



First Punic War

Where Was Carthage?

- ◆ Carthage was a city on the north coast of Africa.
- ◆ It was very close to Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and the south coast of Italy.
- ◆ The Carthaginians were keen to expand their territories.
- ◆ You can imagine, therefore, that they might have some difficulties with their increasingly powerful Roman neighbours.
- ◆ The Carthaginians were very keen on commerce but less keen on culture!

Founding of Carthage

- ◆ The best-known story of the founding of Carthage comes from the Aeneid.
- ◆ The Tyrian princess, Dido, is said to have founded the city after fleeing her home.
- ◆ The Romans called the Carthaginians 'Poeni', a word which comes from Phonikes (Phoenicians). This is where the word 'Punic' comes from.
- ◆ The Carthaginians claimed the city was founded in the 9th century BC, but archaeological evidence points to its foundation as being closer to the end of the 8th century BC.



Carthage

The Early Years of the Conflict

- ◆ In 264 BC, the two main cities on the west coast of Sicily - Messina and Syracuse - were locked in a dispute.
- ◆ The inhabitants of Messina asked the Romans and the Carthaginians for help.
- ◆ The Carthaginians became involved, and once they were on the island of Sicily, they stayed there.
- ◆ The Romans were unhappy about this and attacked Messina, forcing the Carthaginians to withdraw.
- ◆ In 260, a Roman fleet tried to gain control of all of Sicily, but failed.
- ◆ Even though they did not have complete control of Sicily, the Romans had now opened up a passage to Corsica and they sailed there, driving the Carthaginians out.
- ◆ Four years later, in 256, another Roman fleet sailed to North Africa and established a beachhead there.
- ◆ The Carthaginians were willing to surrender, but the Romans set terms which were so severe that the Carthaginians could not accept them and so they chose to fight on.
- ◆ In 255 the Carthaginian army - largely comprising cavalry and elephants - attacked the Romans and drove them into the sea.





The Changing Fortunes of the Carthaginian Empire

Carthaginian Defeat

- ◆ In 254, the battle for control of Sicily resumed.
- ◆ In 247, a Carthaginian general called Hamilcar Barca took control of the Carthaginian army and engaged in guerrilla warfare with the Romans.
- ◆ He managed to gain back some Sicilian territory, despite not being given enough troops by the Carthaginian government, and even attacked the south coast of Italy from his new stronghold.
- ◆ Neither side achieved any significant victory until 241, when the Romans - who now had a fleet of 200 warships - gained control of the seas between the nations.
- ◆ The Carthaginians were unable to maintain their presence on Sicily and so surrendered to the Romans.
- ◆ They now had to agree to Roman terms and were forced to pay an indemnity. The battle for Sicily resumed in 254 but was largely stalemated until 241, when a fleet of 200 warships gave the Romans undisputed control of the sea lanes and assured the collapse of the Punic stronghold in Sicily. One year later Carthage surrendered.
- ◆ They were forced to pay a sum of money to the Romans as a condition of the acceptance of their surrender and guarantee of peace with Rome.

Hamilcar Barca

- ◆ One of the most famous Carthaginian generals.
- ◆ 'Barca' means lightning and Hamilcar probably earned this nickname because of his lightning raids on the Romans.
- ◆ At the end of the First Punic War, his mercenary soldiers revolted because they had not been paid for a long time.
- ◆ With the Romans' help, Hamilcar raised an army and defeated these rebels in 237.
- ◆ By now he had become a hugely powerful statesman and leader.
- ◆ He went to Spain to conquer territories in an effort to make up for the loss of Sicily and Sardinia.
- ◆ He and his son Hannibal and son-in-law Hasdrubal spent nine years there with their army of cavalry, elephants and African foot-soldiers. They became very wealthy and extremely powerful.



Marcus Atilius Regulus - A famous Roman martyr

- ◆ Marcus Atilius Regulus was elected consul during the First Punic War.
- ◆ At the time of his election, he had been retired from military service for some time, but was willing to return to help his country.
- ◆ Regulus decided that rather than fight the Carthaginians at sea or on the island of Sicily, he would bring the fight to Carthage.
- ◆ He was very successful initially, but then the Romans hired a Spartan mercenary who led their army to victory over the Romans.
- ◆ Regulus was taken captive and sent back to Rome to advise the Romans to make peace. He was allowed to go on condition that he would return to Carthage after he had brought the Carthaginians message to them and had arranged a peace treaty with terms which would be favourable to the Carthaginians.
- ◆ Instead of suing for peace, Regulus advised the Romans to fight on.
- ◆ Because he was a man of honour, Regulus returned to Carthage as he had said he would.
- ◆ The Carthaginians tortured and killed him because they viewed him as a traitor.



Corvus

- ◆ Before the First Punic War, the Romans were not confident fighting at sea.
- ◆ The Carthaginian fleet was far superior to the Romans' and the Carthaginians preferred sea battles, knowing the Romans were at a disadvantage.
- ◆ However, the Romans managed to turn sea battles into something more like land battles by using the corvus.
- ◆ This was a plank which could be lowered onto the enemy's ship and used as a bridge by the Roman soldiers.
- ◆ The corvus changed the fortunes of the Roman fleet and was instrumental in the Carthaginians' defeat.