in the art of war, Hannibal became a skilled soldier and leader. He would prove to be a great challenge to the Romans in the years ahead.

Although only 26 years old when Hamilcar died, Hannibal assumed control of Carthaginian forces in Spain. In 219 B.C., despite early Carthaginian promises to the Romans, Hannibal began to lay siege to the city of Saguntum. When Saguntum appealed to the Romans for help against the Carthaginians, the Roman Senate responded immediately. In a short time, this conflict between Rome and Hannibal escalated into the Second Punic War.



Hannibal

The Second Punic War Begins

When Saguntum fell to Hannibal in 219 B.C. following an eight-month siege, the Romans sent a delegation to him to protest the military takeover of the city. Hannibal treated them with disrespect and refused to respond to their concerns.

The Romans responded with war. With the outbreak of the Second Punic War in 218 B.C., Hannibal was prepared to do battle with the Romans. He began developing a strategy which was to take him to Italy where he nearly brought about the destruction of the city of Rome itself.

Hannibal amassed a huge army of over 90,000 men and began a lengthy march from Spain to Italy. Accompanying Hannibal's army were 40 elephants, which he used to carry supplies and equipment.

Hannibal crossed over the Ebro River in the fall of 218 B.C. and headed north. He knew the Romans were expecting him to sail his forces to northern Italy and they sent an army there to meet him. However, Hannibal decided to take his forces by land through the high, snow-covered mountains known as the Alps.

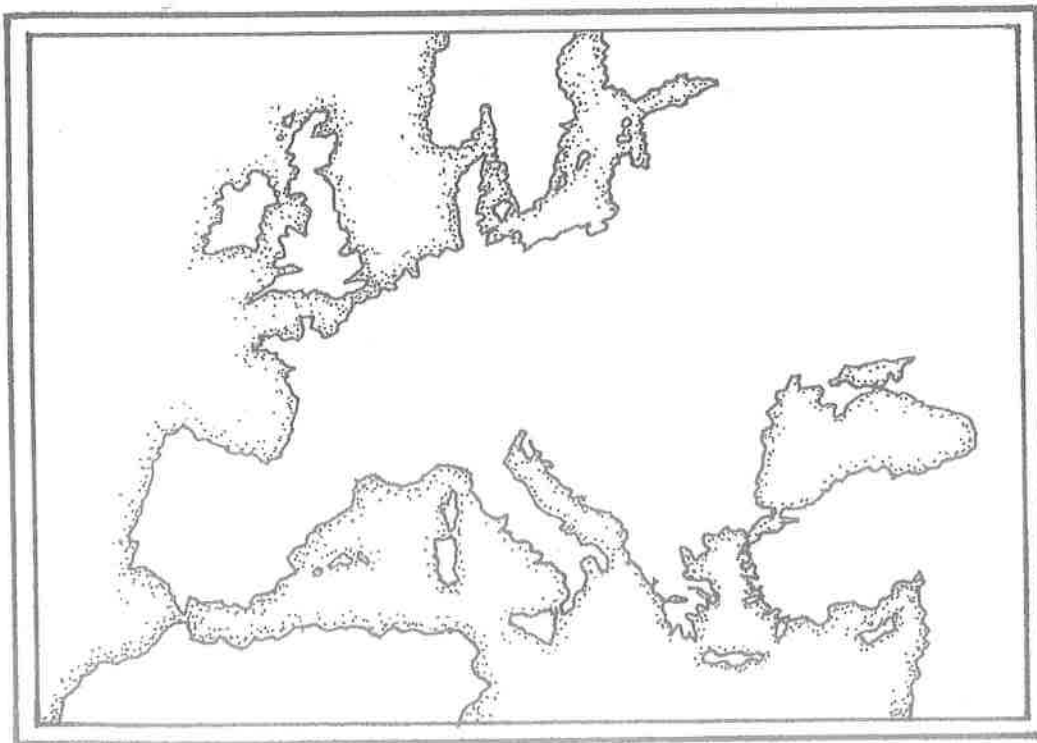
Hannibal's campaign was a treacherous one. His army was unaccustomed to the cold and snow of the mountains of south-central Europe. Thousands of

Hannibal's men succumbed to the wintery weather. To protect his elephants from the cold, Hannibal had special woolen blankets to cover them. Tribes of warriors native to the Alpine region fought Hannibal as he worked his way through the many snowy mountain passes.

This campaign proved nearly disastrous to Hannibal. All of his elephants died except one. The trek through the Alps took many months. Only one out of three of the men who began this campaign remained alive when Hannibal's forces emerged from the mountains into northern Italy. There he met 26,000 Roman forces and defeated them.

His greatest victory came in 216 B.C. when he defeated the Romans in the battle of Cannae, located south of Rome on the Adriatic coast. Thirty thousand Romans lost their lives at Cannae. Although this was an important victory for Hannibal, it did not bring about absolute defeat for the Romans.

For the next 15 years, Hannibal campaigned throughout Italy, ravaging the Italian Peninsula and defeating the Romans in battle repeatedly. In 211 B.C., Hannibal's army came to within one mile of the city of Rome, but never saw it fall.



Map Exercise

On the map, draw a line showing the route Hannibal took from Spain to Italy. Then locate the following on the map: the Ebro River, Saguntum, Carthago Nova, Carthage, Rome, Cannae, the Alps, the Mediterranean Sea, the Po River, Sicily, Corsica, and Sardinia.

The End of the Punic Wars

No Roman general in Italy was able to stop Hannibal during 15 years of fighting. At best, the Carthaginian general could only be slowed in his relentless campaign. One Roman general known for his delaying tactics was Fabius the Delayer.

The Roman army constantly harassed Hannibal's forces, making it hard for his army to stay supplied. This required great resolve on the part of the Roman army to fight on continually without letting up.

However, not until a Roman general left Italy and sailed straight for Carthage itself did Hannibal decide to abandon Italy and his countryside campaign. The general was named Publius Cornelius Scipio. He was named for his father who led Roman armies in Spain.

Scipio the Younger took control of Roman forces in Spain in 206 B.C. He met the enemy there in the battle of Ilipa (IL ih puh) in southwestern Spain. Although outnumbered, Scipio won the battle, having surprised the Carthaginians with a dawn attack.

With Scipio's success, the Carthaginians were forced to abandon Spain. The Romans in Italy also realized they had a great general who might be able to meet Hannibal head on. In 205 B.C., Scipio traveled to Rome where he was hailed as a great hero. This young general (he was only 32 in 205) was soon elected as a consul of Rome despite the fact he was, by law, too young to hold the political office.

In spite of Hannibal's longtime presence in Italy, Scipio decided not to fight him there. Instead, he decided to lure him off the peninsula. In 204 B.C., Scipio set sail with his army for northern Africa. Soon, Scipio joined forces with former Carthaginian allies and began menacing the city of Carthage.

Desperate, the Carthaginians sent word to Hannibal to come to their rescue. But before he could arrive, the Carthaginians negotiated a truce with Scipio. Before the truce was officially ratified, Hannibal landed in northern Africa. The Carthaginians broke the truce and the stage was set for war between Scipio and Hannibal.

The battle took place at Zama (ZAY muh), a town located about 100 miles southwest of Carthage. The battle began on October 19, 202 B.C. Hannibal used 80 elephants in the fighting, beginning the battle with an elephant charge. However, as they ran toward the Roman line, they were frightened by the

enemy's trumpet blasts and turned about, rampaging into Hannibal's cavalry. Confusion took place among Hannibal's forces.

Scipio's men took advantage of the confusion and began advancing against the Carthaginians and their allies. The enemy began melting away until only

Hannibal's most seasoned veterans were left, those who had fought alongside him in Italy. Hannibal's army was in shambles. The battle of Zama was a Roman victory, the only battle lost by the great Carthaginian general.

The Second Punic War was over and the Romans were victorious. Under the peace treaty that followed in 201 B.C., the Carthaginians were stripped of all power. Hannibal survived his loss at Zama and was made ruler of a newly humbled Carthage.

Yet this did not mark the end of conflict between the Carthaginians and Rome. Although Carthage never regained full power, it did become prosperous in the 2nd century B.C. By 150 B.C., certain Roman senators decided that Carthage was once again too powerful.

The result was the Third Punic War (149–146 B.C.). This war resulted in the utter destruction of Carthage at the hands of bullying Rome. In the end, the Romans ordered the dismantling of the city, and the 55,000 occupants of Carthage were sold into slavery. Even the fields around Carthage were sowed with salt so they would never again be fertile. Following this victory, Roman power would experience much change.



A coin depicting two Roman soldiers

Review and Write

Using additional sources, describe the battle of Zama in 150 words.