

The Punic Wars

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Introduction

In 264 BC,¹ the first of a series of conflicts between two powers in the Mediterranean erupted, which would become known as the Punic Wars. Primarily an ongoing struggle between Rome and Carthage, with various fluid allies on either side, it would rumble on for over a century and end with the destruction of Carthage (the city and its empire).

In this discussion we will be taking a broad overview of the three wars, with a particular focus on the second war as it was the most important in the long term. We will examine the state of affairs before the First Punic War, and then move on to look at each war in turn. Finally, we will discuss the immediate aftermath of the Third Punic War, and the implications this had for the balance of power in the Western Mediterranean.

The nature of warfare in this period means that, despite the length of time covered, there were long periods of inactivity — for example it was usual for the majority of battles to take place during the spring and summer months. As a result, we will skip over these periods and focus instead on specific events of importance – particularly the two crucial battles of the Second Punic War.

Background

The name of the wars comes from the fact that many of our sources are either Roman or sympathetic towards Rome, and would therefore have seen these conflicts as wars against, and possibly started by, the Carthaginians.² *Punic* was a cultural stereotype used by the Romans to refer to the ethnicity of their opponents, rather than the city-state of Carthage, and it is unlikely that the Carthaginians would have referred to themselves as such. Pro-Carthaginian sources, and most Greek historians, referred to the Second Punic War as the Hannibalic or Hannibalian War, after the Carthaginian general.³

Rome

By the time of the First Punic War (264-241), Rome was well-established as the main power in the Italian Peninsula. Having ejected the last king in 509, Rome established a republic, with the Senate, a collection of rich and powerful individuals, as the main decision-making body.⁴ Executive authority

¹All dates are BC unless otherwise indicated.

²A similar naming convention can be found with the Peloponnesian War, due to the majority of available sources being Athenian and seeing the conflict as a war against the Peloponnese.

³Polybius 1.3.

⁴The Senate could trace its roots back to the founding of Rome, but it was largely an advisory council to the monarch before the republic, and to the emperor from Augustus onward. Although the Senate did not pass legislation – a role left to the assemblies – its control over money and foreign policy meant that in practice it was the decision-making body of the Roman Republic, until the rise of Caesar and Pompey.

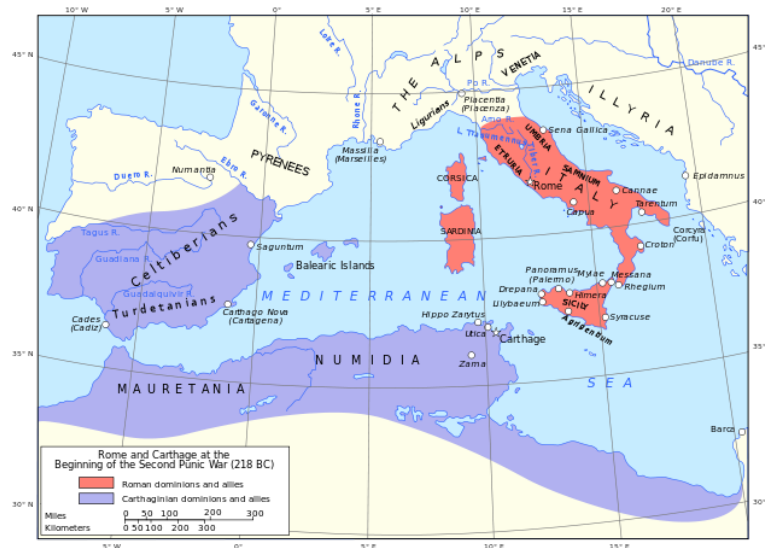


Figure 1: Locations of Rome and Carthage (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Punic_War)

was vested in the magistrates, including the two consuls who had command of the armies.⁵ The fact that the consulship was only held for a single year – though occasionally extended – and the desire to win military glories during that time, encouraged and rewarded decisive, and sometimes reckless, action. Severe punishments for failure appear to have been rare, and other than the risk of death in battle the risk/reward equation was weighted in favour of action.⁶ Failure could stall an ambitious man's political and military career,⁷ but it was still possible to recover from a defeat.⁸

Rome's army at the time consisted largely of citizens,⁹ drawn from both Rome and her allies (unlike modern armies which usually consist of professionals whose job is to serve in the military).¹⁰ The bulk of the army consisted of heavy infantry, with cavalry provided by *equites* (singular: *eques*) who were entitled to a replacement horse out of state funds if theirs was killed in battle.¹¹ Armies were split into legions with approximately 5,000 men each,¹² and each consul would usually command two legions, giving a total of around twenty thousand men in the army at any one time (excluding allies).¹³

⁵Technically the censors were the most senior magistrates, as the eligibility requirements for office included having held a previous consulship, and they were seen as the top of the *cursus honorum*. However, censors did not hold *imperium* – the power to order corporal and capital punishment – and for the purposes of discussing wars the consuls can be seen as *de facto* the most senior magistrates.

⁶We do hear of a consul, Publius Claudius Pulcher, who was prosecuted after losing a battle, though possibly because he ignored bad omens rather than solely for military incompetence (Polybius 1.52). He is said to have lost his temper when the sacrificial chickens refused to eat, throwing them into the sea with the words: 'if they will not eat, let them drink!' (Suetonius, *Life of Tiberius* 2).

⁷Unlike most modern societies, where there is a clear line between the military and politics, in Rome the two strands were tightly interwoven, with military service often laying the groundwork for a political career.

⁸For example, Cornelius Scipio Asina lost his ships to the Carthaginians in 260 and was their prisoner for a time, but managed to win a second consulship in 254, despite his military defeat and the embarrassing nickname *asina* ('female donkey') (Polybius 1.21).

⁹There were several types of Roman citizenship, with different levels of privileges. Arguments over who had what type of citizenship caused resentment on many occasions, including the Social War of 91-87.

¹⁰Some allies were required to supply troops as part of their treaty obligations. This often caused resentment, although the opportunity to share in the rewards on defeating an enemy army no doubt helped to keep this resentment under control. Later, in the Roman Empire, military service was also a route to the valuable status of Roman citizenship.

¹¹These and other similar Latin words is where we get the English words equine, equestrian etc.

¹²It was rare for a legion to be at full strength due to casualties, deserters etc., so this figure should be seen as a rough approximation rather than an exact measure of manpower.

¹³For full details of the Roman army in this period, see: *The Making of the Roman Army* (Lawrence Keppie).

Another important difference between Rome and Carthage was that Rome was prepared to grant citizenship widely, whereas most other city-states guarded citizenship jealously and were reluctant to bestow it on large numbers of allies.¹⁴

Carthage

According to legend, Carthage was founded by a woman named Elissa or Dido,¹⁵ to whom the Libyans granted all the land that she could cover with the hide of an ox. Elissa cut the hide into small thin strips, allowing her to cover a much greater piece of land than the Libyans expected.¹⁶ Such craftiness would come to be seen as typical Carthaginian trickery by the Romans.¹⁷ Like Rome, Carthage extended her influence by expanding into nearby territories, as well as further afield.

The Carthaginian method of selecting military commanders differed markedly from their opponents. In Rome, supreme military command generally rested with the consults, two elected officials who held office for a year and usually had to wait some time before holding the post again.¹⁸ Carthage, on the other hand, would appoint generals for much longer periods. This is most noticeable in the Second Punic War where Hannibal is the primary Carthaginian commander throughout, whereas the Romans had more than a dozen commanders.¹⁹

Carthage meted out severe punishments to generals who failed in their mission, even if through events beyond their control, with some commanders being exiled²⁰ or suffering death by crucifixion,²¹ impaling,²² or stoning.²³ In some cases, junior officers voted to have their commanders executed. In contrast, Rome was relatively lenient, and whilst a defeat might set back a career, it did not preclude further commands. A Roman general was far more likely to meet his end at the hands of the enemy than from the Senate - and in any case would be protected from some punishments, such as crucifixion, by his status as a Roman citizen.²⁴

The armies of Carthage also differed markedly from those of Rome. Carthaginian forces were comprised mostly of mercenaries, possibly as a result of the losses suffered in the Sicilian Wars. Citizens would only be drafted in large numbers if there was an immediate threat to Carthage. This method of recruitment could be costly, and there were several occasions when large numbers of mercenaries awaiting pay caused problems for the Carthaginians, particularly in the aftermath of the First Punic War when Carthage struggled to make payments.²⁵

¹⁴A list of Roman citizenship grants, sometimes without the right to vote, can be found in Velleius Paterculus 1.14.

¹⁵Velleius Paterculus 1.6; Orosius 4.6.1.

¹⁶Appian, *The Punic Wars* 1 (*Roman Histories* 8.1)

¹⁷Livy for example lists Hannibal's vices as including 'treachery worse than Punic' (*perfidia plus quam Punica*), demonstrating both the cultural stereotyping ('Punic') and the fact that Carthaginians were seen as treacherous (Livy 21.4). Justinus also describes a general, Mago, as having 'the cunning of a Carthaginian' when he visited Pyrrhus pretending to be a peacemaker when in fact he was looking for information to be used to the advantage of Carthage (Justinus 18.2).

¹⁸Whilst there were some notable exceptions to this rule, particularly in the late republic, for the most part the rules governing the length of consulships and the time between successive consulships were generally adhered to during the period of the Punic Wars. Furthermore, with only two consulships on offer each year, competition for the post was fierce.

¹⁹Hamilcar Barca, father of Hannibal, also commanded Carthaginian forces for six years in the First Punic War, and for several years afterwards.

²⁰Orosius 4.6.7

²¹Polybius 1.24; Livy, *Periochae* 17.

²²Orosius 4.6.32

²³Orosius 4.8.4

²⁴As a general rule, Roman citizens were protected from flogging (though not in the army), torture, and crucifixion (Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.5.165-168). Perhaps the most well-known example of this is Paul's assertion that he was a Roman citizen, resulting in his release by a Roman commander (Acts 22:22-23:11).

²⁵After the war, the mercenaries revolted after repeated delays to their back-pay, and the resulting conflict, known as the Mercenary War or the Truceless War, lasted for several years. Despite setbacks and atrocities on both sides, including the brutal execution of prisoners, Carthaginian troops, led by Hamilcar Barca, eventually prevailed and completely destroyed the rebels. (Polybius 1.65-88).

At the outbreak of the First Punic War, Carthage had a trade network stretching out into Spain and North Africa. Its influence on the region was probably as great as Rome's, if not more so, and there was no reason to believe that Rome was certain to emerge victorious from the coming war.

Names

Both the Romans and Carthaginians would often name sons after their fathers, and selected male names from a relatively limited pool.²⁶ As a result, the same names appear in several places, but often refer to different people. For example, there were multiple Carthaginians with the names Hamilcar and Hannibal, and several Romans with the name Scipio. In some cases it is obvious that they refer to different people due to the amount of time between two events,²⁷ but in other cases some disambiguation is required.²⁸

First Punic War (264-241)

At the beginning of the First Punic War, Rome was the leading city-state in Italy, having gradually conquered or absorbed most of the tribal towns and villages in the region. Less than a decade before it had finally defeated Pyrrhus of Epirus, in a war in which they were at least fighting against an enemy which asked for, and received, aid from Carthage.²⁹

However, the Romans did not have complete control over the Western Mediterranean, and Carthage had also been expanding her influence during this time. Matters came to a head when a group of Italian mercenaries, the Mamertines, appealed to both city-states for assistance in holding the recently captured city of Messana. The Carthaginian response was to send aid in the form of a garrison, which was installed in the city. The Mamertines appear to have been unhappy with this situation, and sent a delegation to Rome to request assistance. The Senate, after much deliberation, declined to intervene, possibly because of the way in which the Mamertines had captured Messana.³⁰ However, when the proposal was put to the Roman people they enthusiastically voted for war, and Appius Claudius, one of the consuls, was appointed to command the expedition.³¹

The initial stages of the Roman campaign were successful, as they managed to land in Sicily and defeat the forces besieging Messana, the terms of which gave the Romans a supply base. As the war progressed, each side suffered various setbacks, including the loss of hundreds of ships in several different storms.³² Eventually, Roman ability and willingness to keep funding new ships appears to have been the overall decisive factor, as the First Punic War was dominated by engagements at sea. Hamilcar Barca, the father of the Hannibal who would inflict a series of defeats on Rome in the next war, was forced to negotiate a peace.

²⁶There also appears to have been a small pool of popular female names, but this is less of an issue given the limited role of women in this period – at least according to our sources, which rarely mention women except in relation to their husbands, fathers or sons. An example of the dismissal of women can be found in Polybius, who describes Queen Teuta as suffering 'from a typically feminine weakness, that of taking a short view of everything' (Polybius 2.4).

²⁷There was a military commander with the name Hannibal in both the First and Second Punic Wars, but one died around ten years before the other was born, so there is limited scope for confusion.

²⁸For example, we have Scipio, Scipio Africanus (son of Scipio) and Scipio Aemilianus (cousin and adopted son of the eldest son of Scipio Africanus, who was also called Scipio).

²⁹After the death of Pyrrhus, the Tarentines asked for, and received, aid from the Carthaginians (Orosius 4.3.1; Livy, *Periochae* 14), and the Senate later reprimanded Carthage for this as it broke a treaty they had with Rome (Orosius 4.5.2). The war against Pyrrhus is where the phrase *Pyrrhic victory* is derived from, used to describe a victory which is gained at too high a cost. Pyrrhus is reported to have said that he would be ruined if he was victorious in one more battle against the Romans (Plutarch, *Life of Pyrrhus* 21.9; Orosius 4.1.15).

³⁰According to Polybius, the Mamertines had entered the city 'under the guise of friendship', and then proceeded to capture it and execute its male inhabitants, whilst taking the women as their wives (Polybius 1.7).

³¹Polybius 1.11.

³²In one storm, only 80 out of 364 ships survived (Polybius 1.37). During the war, the total numbers of ships lost were 700 (Rome) and 500 (Carthage) (Polybius 1.63; Appian, *Roman History* 5.2.5-6).

The treaty imposed on Carthage was one-sided and required Carthage to pay 1,000 talents³³ immediately and 2,200 talents over 10 years, and surrender all prisoners of war without ransom. Carthage was also required to leave Sicily, of which they had previously held the western part.³⁴ Later, another clause was added, requiring the Carthaginians to evacuate Sardinia and pay a further 1,000 talents.³⁵

Second Punic War (218-201)

By 219, Carthage was recovering from the costs of the First Punic War and was looking to expand her empire, particularly in Spain. The newly appointed Hannibal (son of Hamilcar from the First Punic War) laid siege to the city of Saguntum on the eastern coast of Iberia (as Spain was known at the time). The city sent for help from Rome, but none was forthcoming, and after eight months the defences were overrun and the city captured. Hannibal had offered the inhabitants the opportunity to leave unharmed, provided that they left behind their gold, silver, and other property, but in the end these negotiations failed and all the inhabitants 'of fighting age' were put to death.³⁶

Crossing the Alps

In 218, Hannibal completed one of the most famous military expeditions, by crossing the Alps into Italy. The exact route taken is open to speculation, and we have numerous options to choose from. Regardless, this was seen as a manoeuvre which wrong-footed the Romans, who do not appear to have expected Hannibal to march into Italy so quickly. Several battles were fought and Hannibal managed to defeat the Romans, including ambushing them at Lake Trasimene, which also resulted in the death of the consul Gaius Flaminius Nepos.³⁷ An increasingly worried Senate decided that the situation was serious enough to appoint Fabius Maximus as dictator, placing him in sole command of the Roman army.³⁸

Having been appointed dictator in 217, Fabius Maximus employed a strategy of shadowing Hannibal but refusing to engage in battle.³⁹ Instead of fighting pitched battles, Fabius harassed Hannibal's foragers and destroyed crops, hoping to gradually wear down the Carthaginians by restricting their movement and access to food. These tactics earned him the nickname *cunctator*, usually translated as 'delayer' or 'lingerer'.⁴⁰ Whilst successful in delaying Hannibal and buying Rome time to prepare, being marked as a 'lingerer' was not a positive sign amongst a people who prized aggression and valour. At the end of his term⁴¹ the Senate replaced Fabius with the consuls Servilius Geminus and Marcus Aemilius Regulus.

³³A talent was a unit of mass, usually in the form of a precious metal such as gold. The exact amount varied as there were several different talents (Attic, Roman etc.), but most were around 30kg (66lb). There is no precise modern equivalent, but these were significant sums and a heavy burden on Carthage in the years following the war. For context, the Bank of England reserves as of May 2016 were around 10,000 talents (based on a simple conversion of 1,000 ounces = 1 talent).

³⁴Polybius 1.62-63; Appian, *Roman History* 5.2.4

³⁵Polybius 3.27

³⁶Livy 21.13-14.

³⁷Polybius reports that 15,000 Romans were killed (3.85), whereas Orosius gives figures of 25,000 killed and 6,000 captured (4.15.4-6). Either way, it was a significant defeat.

³⁸Orosius 4.15.7. Like many words from this time period, the Roman use of dictator differs from our modern usage.

³⁹In this period of history, battles generally took place with the 'agreement' of both sides, and it was difficult to force a reluctant enemy to fight a pitched battle. Occasionally an army would be ambushed, or two armies would run into each other without warning, but generally the dust cloud thrown up by thousands of men marching would alert commanders to the presence of an army when it was several miles away. Often two armies would line up in formation outside of their respective camps, only to return without engaging.

⁴⁰'Unus homo nobis cunctando restituit rem' - 'by delaying, one man restored the matter to us' (Ennius, *Annales* 12.360-362).

⁴¹Roman dictators were appointed for a specific period – usually six months – or for a specific purpose such as holding elections. They were expected to resign gracefully at the end of their term, and all appear to have done so in this period. The office was later discredited by Sulla and Julius Caesar (the latter becoming 'dictator for life' shortly before his assassination), who treated it more like the modern term where abuse of power is generally implied.

Battle of Cannae

Shortly after, Gaius Terentius Varro and Lucius Aemilius Paullus were elected as consuls and placed in command of a newly raised army,⁴² with orders to engage Hannibal and stop his largely unopposed advance across Italy. Usually only one consul, with their two legions, would be dispatched to deal with any given threat, but such was the fear of Hannibal that eight legions were raised and dispatched to battle the Carthaginians. The possibility of Italian towns defecting to Hannibal also appears to have been a concern to the Romans.

On the day of the battle, the Roman consuls followed their conventional method of deploying troops, although the numbers involved meant that the formations were deeper than usual. The primary tactic used with this formation was to close with the enemy and keep a large proportion of men in reserve to replace front-line troops who were tired, reinforce a weak position, or take advantage of a weakness in the enemy line.

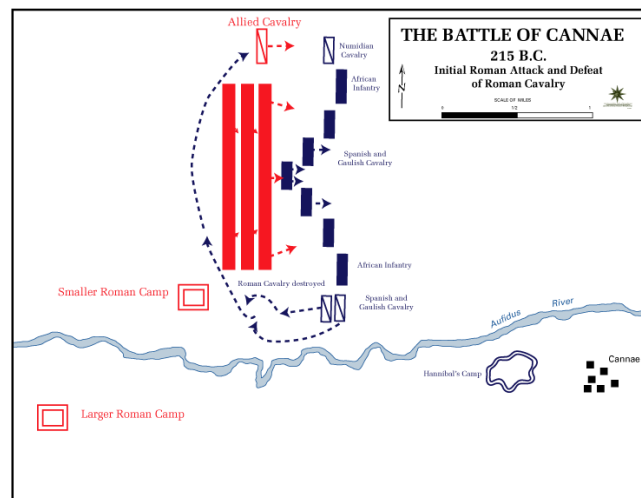


Figure 2: Initial troop deployment at Cannae (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Cannae)

Hannibal, on the other hand, did not stick to convention and deployed his men based on the terrain and the fact that the Romans had their retreats to the rear and right flanks blocked by a hill and river respectively. When the Romans advanced, Hannibal allowed the centre of his line to fall back, as if weakened. The Roman infantry pressed forward to take advantage of this seemingly weak position, only to be outflanked by Hannibal's African infantry units, and attacked in the rear by cavalry (the Roman cavalry had already been defeated by this point). Surrounded on all sides with nowhere to run, the Roman forces were almost completely destroyed, although a small number (perhaps 5-10% of the total) managed to fight their way through and escaped to the nearby town of Canusium.

Although Hannibal had defeated Roman armies in the past, Cannae was particularly worrying due to the near total destruction of the Roman army. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of Rome's allies began to rethink their loyalties, and we are told of over a dozen who defected to the Carthaginians.⁴³

The blame for the loss has often been laid at the feet of Varro, as he was in command on the day of the battle.⁴⁴ He is seen by contemporary sources as being reckless and overconfident, although a more balanced view might be that he was outmanoeuvred by a skillful general who was prepared to break with conventional forms of fighting and use the terrain to his advantage.

⁴²Polybius 3.106.

⁴³Livy 22.61.

⁴⁴When two consuls were present, they generally held command on alternate days.

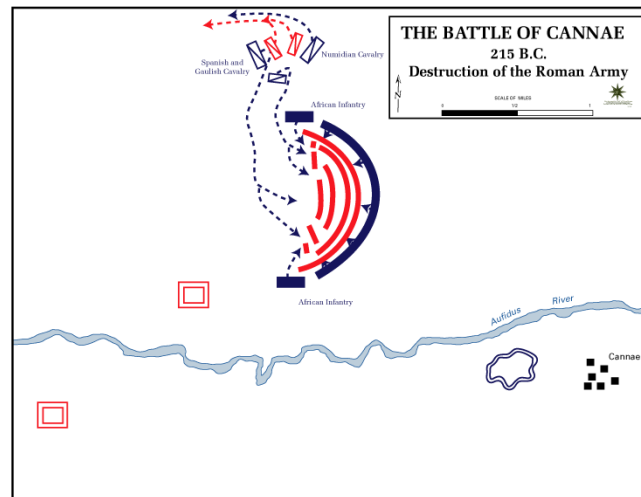


Figure 3: Rome army surrounded and destroyed (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Cannae)

After the battle, Hannibal sent a delegation to negotiate a peace treaty with the Senate. Given the heavy losses suffered, it was not unreasonable for Hannibal to expect such an offer to be considered and accepted. Instead Rome stepped up her efforts to defeat Carthage, raising new legions to replace those lost at Cannae.

Carthage forced out of Spain

Although Hannibal continued to cause problems for the Romans in Italy, the Carthaginians fared less well in Spain. The two main Carthaginian generals in that area, Hasdrubal Barca (Hannibal's brother) and Hanno appear to have lacked Hannibal's military skills and suffered a series of defeats at the hands of the Romans. Whilst Hannibal continued to command successfully in Italy, the defeats in Spain deprived him of reinforcements. In particular, the almost complete destruction of the Carthaginian army at the Battle of Ilipa (the Roman army commanded by Scipio Africanus) broke the Carthaginian hold on Spain.

Battle of Zama

In 205, Scipio Africanus secured the consulship and proposed to end the war by taking the fight to Carthage in their home land, demanding Africa as his consular province and threatening to take the vote to the people if the Senate did not comply.⁴⁵ Despite the opposition of Fabius Maximus, Scipio's demand was granted and he set off to Africa. In the meantime, the Carthaginian senate had recalled Hannibal from Italy.

The final battle at Zama began with both Roman and Carthaginian armies deploying in similar formations, with three lines of infantry in the centre and cavalry on both flanks. Hannibal also deployed his elephants at the front of his army, hoping that they would intimidate and trample the Roman infantry.

When the fighting commenced, Scipio avoided the elephants by having his cavalry blow large horns to frighten them, and then allowed the remainder to charge through the gaps in the Roman lines which had been left open for that purpose. The remainder of the battle was a long, hard slog between the infantry of both sides, but in the end the Roman cavalry managed to circle around the Carthaginians

⁴⁵Livy 28.40-45.

and attack them in the rear. The majority of the Carthaginians were killed or captured, although Hannibal himself managed to escape. Soon after, the Carthaginian Senate sued for peace.

Peace treaty

As with the First Punic War, Carthage was forced to pay a war indemnity, this time of 10,000 talents of silver over a period of fifty years. In addition, her ability to maintain a navy was severely restricted, she was forbidden from raising an army or waging war in Africa without permission from Rome, and completely forbidden from waging war outside Africa. Once again, Carthage was forced to hand over all prisoners of war free of ransom, whilst also paying for the return of around 200 of her citizens and handing over 100 hostages as a 'guarantee of good faith'.⁴⁶

Third Punic War (149-146)

In 151, the indemnity imposed on Carthage at the end of the Second Punic War was finally repaid. To Carthage this meant they had fulfilled their obligations and were therefore no longer bound by the treaty – in particular the condition that forbade Carthage from raising an army without permission from Rome. Numidia was once again encroaching on Carthaginian territory, and had already besieged one of the border towns. Carthage sent out a force to repel the Numidians and recover the lost ground.

Although the Carthaginian force was defeated, Rome appears to have used the raising of an army by Carthage and its use against the Numidians as an excuse to declare war, claiming that the actions of Carthage were a breach of the treaty.

This time, the war was relatively short. Rome gathered a significant force and marched towards Carthage, with a consular demand that all weapons and armour be handed over to them. When this demand was met, it was followed up by another, this time that the Carthaginians move inland so that their city could be burned. At this point, the Carthaginians realised that Roman demands were likely to continue until Carthage was destroyed, and so they abandoned negotiations. The Roman response was to place Carthage under siege.

Although the Carthaginians held out for nearly three years, and scored several minor victories against the Romans, the final result was a foregone conclusion. Carthage eventually fell in the spring of 146, when Scipio Aemilianus led a successful assault. The Romans spent 17 days razing the city to the ground, with the surviving inhabitants sold into slavery.⁴⁷

It is an oft-repeated myth that the Senate ordered the fields near Carthage to be salted, in order to ensure that nothing could grow there again. However, there is no archaeological evidence to support this, and it would be unusual for Rome to completely destroy a site which could be used for growing grain for its expanding population. In fact, a new city was built on the site, and it became an important part of the Western Roman Empire as the centre of the province of Africa.⁴⁸

Conclusions

At the beginning of the First Punic War, it was by no means clear which side would emerge victorious – often in ancient conflicts there would come a point where the two sides would agree conditions for peace. No one could have predicted that two more wars would occur and that the final result would be the complete destruction of Carthage – usually the victors wished to capture an enemy city rather than systematically raze it to the ground.

⁴⁶Polybius 14.18; Livy 30.43.

⁴⁷The Roman Senate had previously resolved to destroy Carthage (Velleius Paterculus 1.12).

⁴⁸The Roman province of Africa was only the tip of the continent, and not the whole of modern day Africa.

Several reasons have been offered for the conflicts between Rome and Carthage, ranging from Rome's concern about the expansion of a neighbouring power, to the conduct of third parties which pulled Rome and Carthage into war.⁴⁹ The treatment of Carthage by Rome after the First Punic War, especially in terms of the war indemnities, could be seen as a cause for the Second War.⁵⁰

Ultimately, the overall reason leading to the defeat and destruction of Carthage appears to have been a combination of Rome's desire to provoke war, or declare it based on a (sometimes dubious) technicality, and then continue to fight regardless of the cost. Unlike modern democracies, where high casualty rates and limited progress often results in strong pressure on politicians to bring a conflict to a close, Rome appears to have displayed an enthusiasm for conquest, regardless of the initial results and despite the fact that majority of the army consisted of citizens.

Chronology

- 264 Beginning of the First Punic War.
- 247 Birth of Hannibal.
- 241 End of the First Punic War.
- 221 Hannibal made commander of Carthaginian forces in Iberia.
- 219 Siege of Saguntum.
- 218 Beginning of the Second Punic War.
- 218 Hannibal crosses the Alps.
- 217 Roman forces ambushed and defeated at Lake Trasimene.
- 216 Roman army defeated at Cannae.
- 202 Carthaginian army defeated at Zama.
- 201 End of the Second Punic War.
- 149 Beginning of the Third Punic War.
- 146 End of the Third Punic War.

Sources and further reading

We are fortunate that this time period is well documented, and many of the ancient sources are still available to us. There is also some further reading for those who wish to explore the subject further.

Ancient sources

Our ancient sources are a mixture of Latin and Greek. For those unfamiliar with either language, English translations are available for all the major sources (e.g. Appian, Plutarch) in the Penguin Classics, Oxford World's Classics and Loeb Classical Library series (the latter retains the original language alongside the translation). More obscure sources (e.g. Velleius Paterculus) are only available in the Loeb series, as are some books of authors such as Cassius Dio.

Polybius: Greek with a heavy Roman bias. Polybius was a hostage in Rome between the Second and Third Punic Wars, and a tutor for Scipio Aemilianus. These connections meant that he had a greater insight into the Roman military, and he may have been present when Carthage was sacked in 146. Generally considered to be more reliable than Livy, Polybius is a major source for the Punic Wars.⁵¹

⁴⁹Third parties drawing more powerful neighbours into a conflict is also a possible cause of the Peloponnesian War, which we have discussed previously.

⁵⁰Perhaps similar to the way in which the Allies treated Germany after the First World War, making huge demands for reparations?

⁵¹For books 1-5 of Polybius, the Oxford World's Classics edition has the complete English translation. The Penguin Classics edition does not include the full text, e.g. chapters 1.65-88 are missing.

Livy: Roman writing several centuries after the war, in the reign of Augustus. Whilst sometimes criticised as unreliable, patriotic, and concerned mainly with telling a good story, Livy used several sources which would otherwise be lost, and is therefore a useful guide to the wars, although not one which can be relied upon in isolation.

Appian: Roman historian of Greek origin whose *Roman History* ranges from the beginning of Rome to the time of Trajan (c. 100 AD). Although writing several centuries after the Punic Wars, Appian's work is valuable as a large part of it has survived to the present day.

Plutarch: Greek (later Roman) biographer known for his 'Lives' which discuss who he considered to be great individuals (e.g. Cato the Elder, though sadly the Life of Scipio Africanus is lost). Care must be taken as Plutarch, like Livy, was writing several centuries after the war and was aiming to entertain rather than provide historical accuracy.

Velleius Paterculus: Roman soldier, historian and senator who wrote a history of Rome. Although not generally considered a careful historical study, it is useful for its connected narrative of certain periods.⁵²

Orosius: Priest who wrote a history from a Christian perspective, approximately five centuries after Pompey.⁵³ He is often a few years out with his dates, and is very anti-pagan, but does quote from some sources who are now lost to us.

Further reading

For those who wish to delve into this time period in more detail, there are some specific works which may be of interest.

The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire, Lawrence Keppie. Comprehensive coverage of the changes in the Roman army from republic to empire, including during the Punic Wars.

Carthage Must Be Destroyed, Richard Miles. One of the few books focusing on Carthage and aimed at a general audience.

The Fall of Carthage, Adrian Goldsworthy. Covers all three wars and contains a number of maps. Probably the best broad overview aimed at a general audience.

In the Name of Rome, Adrian Goldsworthy. Biographies of individual Roman generals, including Scipio Africanus.

Rome versus Carthage: The War at Sea, Christa Steinby. A detailed examination of the role of the navy in the three wars.

A Companion to the Punic Wars, Dexter Hoyos (Editor). Collection of essays aimed at an academic audience, but still accessible to the interested general reader.

Hannibal: a Hellenistic life, Eve MacDonald. Biography of the Carthaginian general who inflicted many defeats on Rome.

Rome Spreads Her Wings, Gareth C. Sampson. Discussion of Rome's territorial expansion between the Punic Wars.

⁵²Unlike the other authors listed here, Velleius Paterculus is not widely available with an English translation, however it does appear as volume 152 of the Loeb Classical Library, together with the *Res Gestae* of Augustus.

⁵³The most up to date English translation of Orosius, with an introduction and notes, is by A. T. Fear and published by Liverpool University Press.