

THE IN A HURRY SERIES

Carthage

in a Hurry

Rome's rival, and how it was erased

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The Whole Thing in One Page

When Rome destroyed Carthage in 146 BCE, the Senate spared one Carthaginian achievement: it ordered Mago's twenty-eight books on farming translated into Latin. The city burned; its agricultural knowledge was too useful to lose.

That is a better beginning than Hannibal crossing the Alps. Carthage has been compressed into Rome's enemy: a rich trading city that paid foreigners to fight, nearly won one war and disappeared when Rome finished the job. The civilisation beneath that summary was a Phoenician-rooted African republic, sustained by one of the Mediterranean's most productive landscapes, governed through magistrates, councils and an assembly, and connected to ports and peoples from western Sicily to Iberia.

Settlers from Tyre founded Qart Hadasht, the New City, in a North African world already inhabited and organised. Over centuries the city became Punic: Phoenician in language and religious inheritance, African in land, population and political environment, and Mediterranean in the breadth of its contacts.

Carthage expanded by keeping different places useful without making them identical. Nearby communities could owe tribute and soldiers. Phoenician towns might retain their own elites. Numidian rulers supplied cavalry when alliance and interest aligned. Overseas possessions varied from garrisoned territory to commercial partnership. The arrangement gave a citizen body of limited size immense reach, but much of its power existed in relationships the city had to renew.

The land beneath those relationships mattered as much as the sea. African farms produced grain, oil, wine, livestock, taxable surplus and technical knowledge. The merchant harbour and later circular naval basin made the maritime state visible; the countryside fed it. Carthage was neither a floating market nor an innocent league of traders. Its wealth rested on conquest, tribute, enslaved labour and unequal access to land as well as exchange.

At home, two annual suffetes, councils and a popular assembly shared authority, although wealthy families dominated office and the exact balance is partly lost. Generals could hold long commands abroad while civic magistrates remained in the city. That produced experience and accountability, but distance made a single strategy hard to sustain. Religion ran through household and state. Baal Hammon and Tanit received vows and offerings; the tophet held cremated remains of infants and children. Deliberate sacrifice remains plausible for part of that record, but the evidence cannot tell us how every child died.

The army reproduced the wider order. Citizens served, but Libyan levies, Numidian cavalry, Iberians, Gauls, Balearic slingers and paid soldiers gave it much of its range. Hannibal made that diversity lethal. He crossed the Alps, destroyed Roman armies and won at Cannae. Yet he could not detach enough of Italy from Rome. The difference was not courage. Rome's alliance structure kept producing men and obligations after battlefield catastrophe.

Carthage lost, recovered and was destroyed in a third war when it posed little immediate threat. Rome later rebuilt on the same site, exploiting a harbour, hinterland and position that had lost none of their value. Punic language, religion and local identity continued under Roman rule. What vanished most completely was Carthage's independent state and its power to describe itself.

The conqueror preserved Mago, rebuilt the site and supplied most of the surviving verdict. Carthage's usefulness outlived Carthage's freedom.

That is the book.

Why You Should Care

In 310 BCE, Agathocles of Syracuse carried the war against Carthage into North Africa. His army advanced through the Cape Bon countryside and found estates, country houses and carefully cultivated fields. The scene exposes the first reason Carthage matters: the sea power was rooted in African soil.

The scene reverses the usual angle. Carthage normally reaches us as a Roman problem. It enters the story late, as the rich city Hannibal fought for, and vanishes when Scipio destroyed it. Read that way, Rome appears destined to rule and Carthage becomes the obstacle that made the victory impressive. Read Carthage on its own terms and the western Mediterranean looks less settled. Rome was facing a state of comparable ambition, wealth and capability, built through a different method.

Carthage joined a Phoenician inheritance to an African base. It spoke a Levantine language and worshipped gods with Levantine roots, while drawing food, labour, territory and alliances from North Africa. Its wealth moved through ports in Sicily, Sardinia, Iberia and beyond, but the ships depended on grain, oil, livestock and revenue from the countryside behind the city. The standard image of a merchant republic floating above the sea hides the fields beneath it.

By its final centuries, the city's shape made that relationship visible. A commercial harbour opened beside a circular naval basin, with shipsheds facing an island at its centre. Behind them rose the Byrsa, temples, workshops, streets and houses. The arrangement belonged to a large engineered city, able to organise trade, defence, government and worship within a compact site while reaching across thousands of kilometres.

At Kerkouane on Cape Bon, a Punic town abandoned before Roman rebuilding could cover it, surviving houses preserve basins and bath tubs, and the town was involved in purple-dye production. It is a rare view of Punic life below the level of fleets and treaties: streets, water, craft and domestic rooms built by people who expected the town to continue. Beyond

the household, Carthage did not impose one status everywhere. A city might pay tribute, host a garrison, supply soldiers, accept Carthaginian leadership or remain a commercial partner. That variation gave the city reach, but every obligation had to keep working when war arrived.

It also changes the Punic Wars. They are commonly told as the hard middle chapters of Rome's rise. From Carthage they become a contest between states that mobilised people and territory in different ways. Carthage could assemble naval skill, African infantry, Numidian cavalry and Iberian resources across a huge distance. Rome could draw repeated armies from an Italian alliance system that survived disasters which would have ended most wars. Hannibal's victories make more sense once both structures are visible, and so does his failure to turn victory into Roman collapse.

Then there is the question of memory. Carthage left inscriptions, buildings, graves, workshops, harbours and objects, but almost none of its historical literature survives. The long narrative was written by Greeks and Romans, often during conflict or after defeat. That does not make it useless. It means the reader must learn to notice when an enemy's description has hardened into the subject itself. The picture of a faithless trading power defined by child sacrifice was assembled from evidence and prosecution together.

None of this requires turning Carthage into the innocent victim of Rome. It conquered, taxed, enslaved and fought with considerable brutality. Its elites drew wealth from unequal relationships and from labour over which they held power. Recovering a civilisation is not the same as acquitting it.

The reward is a fuller ancient world. You will see the city before Hannibal, the farms behind the fleet, the institutions behind its generals, the gods inside its households and the bargains holding its power together. Then Rome will destroy the state, rebuild the city and preserve fragments of the knowledge it had conquered.

Carthage matters because Rome's greatest rival was never merely Rome's rival.

The Core Ideas

The City That Connected the West

Stand on the Byrsa hill and Carthage begins to make sense before anyone mentions Hannibal. Behind it lies the fertile country of northern Tunisia. Ahead, the Gulf of Tunis opens towards Sicily and the central Mediterranean. Ships leaving the coast could turn east towards Tyre and Egypt, north towards Sardinia and Italy, or west towards Ibiza and Iberia. Carthage did not occupy the edge of the ancient world. It sat at a hinge.

Tradition dated its foundation to 814 or 813 BCE and credited Elissa, the Tyrian princess later known as Dido. Archaeology securely reaches the later eighth century. The literary version supplied exile, murder, an oxhide cut into strips and, eventually, a doomed love affair with a Trojan who never visited. History was less accommodating to opera. Settlers from Tyre established a coastal community among North African populations who already possessed their own land, exchange routes and political interests.

The result became Punic. The word comes through the Roman name for western Phoenicians, but it should not be mistaken for a biological category. Punic communities used a Phoenician language and alphabet, worshipped deities with Levantine roots and maintained connections through ritual, trade and memory. Those communities also developed locally in North Africa, Sicily, Sardinia and Iberia. Language, cult, ancestry and political identity did not move in identical patterns, and no single biological profile defines who counted as Punic.

That openness was practical. Ports grow by receiving outsiders, and Carthage grew quickly. Workshops processed imported and local materials. Merchants dealt in metals, pottery, textiles, food, timber and people. Sailors carried news as well as cargo. Treaties, marriages, guest-friendships and religious ties extended the city's reach beyond anything its population could have achieved by settlement alone. By the later sixth century BCE, wealth, alliances and war had made Carthage the leading power of the central Mediterranean.

The famous image comes from much later: a rectangular commercial harbour joined to a circular naval basin, ringed by shipsheds and built around an island headquarters. It was formidable, but it should not be projected backwards across the city's whole history. The monumental double harbour took its recognisable form near the end of independent Carthage. The city had already been powerful for centuries. Its first technology was not an ingenious dock. It was the ability to connect places whose inhabitants did not need to become Carthaginian in order to enrich Carthage.

This is why the usual description, a trading city, is both true and insufficient. Trade sat inside a larger political economy. Carthage joined producers to markets, ports to inland routes, rulers to military support and scattered Phoenician communities to a stronger centre. Commercial access generated revenue; revenue funded protection and coercion; both widened the area from which the city could draw.

The arrangement gave one city extraordinary reach. Much of that power lived elsewhere, in fields it did not work, towns it did not fully govern and loyalties it had to renew. Carthage began as a successful junction. Everything that followed depended on keeping the routes open.

Africa Fed the Sea Power

A fleet cannot eat silver. The ships, purple cloth and Iberian metal attract attention because they travelled; the grain that kept the city alive disappeared into bread. Yet Carthage's maritime power became possible only when it acquired an agricultural base large enough to feed people, generate exportable surplus and support war.

Northern Tunisia offered unusual advantages. The Cape Bon peninsula and the valleys inland received enough rain for dry farming, while soils in several regions supported cereals, vines, olives and livestock. Over time, Carthage and other Punic communities occupied and organised rural land more systematically. Farmsteads, presses, storage facilities, cisterns and transport routes joined the city to a productive countryside. Wheat, wine and

oil were not background commodities. They were stored energy, taxable wealth and cargo that could be exchanged for whatever the region lacked.

This was no empty landscape awaiting improvement from the coast. Libyan communities farmed, herded, traded and fought there before Carthage expanded. Some became allies. Others paid tribute, supplied troops or lost control of land. Punic settlement and agricultural growth brought cooperation, intermarriage and shared techniques, but also conquest and coercion. When ancient accounts describe wealthy Carthaginian estates, the elegance above ground rests on people whose names were not recorded.

The distinction between city and country therefore mattered politically. The citizens who governed Carthage were only part of the population from whom the state drew land, revenue and soldiers, and the legal positions of the surrounding communities varied. In a good year, the arrangement produced grain, income and manpower. In a political crisis, it exposed accumulated grievances. During the great revolt after the First Punic War, unpaid soldiers were joined by African communities whose anger reached beyond a delayed wage packet. The countryside strengthened Carthage because the city could draw from it, and endangered Carthage when extraction had outlasted consent.

Agriculture also demanded a different kind of intelligence from commerce. A merchant can change destination when a market closes. A farmer has to understand a particular soil, season, slope and animal. Punic agronomy accumulated that knowledge across generations. Its most famous expression was Mago's agricultural work in twenty-eight books, covering the management of estates, crops and livestock. The original is lost, but its scale alone reveals a civilisation that treated farming as a technical discipline worthy of sustained writing.

That expertise helps explain Carthage's recovery after defeats that stripped away fleets and overseas possessions. One reason sea power could be rebuilt was that land continued to yield food and revenue. After the First Punic War, Carthage lost Sicily, paid a heavy indemnity and then faced

revolt. It still recovered quickly enough to create a new power base in Iberia and challenge Rome again within a generation. Silver, conquest and Barcid leadership in Iberia mattered, but they rested on an African state that remained productive after its first empire had been cut down.

The countryside also changes the moral picture. Carthage was not a benign association of traders made prosperous by voluntary exchange. Its elites owned estates, taxed subjects, held enslaved people and used military force to secure resources. Commercial skill and agricultural exploitation belonged to the same system. The port displayed its reach. The fields paid the bill.

An Empire of Ports and Bargains

Colour Carthaginian territory on a modern map and the result will look more orderly than the thing itself. No single border enclosed a uniform administration, legal status and obedient population. Carthage ruled different places in different ways, often because each had entered its orbit by a different route.

Close to the city, control could be territorial and direct. Inland communities supplied revenue and soldiers, while Punic settlement pushed into productive land. Across the sea, the picture changed. Some were old Phoenician towns with their own elites and institutions. Some accepted Carthaginian leadership against a common enemy. Some paid tribute, hosted garrisons or surrendered control of foreign policy. Others remained commercial partners until pressure or war altered the terms. Sardinia, western Sicily, the Balearic Islands and southern Iberia did not occupy identical positions, and even within one island Carthage's hold could be strong on the coast and uncertain inland.

This still counts as empire. Carthage fought to exclude rivals, compelled obedience, transferred wealth and punished defection. It destroyed or displaced communities when strategy required it. What it did not usually attempt was to flatten every relationship into the same model. The object was reliable access: to harbours, grain, metals, troops, markets and sea lanes. If a local government delivered them, replacing it could create work

without adding power.

The method suited the Mediterranean. Ships connect points rather than surfaces. A chain of secure ports can control movement across a sea while leaving large stretches of interior beyond close supervision. Carthage could therefore exert influence over an immense area with fewer citizens and officials than a continuous land empire would have required. Local elites retained status while Carthage acquired resources and strategic depth. Both sides could call the arrangement partnership until their interests diverged.

Treaties show the system in its formal clothes. Carthage and Rome made repeated agreements long before their wars, specifying where merchants could operate, what protections applied and which communities fell within each power's sphere. Such documents were not sentimental declarations of friendship. They converted uncertainty into rules and recognised that control over access could matter more than possession of every mile between two ports.

The bargains varied. A Phoenician city with useful ships and old religious ties could negotiate from a different position than a farming community liable for tribute. A Numidian ruler with cavalry and territory could change sides in ways a subject village could not. Carthaginian power rested on these differences. It offered protection, markets and opportunity to some; to others it presented demands backed by an army.

That flexibility created weak links as well as reach. When the centre was strong, the arrangement assembled resources from several environments without forcing them into one society. Under pressure, particular obligations could fail or require renegotiation. Defeat at sea could expose Sardinia. A dispute over pay could merge with African rebellion. A change of dynasty in Numidia could remove cavalry and open the road to Carthage itself.

Iberia shows both sides. After the First Punic War, Hamilcar Barca and his successors built a new domain there through campaigning, alliances, diplomacy and new foundations. Silver and soldiers restored Carthage's strategic position. The same success gave the Barcid commanders an

overseas base, personal loyalties and room for decisions that the government at home could influence without supervising every step. The empire regained depth, but the distance between field command and civic control widened with it.

Rome's Italian network is documented more clearly: colonies, roads, treaties and widening forms of citizenship tied conquered communities to military obligations. No comparable extension of Carthaginian citizenship is visible across the western empire; tribute, alliance, garrison and local autonomy appear more often. The evidence is uneven, and this is a contrast of degree rather than civic virtue. It mattered because Hannibal later tried to detach communities that Rome had spent generations drawing into its own political order.

Judges at Home, Generals Abroad

Aristotle included Carthage among the few constitutions he considered worth serious praise. He noted that its citizens had remained loyal to the system and that the city had suffered neither a tyranny nor civil conflict on a scale worth mentioning. For a wealthy republic surrounded by subjects and engaged in repeated overseas war, that record needs explaining.

Carthage distributed authority instead of placing it in one hereditary ruler. Its leading civil magistrates were the *suffetes*, a Roman rendering of a Phoenician title meaning judges. In the mature republic there were normally two, chosen for limited terms. Greek writers sometimes called them kings because they were searching for a familiar label, but they were neither monarchs nor commanders by birth. They presided over civic business and worked with a council or councils of elders drawn from the elite.

The citizen body was not silent. Aristotle says that when the leading magistrates and elders disagreed, questions went to the assembly, where citizens could reject proposals and speak against them. That was a meaningful power, though Carthage was no democracy on the Athenian model. Wealth and family standing shaped access to office. Competition for office favoured men with the leisure and resources to serve, and the same

successful families recur across generations. Aristotle admired selection by merit and disliked the degree to which money helped decide what counted as merit.

A further body, remembered as the Hundred and Four, scrutinised powerful officials and especially military commanders. Its exact organisation is difficult to recover, but its purpose fits the political problem. A general serving abroad might control an army, negotiate with rulers, collect revenue and stay away for years. Victory made him richer, more famous and more useful. It also made him dangerous. Carthage wanted military expertise without allowing a successful commander to become a king in fact.

One important distinction was that the suffetes were civil officials, while generals received separate and sometimes extended commands. This was no modern separation of powers, and the exact chain of command is difficult to recover. It did allow military expertise and personal authority to accumulate far from the annual rhythm of civic office. Commanders remained answerable when they returned, sometimes harshly so.

The Barcid family exposed the tension. Hamilcar, Hasdrubal and Hannibal built Carthaginian power in Iberia over nearly twenty years. They fought, negotiated marriages and alliances, founded or enlarged cities and cultivated loyalty among troops. Their achievements rescued Carthage after the First Punic War. They also created a sphere in which one family possessed knowledge and authority that no annual magistrate in Africa could match. Hannibal's attack on Saguntum forced the city to decide whether to disown or support a commander acting far from the council chamber. When Rome demanded that he be surrendered, Carthage refused. A decision made in Iberia had become a war for the whole republic.

It is tempting to explain defeat through this arrangement: cautious magistrates at home refusing the brilliant general what he needed. The evidence will not support so tidy a story. Carthage sent armies, fleets and money, opened additional fronts and sustained the war for sixteen years in Italy. Hannibal was neither abandoned nor free from strategic mistakes. Institutional distance may still have complicated coordination. Several

theatres competed for limited resources, elite groups disagreed, and no constitution could make geography disappear.

The constitution's achievement was longevity. It channelled competition among wealthy families, allowed meaningful popular action and kept commanders answerable to a republic. Its cost was less a fatal defect than a recurring problem of scale: decisions made in Carthage had to govern men who held armies, alliances and information months away. The same arrangements that reduced the risk of a general becoming king could make an opportunity abroad difficult to convert into settled policy at home.

Gods, Families and the Tophet

The surviving Carthaginian voice is often carved into stone in a form that sounds modest: a person makes a dedication to a god because the god heard his or her voice. Names, family relationships, vows and gratitude appear where histories do not. The inscriptions reveal religion at the scale on which most people experienced it, as an exchange of obligation between households, community and divine power.

Carthage inherited a polytheistic world from Phoenicia and changed it in Africa. Baal Hammon and Tanit became the most prominent divine pair. Melqart retained strong associations with Tyre, maritime travel and renewal. Astarte, Eshmun and other gods received worship, while contact with Libyan, Egyptian and Greek traditions produced new images and identifications. There was no single sacred book defining a fixed pantheon. Cult belonged to places, families, offices and occasions.

Religion therefore ran through civic life rather than occupying a separate compartment. Treaties invoked gods. Generals sacrificed before campaigns. Temples held wealth and prestige. Personal names placed children under divine protection. Votive stelae recorded promises fulfilled. Disaster could be interpreted as evidence that an obligation had been neglected, making ritual action part of political response rather than private consolation.

The tophet concentrates every difficulty in the subject. Near the later

harbours lay a sacred precinct containing urns with cremated remains of infants and young children, sometimes mixed with animals, accompanied by inscribed stelae dedicated chiefly to Baal Hammon and Tanit. Greek and Roman writers accused Carthaginians of sacrificing children, and some accounts are plainly designed to horrify. The sanctuary makes the accusation impossible to dismiss as propaganda alone. It does not permit every urn to be treated as proof of a child killed in ritual.

The safest conclusion is narrower than either popular version. Deliberate sacrifice remains a serious explanation for some deposits, but the record does not reveal how often it occurred, how practice varied between sanctuaries, or how every child died. Other children may have died from disease or the severe mortality of infancy and then received a distinctive sacred burial. A 2024 study of twelve individuals at the later Neo-Punic site of Zita found chronic health problems, careful treatment after death and no concrete indication of ritual killing there. Carthage's tophet covered centuries, and one verdict need not fit every deposit.

That conclusion lacks the satisfying simplicity of both popular versions. Carthage was neither a city of monsters routinely feeding children to a bronze machine nor an innocent victim of Roman slander whose sanctuary contained only ordinary graves. The evidence of careful mortuary treatment also matters: grief, devotion and ritual killing, where it occurred, were not categories ancient worshippers had to experience as mutually exclusive.

The tophet also matters because Greek and Roman writers made the accusation central to Carthaginian identity. Enemies are easily described through the practice most likely to deny them moral equality. Roman warfare, slavery and mass killing could then appear as severe necessities against an alien cruelty. The charge worked so well that Carthage is still introduced through it, while Roman exposure of infants rarely defines Rome.

A responsible history should neither hide the practice nor let it consume the civilisation. Carthaginian religion organised family memory, public authority, agriculture, travel, healing and war. The tophet belonged inside that world. It was not the whole of it. To make it the essence of Carthage is to accept the

conqueror's choice of headline.

Armies Built Beyond the Citizen Body

At Cannae in 216 BCE, Hannibal arranged troops from several societies into one design. Gauls and Iberians formed the forward centre. African infantry stood farther back on the wings. Numidian cavalry operated with a speed and looseness Roman horsemen struggled to match. As the Roman mass pressed inward, the centre yielded, the African troops turned against its flanks and the cavalry closed from behind. The army's diversity was not an inconvenience Hannibal overcame. It was the material from which he built the victory.

Calling such a force mercenary is attractive because the word explains Carthage in one stroke: rich merchants paid foreigners to do their killing. It also collapses different relationships into one. Carthaginian armies included citizens, especially when the city itself was threatened. Libyan infantry often came through obligations imposed on subject communities. Numidian cavalry came through alliances, dynastic relationships and varying degrees of dependence. Iberian and Gallic warriors might serve as allies, retainers, levies or soldiers for pay. Balearic slingers sold a specialised skill. Some men were mercenaries in the strict sense. Many were not.

The mixed army answered a basic problem. Carthage's citizen population was too small to garrison Africa, contest Sicily, hold Sardinia, expand in Iberia and fight major land wars at the same time. Its wider sphere contained military traditions suited to different tasks. North Africa supplied disciplined infantry and exceptional light cavalry. Iberia supplied tough infantry and horsemen. The Balearic Islands supplied slingers trained from youth. Gaul supplied large infantry contingents when politics and payment aligned. Carthage assembled capabilities rather than reproducing one citizen army everywhere.

This required more than money. Different contingents spoke different languages, used different weapons and expected different rewards. Command had to pass through subordinate leaders who retained authority

within their own groups. A general needed interpreters, diplomacy, personal reputation and a clear sense of what each unit would tolerate. Hannibal spent years campaigning with many of the same men. His achievement lay as much in sustaining a coalition across the Alps and through repeated winters as in drawing a double enclosure at Cannae.

The arrangement had genuine advantages. Losses among one population did not exhaust the whole military base. Recruitment could expand as influence expanded. Specialist forces gave Carthaginian commanders a tactical range Roman armies initially lacked. A state with few citizens could project land power across the western Mediterranean while maintaining a navy and commercial economy.

The weaknesses arrived when the relationship behind the soldier failed. After the First Punic War, Carthage could not immediately pay the army returning from Sicily. Negotiation turned into mutiny, then into a war involving Libyan subjects and other African communities. The conflict became savage because the dispute concerned more than arrears. Soldiers had weapons and organisation; subject populations had accumulated grievances; Carthage had just lost much of its naval position and faced a heavy indemnity. The empire's separate tensions fused into one rebellion.

Rome used the crisis to seize Sardinia while Carthage was unable to resist. Carthage then rebuilt in Iberia and produced Hannibal's army, evidence that the military system remained formidable. The Second Punic War exposed a mismatch between Hannibal's strategy and the political ties he was trying to break. He could recruit enemies of Rome and win Italian allies after victory, but most Roman allies stayed. Rome could raise new armies while attacking Carthaginian resources in Iberia and Africa.

This does not mean Roman citizens beat Carthaginian mercenaries through patriotism. Rome also relied heavily on allied troops, and Carthaginian soldiers could fight with extraordinary loyalty. Rome's Italian obligations were more deeply institutionalised through colonies, treaties and widening citizenship. Carthage drew external manpower through a broader range of arrangements that are less uniformly documented. That difference helps

explain resilience, but naval control, leadership, geography and contingency mattered as well.

At its best, that diversity created a remarkably adaptable army. Its cohesion was an achievement rather than a default. The army was Carthaginian power made visible: not a crowd of hired strangers, but a coalition whose loyalty, supply and command had to be produced again through every campaign.

The City Rome Destroyed and Rebuilt

In 149 BCE, Carthage surrendered hostages and weapons to Rome in the hope of preserving peace. The Roman demand kept moving. The Carthaginians were finally told to abandon their city and resettle inland, away from the sea. For a community whose identity, economy and security depended on that location, the order amounted to extinction without the courtesy of immediate killing. Carthage chose war.

The city had been defeated half a century earlier at Zama, stripped of overseas possessions and forbidden to wage war without Roman permission. It then recovered economically. That recovery became part of the problem. Carthage was prosperous, strategically placed and available as a target to Roman politicians who no longer needed to fear its armies. Conflict with the Numidian king Masinissa supplied the legal pretext. The Third Punic War supplied the end.

The siege lasted three years. Carthage manufactured weapons after surrendering its armouries, mobilised citizens and converted urban space into defence. In 146 BCE, Roman troops broke through. Fighting continued through streets and buildings before the survivors surrendered. The city was burned and its territory declared Roman. The familiar story that salt was ploughed into the ground is a later invention. Rome needed no ritual curse. It had killed, enslaved and dispossessed on a sufficient scale without one.

Destruction altered what could be remembered. Public archives and literature disappeared. Inscriptions survived because stone survives; enemy narratives survived because Greek and Latin scribes copied them. Treaties,

official records and technical works are attested, while the libraries that vanished must have contained much more. Almost none of it reached the manuscript tradition. A civilisation capable of governing an empire and arguing strategy now appears mainly as the object of somebody else's verbs.

Rome did preserve what it considered useful. Mago's twenty-eight books on agriculture were translated by order of the Senate. Other Carthaginian books were distributed to North African rulers. The choice is almost too neat: political memory could be discarded, productive knowledge extracted. Rome separated usable skill from the authority of those who had produced it.

Yet 146 BCE did not erase Punic life. Communities across North Africa continued to use Punic language, institutions, names and religious practices under Roman rule. Inscriptions changed form and mixed languages. Baal Hammon could be identified with Saturn; Tanit with Juno Caelestis. Local elites entered Roman systems without becoming culturally blank. Conquest rearranged identities rather than replacing one population with another overnight.

The city itself returned. Attempts at settlement began before the final Augustan refoundation. Julius Caesar revived the project, and Augustus built a Roman colony over and around the Punic ruins. The new grid, forum, temples and public buildings proclaimed Roman order, while the harbour, fertile hinterland and position in Mediterranean routes supplied the old advantages. The success of Roman Carthage confirms the enduring value of the site, even if no single Roman motive can be recovered from it.

The loop closes here. Carthage had risen by joining sea routes to African resources. Rome destroyed the state but could not abolish the geography, productivity or human connections that had made the city powerful. When Rome rebuilt on the same ground, it drew those advantages into a new imperial order.

What disappeared most completely was Carthage's command of its own

past. Dido survived in a Roman poem. Hannibal survived as Rome's greatest enemy. Child sacrifice survived as the civilisation's moral label. Mago survived in fragments because Roman landowners found him useful. Even the city's return became an achievement of Caesar and Augustus.

Carthage was destroyed. Punic people, knowledge and practice continued. A Roman metropolis rose where the rival had stood. All three statements are true, and the space between them is the final idea. Conquest can eliminate a government, redistribute its population and seize its archive without making the civilisation beneath it vanish. Rome won the territory, then inherited the routes, farms and city. It also inherited the right to explain what Carthage had been.

How It Actually Works

Tyre's daughter

The first Carthaginians arrived by sea from Tyre and settled on a peninsula projecting into the Gulf of Tunis. The traditional foundation date is 814 or 813 BCE; archaeology places a substantial settlement there by the later eighth century. They called it Qart Hadasht, the New City. The name was confident, but the place was not empty. North African communities already farmed, traded and controlled routes inland, while older Phoenician settlements lay along the western Mediterranean coast.

The new port prospered because it joined those worlds. Ships could make the short crossing to western Sicily under favourable conditions, pass west towards Sardinia and Iberia, or return east towards Phoenicia and Egypt. Workshops produced pottery, metal goods and dyed textiles. Merchants handled grain, oil, wine, timber, metals and enslaved people. Cemeteries spread beyond the early settlement, the Byrsa became its fortified height, and a population formed whose language and religious inheritance remained Phoenician while its ancestry and daily surroundings became increasingly African.

Tyre remained the ancestral city, but eastern empires repeatedly

constrained it. Carthage did not inherit a ready-made western empire. It accumulated leadership through wealth, alliances and force. By the later sixth century BCE, western Phoenician towns increasingly dealt with Carthage as the strongest power able to protect sea routes and organise resistance to rivals. The daughter city had become the centre.

The surviving *Periplus of Hanno* may preserve a fifth-century Carthaginian expedition beyond the Straits of Gibraltar. Its Greek text describes the foundation of settlements on the Atlantic coast before a voyage farther south. The sixty ships, thirty thousand settlers and route cannot be accepted as a literal logbook, and scholars still dispute how closely the surviving text reflects a Punic original. Used cautiously, Hanno belongs to the history of Carthaginian expansion beyond the Mediterranean without carrying more certainty than the document can bear.

The long contest for Sicily

Sicily forced Carthage into sustained warfare. Greek cities occupied much of the east and south, Phoenician communities remained strongest in the west, and indigenous Sicels, Sicanians and Elymians pursued their own interests between them. The result was not a clean war between two civilisations. Cities changed partners, local disputes invited foreign armies, and a request for help could become a generation of outside control.

In 480 BCE, a large Carthaginian expedition under Hamilcar was destroyed at Himera by Gelon of Syracuse and Theron of Acragas. The defeat ended the campaign, not Carthaginian power. For decades Carthage avoided major intervention in Sicily while expanding its economic reach and strengthening its position in Africa. It returned in force from 410, destroying Selinus and the rebuilt Himera, then pressing eastwards through repeated wars with Syracuse. Victories were followed by plague, failed sieges and negotiated settlements. Carthage usually held the western end of the island, but never secured Sicily as a whole.

The fighting changed the city behind it. African territory became more tightly organised. Estates, villages, presses, cisterns and roads supplied food and

revenue. In Carthage, a household might contain imported Greek pottery, locally made furniture, Punic inscriptions and servants or slaves from somewhere else in the Mediterranean. Sailors, farmers, scribes, priests, craftsmen and port labourers sustained wars whose surviving histories mostly name generals.

War exposed the scale of organisation behind the port. Councils authorised commanders and expenditure; taxes and harvests became grain, timber, animals, crews and wages; shipyards and workshops kept hulls, weapons and rigging usable. Temples received vows before departure and dedications after return. The same institutions that moved goods by agreement could spend years converting agricultural surplus and tribute into fleets, fortifications and armies.

In 310 BCE, Agathocles of Syracuse exposed the central risk. Blockaded at home, he slipped out with an army and landed in Africa, shifting the war onto ground Carthage had long kept safe. He defeated a Carthaginian army and won support from discontented communities, but the city did not collapse. Its walls held, its government raised fresh forces, and Agathocles eventually returned to Sicily, abandoning much of his African army. The invasion demonstrated the possibility Rome later exploited. A power spread around the sea could be attacked at its centre.

Rome crosses the strait

The First Punic War began in 264 BCE with a quarrel over Messana. The Mamertines, Campanian soldiers who had seized the city, were threatened by Syracuse. One faction admitted a Carthaginian garrison; another appealed to Rome. The garrison was expelled, Roman forces crossed the strait, and Carthage joined Syracuse against Messana. A local crisis had pulled two states with no settled plan for a twenty-three-year war into a struggle for Sicily.

Carthage possessed the experienced fleet and the stronger coastal position. Rome possessed the deeper Italian manpower system and proved willing to learn at ruinous cost. After taking Acragas, the Romans built a major fleet.

Polybius says a stranded Carthaginian warship supplied the model. Their early ships were clumsy, so they fitted boarding bridges that turned a naval collision into infantry combat. At Mylae in 260, Carthaginian captains attacked an enemy they considered amateur and lost ships when Roman soldiers crossed onto their decks.

The innovation did not settle the war. Carthage retained fortified ports at Drepana and Lilybaeum, raided Italian coasts and recovered from defeats. Rome lost fleets to battle and, on a larger scale, to storms. At Drepana in 249, the Carthaginian commander Adherbal brought his ships out before a Roman surprise attack could seal the harbour, formed them in open water and won a major victory. The victory did not break Rome's willingness to rebuild. Both sides replaced ships and crews in numbers that made each apparent decision temporary.

In 256, Rome forced a crossing to Africa after the vast naval battle off Cape Ecnomus. The consul Regulus won on land and offered peace on terms Carthage refused. A Spartan officer named Xanthippus then persuaded the Carthaginians to fight on open ground, where their cavalry and elephants could operate. Near Tunis in 255, the Roman army was crushed and Regulus captured. Africa was saved, but the war returned to Sicily rather than ending.

By 241, Carthage was still supplying its final strongholds from the sea while Hamilcar Barca maintained an aggressive land campaign around Mount Eryx. Rome raised one more fleet, much of it financed by wealthy citizens. Off the Aegates Islands it intercepted a Carthaginian relief force carrying supplies and replacement troops. The defeat cut the Sicilian garrisons from support. Hamilcar had not been beaten in the field, but Carthage could no longer sustain him. It surrendered Sicily and accepted a heavy indemnity.

The war without truce

Peace released an army Carthage could not immediately pay. Troops returned from Sicily expecting wages and rewards accumulated over years. The government delayed, gathered them first in Carthage and then moved them to Sicca, hoping to bargain down the bill. The soldiers marched back towards the capital and camped at Tunis. What began as a pay dispute widened when Libyan communities, heavily taxed during the Roman war, joined the revolt under Mathos and Spendius.

Carthage suddenly faced enemies who knew its officers, tactics and weak points. Utica and Hippo defected. Supply routes closed. The city armed citizens, hired new troops and sent out Hanno, who failed to turn an early success into control. Hamilcar Barca then took command, restored access to the countryside and won over a Numidian prince, Naravas, with cavalry Carthage badly needed.

The war became deliberately irreconcilable. Prisoners were mutilated, tortured and crucified. Each atrocity made surrender more dangerous and compromise less credible. Hamilcar eventually trapped a large rebel force in a mountain enclosure later called the Saw, then defeated Mathos near Leptis in 238 BCE. Polybius called it the Truceless War because the combatants had dismantled the conditions under which a truce could be trusted.

During the crisis, Carthaginian troops in Sardinia also revolted. Rome first refused their invitation to occupy the island, then changed course after the African war ended. It seized Sardinia and imposed another indemnity when Carthage protested. The act removed a major possession at the moment Carthage was least able to defend it. It also made recovery urgent. Iberia offered the revenue, recruits and strategic room that Africa alone could not provide.

A new Carthage in Iberia

Hamilcar crossed to Iberia in 237 BCE. The region offered silver, recruits and room to rebuild beyond immediate Roman reach. It was not vacant territory waiting for a Carthaginian flag. Communities had their own rulers, rivalries and fortified towns, so expansion required campaigns, hostages, marriages, treaties and distributions of reward.

After Hamilcar died in 229, his son-in-law Hasdrubal continued with greater emphasis on diplomacy. He founded or enlarged another Qart Hadasht, the city now called Cartagena, beside an excellent harbour and close to mining districts. In 226 he agreed with Rome that Carthaginian forces would not cross the Ebro under arms. The treaty reduced one uncertainty and left another below the river: Saguntum, a city friendly to Rome and hostile to Carthage's local allies.

Hannibal inherited command in 221. He completed campaigns elsewhere, then attacked Saguntum in 219 after presenting the conflict as punishment for aggression against a neighbouring people. Rome treated the siege and Carthage's refusal to surrender him as grounds for war. The legal arguments mattered, but they sat inside a larger collision. Rome had taken Sardinia and was building influence in Iberia. Carthage had rebuilt enough power to resist the settlement of 241. Neither side trusted the other's limits.

Hannibal's answer was to avoid the expected war. Rather than wait in Iberia or contest another naval invasion, he crossed the Pyrenees, the Rhône and the Alps to enter Italy from the north. His target was the political structure behind Rome's armies. Defeat Rome in front of its allies, offer those allies independence, and the Italian system might come apart without Carthage having to capture every city.

The gamble in Italy

The march cost men, animals and equipment before the first major battle. What reached Italy was still enough. Hannibal defeated Roman forces at the Ticinus and Trebia in 218 BCE, destroyed an army in an ambush at Lake Trasimene in 217, and in 216 drew a much larger Roman force into the enclosure at Cannae. African infantry turned on the Roman flanks while cavalry closed the rear. By the end, Rome had suffered one of the worst defeats in its history.

The expected political collapse began, then stopped. Capua joined Hannibal, as did several communities in southern Italy. Syracuse later changed sides in Sicily, and Philip V of Macedon allied with Carthage. Yet most Latin colonies and much of central Italy remained loyal. The allies had grievances, but they also had hostages, local rivals, legal ties, shared wars and reasons to fear what followed a Roman defeat. One battle, however destructive, could not erase generations of integration.

Hannibal did not fail because he forgot to march on Rome. The city was fortified, his army lacked the means for a quick assault, and his strategy required defections more than possession of the capital. He moved through southern Italy protecting new partners, seeking ports and waiting for the coalition to grow. It never grew far enough.

Carthage supported a war spread across several theatres rather than feeding every available resource into Hannibal's camp. Armies fought in Iberia, Sicily and Sardinia. Fleets moved troops and supplies where Roman control allowed. Hannibal received reinforcements, but distance, hostile coastlines and competing emergencies prevented one continuous flow. The same dispersed resources that had produced his army now had to sustain separate wars at once.

Rome stopped offering him the battle he wanted. It shadowed, delayed and attacked his allies. Capua fell in 211. Syracuse had already fallen after a long siege. In Iberia, Publius Cornelius Scipio captured New Carthage in 209, taking the harbour, stores, hostages and silver base that held

Carthaginian power together. His victory at Ilipa in 206 ended Carthage's effective control of the peninsula.

Hannibal's brother Hasdrubal crossed the Alps with another army in 207, but Roman forces intercepted and killed him at the Metaurus before the brothers could combine. Hannibal remained in southern Italy, undefeated in a final decisive battle and increasingly irrelevant to the direction of the war. Rome had survived the invasion, removed its supports and learned to carry the conflict back to Africa.

The war returns to Africa

Scipio landed in Africa in 204 BCE and joined Masinissa, the Numidian ruler whose cavalry and political ambitions had shifted towards Rome. Carthage relied on Masinissa's rival Syphax and raised new armies while trying to preserve its ports. Dynastic marriage sat inside the alliance system: Sophonisba, daughter of the Carthaginian commander Hasdrubal Gisco, had married Syphax and then Masinissa after Syphax's capture. Livy's account turns her death by poison into tragedy, but the political function of the marriage is clear. Scipio destroyed enemy camps in a night attack, won at the Great Plains in 203 and forced the recall of Hannibal from Italy. Hannibal returned to the African coast after more than three decades spent largely in Iberia and Italy. The war he had designed to break Rome's alliances would now be decided beside Carthage.

At Zama in 202, Carthage committed elephants, newly raised troops, veterans and Hannibal's remaining Italian army. Scipio opened lanes through his infantry so many of the elephants passed without breaking the formation. Roman and Numidian cavalry drove off their opponents, returned later and struck the Carthaginian rear. Hannibal's veterans held until the battle closed around them. Carthage lost the army and the last credible route to a negotiated balance.

Hannibal advised acceptance of the terms. Carthage surrendered its fleet apart from ten ships, lost its possessions outside Africa, accepted a long indemnity and agreed not to wage war without Roman permission.

Masinissa received territory and room to press future claims. The western system Carthage had spent centuries assembling was reduced to the city and its African land.

Recovery and erasure

Defeat did not produce immediate ruin. Agriculture, workshops and trade restored revenue. Hannibal became a suffete in 196 BCE and attacked corruption in the financial system, making it possible to meet the indemnity without new emergency taxes. The reforms threatened powerful families. Roman suspicion and domestic enemies combined, and Hannibal fled in 195. Carthage remained prosperous enough to offer early repayment of what it still owed.

Its freedom did not recover with its finances. Disputes with Masinissa went to Roman arbitration because the peace settlement had denied Carthage the right to defend itself independently. Roman decisions were not uniformly against Carthage, but the structure favoured the side allowed to act while the other waited for permission. In 150 BCE, after another Numidian encroachment, Carthage finally sent an army without Roman approval. It was defeated, and the treaty breach gave Rome the formal case for war.

In 149, a Roman army landed after Utica defected. Carthage tried submission first. It gave hostages, then surrendered its weapons after receiving assurances that its laws and territory would remain. The final demand was delivered only afterwards: the inhabitants must abandon Carthage and resettle at least fifteen kilometres from the sea. The city itself would be destroyed.

The answer was resistance. Workshops, houses and temples yielded timber and metal. Citizens and freed slaves made weapons, repaired walls and trained for defence. The first Roman assaults failed, and Carthaginian forces repeatedly struck camps and siege works. In 147, Scipio Aemilianus took command, tightened discipline and sealed the city from its hinterland. When he built a mole across the harbour entrance, the Carthaginians cut another channel to the sea and launched a newly built fleet through it. The surprise

was impressive; the chance to break the blockade was lost.

Once Scipio captured the harbour area and destroyed the remaining field army at Nephesis, hunger completed what assault had not. In spring 146, Roman troops entered the city. They fought through streets and buildings for six days, clearing houses level by level before reaching the Byrsa. Tens of thousands of survivors were enslaved. Carthage was looted, burned and dismantled, and its remaining territory became the Roman province of Africa. The Senate ordered Mago's agricultural work translated into Latin and distributed other surviving books to North African rulers. Rome destroyed much of Carthage's archive and political voice while extracting knowledge it considered useful.

Rome forbade settlement on the site, but the prohibition did not last. A failed colony was attempted under Gaius Gracchus. Julius Caesar revived the project, and Augustus established Roman Carthage in 29 BCE. The rebuilt city became one of the great centres of Roman Africa, confirming that the location and hinterland retained their value. Beyond it, Punic names, municipal traditions, cults and language continued. Augustine still knew of Punic speakers in the region in the early fifth century CE.

The state ended in 146 BCE. The harbour, farmland and human connections did not. Rome destroyed Punic Carthage, then built a Roman city whose success depended on many of the same physical advantages.

How we know

Carthage's own historical literature is almost entirely lost. The main continuous accounts were written in Greek or Latin. Polybius is closest to the First and Second Punic Wars, questioned participants and used documentary material, but he moved within the circle of Scipio Aemilianus. Livy wrote later and survives incompletely for this period. Appian, later still, supplies the fullest surviving account of the Third Punic War and often gives speeches and numbers that should be treated as literary reconstruction rather than transcripts.

Material evidence corrects the enemy narrative. Excavation reveals the city,

harbours, houses, workshops, sanctuaries and rural settlement. Kerkuane preserves a Punic town not rebuilt by Rome. Inscriptions recover names, offices, dedications and language, though rarely events. Underwater work near the Aegates Islands has found bronze rams, helmets and cargo from the battle of 241 BCE, fixing ancient naval history to a real seabed.

The broad sequence is secure. Exact army sizes, casualty totals, private motives and polished speeches are not.

What People Get Wrong

“Carthage was only a trading city”

The label is accurate and radically incomplete. Carthage became rich through maritime exchange, and its merchants linked North Africa to Sicily, Sardinia, Iberia and the wider Mediterranean. Ships are the part that moves, so they dominate the surviving image. The city behind them depended on land.

Carthage controlled a productive African hinterland containing farms, estates, villages, roads, presses and storage. Grain fed the population and armies. Wine, oil, livestock and agricultural surplus supplied exports and revenue. Rural expansion also meant tribute, confiscation, coerced labour and pressure on Libyan communities whose relationship with the city was far less voluntary than trade between merchants.

Carthage was not an offshore marketplace protected by hired guards. It was a territorial and maritime state that could tax, settle, compel and fight. Its African base helps explain recovery after losing fleets and islands, while the later success of Roman Carthage shows that the same site and countryside retained their value. The harbour displayed power. The farms helped make recovery possible.

“Its armies were mercenaries bought by merchants”

Some Carthaginian soldiers were mercenaries in the strict sense, but the word has swallowed the army. Citizens served, especially when the city itself was threatened. African subjects owed troops. Numidian cavalry arrived through alliances, royal politics and shifting obligations. Iberians, Gauls and Balearic slingers served under arrangements ranging from levy and alliance to personal loyalty and cash payment.

The mercenary label supplied a convenient moral contrast with Rome's citizen army: rich Carthage paid foreigners while patriotic Romans fought for themselves. The contrast breaks down quickly. Roman armies also depended heavily on allied contingents, while many troops stayed with Hannibal through years of hardship far from any reliable pay office.

The Mercenary War after 241 BCE made the stereotype persuasive. An unpaid army did revolt, but the conflict widened because African communities joined with grievances over taxation and subordination. It was a crisis in the relationships behind recruitment, not proof that every non-citizen soldier fought only for the next coin. Carthage's diversity gave its generals exceptional tactical range. The danger came when payment, command and political obligation failed together.

“Carthage abandoned Hannibal in Italy”

The accusation contains a real failure and turns it into a betrayal. After Cannae, Hannibal received far less reinforcement than his position seemed to justify. One substantial force came from Africa, another was redirected, and later attempts by Hasdrubal and Mago to reach him from Iberia failed. Carthage never concentrated everything on the army that had broken Rome's largest forces.

It did not leave him to fight alone. Carthaginian armies and fleets operated in Iberia, Sicily, Sardinia, southern Italy and Africa. Money, soldiers and ships were committed across the war. The difficulty was that each theatre had its own urgency, while Roman naval pressure and long distances made

movement uncertain. Hannibal's Barcid command in Iberia had also developed unusual autonomy, leaving the government at Carthage to support a strategy it had not designed in detail.

The stronger criticism is strategic. Carthage never concentrated its war around Hannibal's Italian opportunity, while several theatres competed for ships, soldiers and money. That is more revealing than a story about jealous merchants sabotaging a genius. Hannibal was supported, but his campaign never became the unquestioned centre of Carthaginian strategy.

“Hannibal lost because he did not march on Rome after Cannae”

The missed-march story turns a long strategic failure into one wrong turn on a road. After destroying the Roman army at Cannae in 216 BCE, Hannibal appears to have had one obvious move: go straight to Rome and end the war.

Rome was fortified, defended and difficult to take without a siege train. Hannibal's army had fought an exhausting battle and was operating deep inside hostile territory. Capturing the capital was never the only route to victory. His strategy aimed to break the Italian alliance system by proving that Rome could not protect its partners. Capua and several southern communities defected. Most of the system held.

Hannibal did appear before Rome in 211 BCE, when he hoped to draw Roman forces away from the siege of Capua. The Romans did not abandon the operation, and he withdrew. The episode showed the limit more clearly than an assault after Cannae would have done. A commander could threaten the city without destroying the network that supplied it.

The correction matters because battles do not defeat institutions by themselves. Hannibal won the encounter everyone remembers. Rome survived through recruitment, allied loyalty, fortified places and refusal to negotiate. The decisive target was not a wall. It was the political system behind the wall.

“The tophet settles the child-sacrifice question”

The tophet has been made to prove two opposite certainties. In one version, every urn confirms routine mass child murder. In the other, the accusation was Roman propaganda and the site was an ordinary cemetery for infants who died naturally. The evidence supports neither clean answer.

The sanctuary contained urns holding cremated infant and child remains, sometimes with animals, together with inscribed stelae and repeated dedications to Baal Hammon and Tanit. It was a specialised ritual space, not an ordinary family cemetery. Ancient accusations of sacrifice cannot be dismissed because the writers were hostile. The combined record keeps deliberate sacrifice as a serious explanation for some deposits, but does not establish the cause of every death.

The number, frequency and circumstances remain harder to fix. Tophets operated across different places and centuries, and recent work stresses variation rather than one practice everywhere. Some children may instead have died young from illness before receiving a distinctive sacred burial. At the later site of Zita, twelve analysed individuals showed serious health problems and careful treatment after death, without concrete evidence establishing sacrifice.

The responsible correction is uncomfortable. Sacrifice may have formed part of the practice, but archaeology cannot tell us what share of the burials resulted from ritual killing. Enemy testimony deserves scrutiny, and modern discomfort is not evidence either. Carthage should be neither acquitted nor defined by the single charge its enemies found most useful.

“Rome destroyed Carthage because it was still about to attack”

The Third Punic War is often presented as the final round of one continuous duel. Hannibal had nearly destroyed Rome, Carthage recovered, and Rome struck before the old danger returned. The fifty years between Zama and the Roman invasion make that explanation difficult to sustain.

Carthage had lost its overseas possessions, surrendered almost all of its fleet and accepted a treaty forbidding war without Roman permission. It became prosperous again, but prosperity is not the same as immediate military capacity. Conflict with the Numidian king Masinissa placed it in an impossible position: tolerate repeated encroachment or defend itself and breach the treaty. When Carthage finally fought without authorisation, Rome had its formal pretext.

Roman motives were not uniform. Fear of recovery, domestic political rivalry and strategic interest in Africa all mattered. Some Roman decisions had even favoured Carthage against Numidia, ruling out a tidy fifty-year conspiracy. By 149 BCE Rome nevertheless demanded submission, weapons and finally evacuation after Carthage had complied with the earlier terms.

The war eliminated the independence of a community Rome had already rendered subordinate. It was preventive in the broadest sense, but not an emergency response to a Carthaginian invasion waiting to happen.

“Rome salted the earth and erased everything Punic”

No surviving ancient account says that Rome sowed Carthage with salt. The story entered the tradition much later and became irresistible because it gives total destruction a single visual gesture. Rome needed no salt to make the event severe. It killed, enslaved, displaced, burned and dismantled on a vast scale.

Erasure is still the wrong final word. Rome preserved Mago's agricultural work for translation. Punic language, names, cults and municipal practices continued across North Africa. Baal Hammon could be worshipped through the Roman name Saturn, and Punic remained spoken in some communities centuries after the independent state had disappeared.

The city returned as well. Roman settlement was attempted within a generation, and Augustus established a successful colony on the site in 29 BCE. Roman Carthage became one of the great cities of the empire, using

the harbour zone, farmland and routes that had also favoured its Punic predecessor.

What Rome erased most effectively was political independence and control over historical memory. Carthage survived in hostile narratives as treacherous merchant, child-sacrificer and defeated enemy. Its conqueror rebuilt the place while deciding what the earlier city meant. The false salt story is therefore less important than the real transformation. Rome destroyed the state, inherited the site and kept the authority to explain both.

Use It

Carthage rewards a particular kind of attention. It makes you stop treating power as a coloured area on a map and start asking how food, soldiers, ports, status and allegiance are converted into action.

Read the obligations beneath the map

Carthage did not place every community under one legal condition. A nearby farming population might owe tribute and troops. A Phoenician port might retain its council while accepting Carthaginian leadership. A Numidian ruler might supply cavalry because the alliance served him, then change sides when the balance moved. One colour on a map conceals all of those arrangements.

When examining any large political order, ask four questions before admiring its size. What does each part owe? What does it receive? Who can enforce the exchange? What route exists from subordination to greater status? Formal possession matters, but usable power depends on whether taxes arrive, soldiers report, roads remain open and local elites still find cooperation preferable to defection. Status matters because the same burden produces different behaviour when a community can gain rights, renegotiate terms or see no route upwards. An order held together by fear may look stable until enforcement weakens; one that distributes advantages can survive shocks without becoming fair.

Maps freeze what political life keeps moving. Carthage could appear unchanged while a naval defeat exposed an island, an unpaid army became a rebellion or a Numidian succession shifted cavalry to the other side. The useful map is therefore partly contractual. It shows obligations and options rather than coastlines alone. It can reveal loss of power before territory formally changes hands.

Follow the surplus

A fleet becomes visible when it leaves harbour. Its capacity begins earlier, in a harvest. Grain feeds rowers and soldiers. Timber, metal, rope, animals, storage and wages turn agricultural production into military reach. Carthage's ships were spectacular. The more important achievement was its ability to draw enough surplus from North Africa to build, supply and replace them.

Follow any impressive activity backwards until you find the production it consumes. Who grows the food, extracts the material, maintains the equipment, records the obligation and absorbs the bad year? The glamorous layer often receives credit because it moves. The fixed layer bears risk because it cannot. Carthage's merchants could seek another market; a rural household facing tribute, requisition or land pressure could not move so easily. Timing belongs in the account. A good harvest stored near a harbour can finance a campaign months later; a failed crop, blocked route or depleted treasury can turn nominal wealth into unusable power. Capacity is surplus in the right place, under someone able to claim it, at the moment it is needed.

Surplus also explains resilience. Carthage lost fleets, islands and wars yet recovered because its African base continued producing. The same mechanism carried political danger. A state can become rich enough to survive defeat while extracting so heavily that the people supplying its recovery become available to rebellion. Productive capacity and political consent are separate accounts. Both need reading.

Define how victory becomes a settlement

Cannae was a complete tactical victory and an incomplete political event. Hannibal destroyed the Roman army in front of Rome's allies, expecting more of them to defect. Some did. Enough did not. Rome retained the communities, colonies and obligations from which another army could be raised.

Every strategy needs a conversion chain. A battlefield success must alter allegiance, resources or bargaining power. A reform must change incentives or enforcement. A negotiation must create commitments that survive the people who signed it. A public triumph that leaves the opponent's means of recovery intact may be dramatic without being decisive.

The test is concrete: what can the other side no longer do tomorrow? If it can still recruit, borrow, command allies, replace leaders and deny surrender, the contest continues. Hannibal's problem after Cannae was not a shortage of brilliance. It was that the victory had no automatic mechanism for dissolving the political order behind the defeated army.

Measure political depth, not tactical variety

Carthaginian commanders could combine African infantry, Numidian cavalry, Iberian and Gallic fighters, Balearic slingers and naval expertise. That variety produced options Roman commanders initially lacked. Rome's advantage appeared after losses. Its Italian system could reproduce armies because military obligation was embedded in a deeper set of colonies, treaties, communities and expanding statuses.

Capability and political depth are different. One tells you what a force can do at its best. The other tells you whether the system can replace losses, transfer loyalty between commanders, survive delayed payment and continue when the first plan fails. Hannibal's army possessed remarkable capability. Rome's alliance system possessed greater depth during the war that mattered. Political depth becomes visible in replacement rather than display. Count how quickly losses can be absorbed, how many actors can assume command and whether loyalty survives a dead leader or empty

treasury. The best first performance may tell you less than the quality of the second attempt.

This is not a law that uniform states defeat coalitions. Carthage itself endured for centuries, and Rome also relied on allies. The diagnostic question is narrower: which relationships belong to the institution, and which depend on the reputation, money or personal diplomacy of one leader? A coalition may be strongest at the point of contact and weakest at the point of reproduction.

Split destruction into separate endings

Rome destroyed the independent Carthaginian state in 146 BCE. That statement does not tell you what happened to every other part of the civilisation. People were killed, enslaved and displaced; archives and public institutions were lost; Punic language, names, cults and local practices continued; agricultural knowledge was translated; a Roman city later rose on the same site.

Treat collapse as several questions rather than one date. When did the government end? What happened to the population? Which skills and infrastructures survived? Who inherited land and revenue? Which names, languages and rituals continued, and under whose authority? Different answers can occupy the same year.

Memory requires its own column. Rome preserved the Carthaginian farming work it valued and transmitted the accusations that defined its enemy. The conqueror therefore inherited more than territory. It gained the power to separate useful knowledge from political authorship and to decide which trait would represent the defeated society. Survival without narrative control is a form of survival, but not an equal one.

The limits

Carthage is not a manual for running a modern organisation. Its arrangements belonged to a world of tribute, enslavement, dynastic marriage, slow communication and recurring war. Modern law, bureaucracy, finance and communications alter the cost of every comparison.

Nor does the history prove that a loose maritime empire must lose to a territorially integrated republic. Carthage survived for centuries, rebuilt after severe defeat and came close to breaking Rome. Rome won through resources, adaptation, allied decisions, naval recovery, leadership and contingency. Structure changes probabilities. It does not write the result in advance.

The evidence imposes a final limit. Much of the continuous narrative comes from Greek and Roman writers, while Carthage's own historical argument is missing. The lenses above should therefore be used as questions, not verdicts. They help expose hidden obligations, material costs and incomplete endings. They do not make every silence in the archive answerable.

The one thing to keep

Keep the second map.

The first map shows territory. The second shows what moves across it: food, money, soldiers, ships, orders, rights and promises. It records which relationships are compulsory, which are negotiated, which can survive defeat and which depend on one person holding them together.

That map explains why Carthage could project power far beyond its citizens and why Rome could survive Cannae after losing the visible army. It also explains why 146 BCE was an ending for the state without being the end of Punic language, religious practice, agriculture or the city as a place of power.

After Carthage, never ask only who owned the land or who won the battle. Ask what continued to move, who supplied it, what status bound them and

who obtained the authority to describe the result. That is where power operated, where it failed and where part of it survived the conqueror.

Terms

Qart Hadasht. Phoenician for New City, the name Carthaginians used for Carthage and later for Cartagena. It reminds you that Carthage is a Latinised name for a Phoenician foundation.

Phoenician. A Greek-derived collective label for the coastal city communities of the Levant, especially Tyre, Sidon and Byblos. They shared language and culture without forming one enduring Phoenician state.

Punic. The Roman-derived term for western Phoenician language, culture and communities, especially those connected to Carthage. It describes a cultural world, not a single ancestry or racial group.

Liby-Phoenician. A Greek and Roman label for communities linked to both North African and Phoenician worlds. Its meaning varied, so it should not be treated as a precise mixed ethnicity.

Byrsa. The fortified hill at the centre of Carthage, later occupied by houses, temples and public buildings. The name became entangled with the legend of Dido and the oxhide.

Cothon. A term used for an artificial harbour basin, especially Carthage's late rectangular commercial harbour and circular naval harbour. The famous double harbour belonged to the city's final centuries.

Suffete. From the Phoenician word for judge. Carthage normally elected two suffetes as senior civil magistrates, closer to annual chief officials than to the kings imagined by some Greek writers.

Council of Elders. The elite deliberative body, or bodies, that worked with the suffetes and citizen assembly. Ancient descriptions are incomplete, so the exact division of authority remains uncertain.

Hundred and Four. A powerful Carthaginian oversight body associated

especially with judging generals and officials. Its existence reveals how strongly the republic feared commanders returning with independent prestige.

Tophet. A specialised sanctuary containing urns with cremated infant, child and animal remains, together with votive stelae. It is central to the child-sacrifice debate but does not settle every death.

Baal Hammon. A major male deity of Carthage, frequently invoked at the tophet and later identified with Kronos or Saturn. His precise functions changed across regions and centuries.

Tanit. Carthage's leading goddess, often called the Face of Baal and represented by a distinctive sign. Under Roman rule she was associated with Juno Caelestis.

Melqart. The patron god of Tyre, whose name means King of the City. His cult travelled through Phoenician settlements and was commonly identified by Greeks and Romans with Heracles or Hercules.

Votive stele. An inscribed stone set up after a vow or offering. Punic stelae preserve names, family relationships and repeated religious formulas that compensate partly for the loss of Carthaginian literature.

Tribute. A compulsory payment in money, produce, labour or military service imposed on a subordinate community. Tribute marks the point at which exchange becomes political domination rather than ordinary trade.

Hegemony. Leadership or controlling influence exercised without annexing every community under one administration. The word suits Carthage's uneven command of ports, allies, subjects and commercial partners.

Numidia. The North African kingdoms west and south of Carthage, famous for highly mobile cavalry. Numidian rulers such as Masinissa and Syphax were independent political actors, not permanent Carthaginian auxiliaries.

Mercenary. A soldier serving primarily for pay outside ordinary civic obligation. Some Carthaginian troops fit the term; subject levies, allies, royal

contingents and citizen soldiers often did not.

Barcid. A modern name for the family of Hamilcar Barca, Hasdrubal and Hannibal. The Barcids dominated Carthaginian expansion in Iberia but never formed a hereditary monarchy over Carthage.

Iberia. The ancient geographical name for the Iberian Peninsula. Its silver, ports and soldiers financed Carthage's recovery after the First Punic War and supplied the base for Hannibal's campaign.

Quinquereme. The principal heavy warship of the Punic Wars. The name refers to a rowing arrangement or group of five rowers, not five neat banks of oars stacked vertically.

Corvus. Latin for raven, the name given to Rome's early boarding bridge. It allowed infantry to cross onto enemy decks and helped Rome convert naval encounters into the kind of fighting it understood.

War elephant. An elephant trained to frighten horses, disrupt formations and carry a driver into battle. Carthage used them repeatedly, though disciplined infantry could open lanes or turn them back.

Punic Wars. The three wars between Rome and Carthage, fought from 264 to 146 BCE. Their name comes from the Roman word for the Punic people, not from Carthage itself.

Mercenary War. The revolt of unpaid soldiers and African communities from 241 to 238 BCE, also called the Libyan or Truceless War. It exposed the unequal relationships beneath Carthaginian recruitment and taxation.

Cannae. Hannibal's greatest victory, in 216 BCE, where a Roman army was enveloped and destroyed. Its importance lies equally in what followed: Rome's alliance system did not collapse.

Zama. The battle in 202 BCE at which Scipio defeated Hannibal in North Africa. It ended Carthage's overseas power and left the city unable to wage war without Roman permission.

Indemnity. A payment imposed on a defeated state. Rome's indemnities

extracted Carthaginian wealth over years, constrained policy and encouraged the search for new revenue in Iberia.

Mago. The Carthaginian agronomist whose twenty-eight-book farming treatise Rome ordered translated after destroying the city. He should not be confused with Mago Barca, Hannibal's younger brother.

Neo-Punic. The later form of Punic language and script used under Roman rule, especially in North Africa. The label describes linguistic development after conquest, not the arrival of a new people.

Go Deeper

One hour can recover Carthage from Rome's shadow. The next step is to read one narrative, one ancient account and two works that rebuild the Punic world from a wider range of evidence. Together they move from a readable reconstruction to the source, then to the comparative and archaeological work that prevents Rome from owning the whole subject.

The narrative

Richard Miles, *Carthage Must Be Destroyed: The Rise and Fall of an Ancient Civilization* (2010). This is the easiest full-length continuation: energetic, broad and interested in the city before Hannibal as well as in the wars that destroyed it. Miles keeps religion, North Africa and the Mediterranean setting in view while giving the military story enough room to move. The title announces the limitation. Rome and the Punic Wars still pull the narrative towards the ending, and some archaeological debates have advanced since publication. Start here if you want one substantial book rather than a shelf.

The primary account

Polybius, *The Histories*, translated by Robin Waterfield and edited by Brian McGing (2010). Read Books 1 and 3 first. They contain the First Punic War, the Mercenary War, the treaties, the road to the second conflict and Hannibal's early campaign. Polybius questioned participants and understood institutions and strategy better than most ancient historians. He was also a Greek aristocrat writing within the circle of Scipio Aemilianus, the Roman who destroyed Carthage. His account is indispensable, intelligent and never neutral.

The wider interpretation

Josephine Crawley Quinn and Nicholas C. Vella, editors, *The Punic Mediterranean: Identities and Identification from Phoenician Settlement to Roman Rule* (2014). This collection replaces the old picture of a culture exported intact from the Levant with communities that formed local identities through movement, exchange, worship and political choice. It is the best next read for understanding why Punic did not mean one ancestry or one standard way of life. It is a specialist collection rather than a continuous story, so choose chapters by place or problem instead of reading straight through.

The evidence

Brian R. Doak and Carolina López-Ruiz, editors, *The Oxford Handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean* (2019). This is the reference work behind the reconstruction: history, language, agriculture, religion, archaeology, regional contact and later reception in one large volume. Begin with Hédi Dridi on early Carthage, Dexter Hoyos on the pre-war city, Carlos Gómez Bellard on agriculture and Paolo Xella on religion. It is expensive and academically dense. Its value is that every confident general account can be tested against the evidence and specialist debate that confidence has compressed.

Notes and Sources

Carthage left inscriptions, buildings, graves, harbours, tools and objects, but almost none of its historical literature survives. The continuous narrative therefore depends heavily on Greek and Roman writers whose purposes were not Carthaginian self-description. These notes identify the main supports for the book's model and the few disputes that alter it. Dates are BCE unless marked CE.

The Whole Thing in One Page

Mago and the translated farming books. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 18.22, says that after Carthage was captured the Roman Senate distributed most surviving books to African rulers but ordered Mago's agricultural work translated into Latin by appointed experts. Pliny gives its length as twenty-eight books. The original is lost and survives through later Greek and Latin quotations and adaptations.

A Phoenician-rooted African republic. Punic language, script, cult and institutional titles preserve the Phoenician inheritance. Archaeology and inscriptions show western Punic communities developing locally as well as maintaining eastern connections. Recent ancient-DNA work adds evidence for substantial population diversity in later sampled communities, but cannot define the composition of the earliest colonial phase. Republic is used for a non-monarchical state governed through magistrates, councils and an assembly. It does not imply a modern representative democracy, and the extent of popular participation remains under active reinterpretation.

The sea power resting on land. Carlos Gómez Bellard's chapter on agriculture in *The Oxford Handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean* and archaeological work in northern Tunisia support the emphasis on grain, vines, olives, livestock, storage and rural settlement. Ancient accounts of invading armies moving through wealthy estates are consistent with a developed agrarian base, though they describe elite property more clearly than the labour beneath it.

Differentiated rule. *The Punic Mediterranean*, edited by Quinn and Vella, supplies the broader model of variable Punic communities and connections. Polybius' treaties and war narratives show different relationships among Carthage, Phoenician cities, African subjects, Numidian rulers, Iberian communities and overseas allies. Empire is retained because Carthage compelled service, tribute and strategic obedience, but it did not administer every place in one uniform way.

Hannibal and the Roman alliance system. Polybius Books 3 and 6, Livy Books 21-30, Michael Fronda's *Between Rome and Carthage* and Simon Hornblower's *Hannibal and Scipio* support the distinction between winning battles and breaking Rome's Italian political reservoir. The claim is not that Rome possessed effortless loyalty. Several allies defected, and the surviving system required coercion, self-interest, local rivalry and repeated Roman military recovery.

Destruction, rebuilding and memory. Appian gives the fullest surviving narrative of the final war. Pliny preserves the Mago episode. Andrew Wilson documents the later use of Punic and Neo-Punic in Roman North Africa, while Günther Schörner examines the selective construction of memory in Augustan Carthage. The independent state ended in 146. Punic people and practices did not disappear on that date.

Why You Should Care

Agathocles in the African countryside. Diodorus Siculus, Books 19-20, is the principal narrative source for Agathocles' invasion of 310. His description of prosperous estates has been used cautiously, since invasion narratives often heighten the wealth of the land being entered. Archaeology independently supports intensive cultivation and rural investment around Carthage.

The city, its harbours and domestic space. The Archaeological Site of Carthage, listed by UNESCO, preserves Punic and Roman layers including Byrsa, the tophet and the harbour zone. The famous rectangular commercial basin and circular naval harbour belong to the late monumental

form of the city. Andrew Wilson's survey of North African urbanism uses Kerkouane as a rare Punic domestic comparison, including a house with a basin and bath tub, and notes the town's involvement in purple-dye production. Kerkouane is not treated as a miniature Carthage, but it provides a concrete contemporary view of Punic urban life that Roman rebuilding did not overwrite.

Enemy evidence. Polybius was closer to the Punic Wars than Livy or Appian and had access to documents and participants, but he belonged to the social world of Scipio Aemilianus. Livy wrote under Augustus. Appian wrote centuries after the destruction. Hostility does not make their accounts worthless; it requires claims about motives, speeches, numbers and Carthaginian character to be tested against one another and against material evidence.

The Core Ideas

Foundation and Elissa. The traditional date of 814 or 813 comes through later chronological traditions, while secure archaeological evidence places substantial settlement by the later eighth century. The Elissa or Dido story preserves a Tyrian foundation memory but cannot be read as a biography. Virgil's tragic queen is a Roman literary transformation of a tradition older than Rome's surviving epic.

Hanno beyond Gibraltar. The *Periplus of Hanno* survives only in Greek, and its relationship to a Punic original, the date of any underlying expedition and the historicity of parts of the narrative remain disputed. Some specialists accept a sixth- or fifth-century Carthaginian voyage behind the text; others treat the document itself as too uncertain to carry that conclusion securely. The book therefore says that it *may* preserve a fifth-century expedition, rejects the stated thirty thousand settlers and precise route as literal data, and does not present the Greek prologue's claim that an account was dedicated in a Carthaginian sanctuary as independently verified fact.

Punic identity and ancestry. Punic identifies a western Phoenician linguistic and cultural field, not a fixed biological population. Harald

Ringbauer and colleagues generated genome-wide data for 210 individuals, including 196 from fourteen sites traditionally identified as Phoenician and Punic. Their central and western samples are overwhelmingly from the sixth century BCE or later because cremation, dominant in many earlier Phoenician settlements, rarely preserves usable ancient DNA. The study found little direct Levantine ancestry in most of those later sampled communities, including Carthage. That is important evidence for population diversity after 600 BCE, not a direct measurement of the people who founded the earliest western settlements. Lorenzo Nigro, a co-author of the Nature study and a Phoenician-Punic archaeologist, published a 2025 response arguing that the article's historical framing goes beyond what this sampling can establish. The book therefore keeps the genetic result in the notes rather than making it part of the narrative definition of Punic identity.

Africa fed the city. The book distinguishes productive integration from benevolent development. Punic settlement brought techniques, markets and investment, while Carthaginian expansion also imposed tribute, military levies, land pressure and unequal status on African communities. The evidence is strongest for the existence and scale of rural production, weaker for the exact legal condition and daily experience of many labourers.

Ports and bargains. Roman-Carthaginian treaties preserved by Polybius reveal negotiated zones of trade and strategic exclusion. Archaeology shows variation among Punic settlements in Sicily, Sardinia, North Africa and Iberia. Terms such as colony, ally, subject and possession are therefore used according to context rather than as interchangeable labels.

Suffetes, councils and the assembly. Aristotle, *Politics* 2.11, is the main analytical description of the Carthaginian constitution. He praises its durability while criticising the influence of wealth. The two suffetes were senior civil magistrates. Councils and an assembly shared decision-making, and a body conventionally called the Hundred and Four scrutinised officials and generals. The surviving descriptions do not permit a complete constitutional chart or a secure count of who participated in every assembly. Michael J. Taylor's 2023 article argues that the distinction between civil

judges and military commanders affected strategy; the book treats this as a plausible pressure rather than settled causation. Brett Kaufman's 2025 monograph advances a much broader democratic reading of Phoenician and Carthaginian government. Its importance is acknowledged, but its most expansive claims are not treated here as consensus.

Religion and the tophet. Punic inscriptions, sanctuaries and votive stelae support the prominence of Baal Hammon and Tanit and the formula that a deity had heard the dedicator's voice. Greek and Roman writers accuse Phoenician and Punic communities of child sacrifice. Tophets contain cremated infant, child and animal remains in specialised ritual contexts. Deliberate sacrifice remains a serious interpretation of part of that record, but neither the literary accusations nor the burials establish the cause of every death, the frequency of ritual killing or one uniform practice across centuries and sites. Matthew McCarty's 2024 study is useful precisely because it treats these rites as changing social and ritual practices rather than reducing them to a binary verdict detached from context.

Jessica Cerezo-Román and colleagues examined the remains of twelve individuals from the Neo-Punic tophet at Zita. Their 2024 study found chronic health problems, careful post-mortem treatment, no evidence of perimortem trauma and no conclusive evidence establishing sacrifice or the manner of death. The analysed burials date to roughly 50-30 BCE through the first century CE, after the destruction of independent Carthage. Zita cannot settle Carthage's tophet or every Phoenician and Punic sanctuary. It does show why neither every-urn-is-sacrifice nor pure-propaganda certainty is adequate.

Armies beyond the citizen body. Polybius' accounts distinguish Carthaginian citizens, Libyan forces, Numidians, Iberians, Gauls and hired soldiers. Mercenary is restricted to service primarily for pay. Subject levies, allied contingents and royal forces belonged to different political relationships. The mixed system supplied specialist capabilities but required command, payment and negotiation across those differences.

Cannae. Ancient casualty totals vary and are not repeated as precise fact.

The secure result is the destruction of a large Roman army in 216 and Rome's refusal to negotiate. Fronda's study of southern Italy is important because it replaces the binary loyal-or-disloyal map with local decisions made under pressure from both sides.

The city destroyed and rebuilt. Appian's description of the siege supplies the main sequence: submission, the surrender of weapons, the demand for evacuation, renewed resistance, blockade and street fighting. His speeches are literary compositions and his population totals are insecure. The later Roman colony is distinguished from the failed Gracchan project and from Caesar's plans. The effective Augustan foundation dates to 29.

How It Actually Works

Tyre's daughter. Hédi Dridi's treatment of early Carthage and Dexter Hoyos' account of the city before the Punic Wars support the chronology, western connections and rise to regional leadership. The book avoids claiming that eastern Tyre handed Carthage a finished empire.

Sicily. The battle of Himera in 480 is secure; the scale and coordination sometimes assigned to the campaign are less so. The long Sicilian wars involved Greek, Punic and indigenous communities whose alliances changed. They are not presented as an unbroken racial war between Greeks and Phoenicians.

The First Punic War. Polybius Book 1 is the main source for Messana, Acragas, Roman naval construction, Mylae, Ecnomus, Regulus, Xanthippus, Drepana and the Aegates. The stranded-ship model for Rome's first fleet and the corvus come from his account and remain plausible, though the details of shipbuilding and the device's use are debated. The book avoids exact fleet and casualty totals where the literary numbers create false precision.

The Aegates seabed. Work led by Sebastiano Tusa and Jeffrey Royal, continued through the RPM Nautical Foundation project, has recovered bronze warship rams, helmets and amphorae from the battle area. The cargo fits a Carthaginian relief force carrying supplies towards Sicily. The

finds fix the general battle landscape more securely than the precise manoeuvres described in a literary narrative.

The Mercenary War. Polybius is again the principal source. His hostility to the rebels and taste for moral horror are visible, but the sequence of delayed payment, military revolt, African participation and extreme violence is secure. Libyan or African War is often a better label for the widened conflict; Mercenary War is retained because readers will meet it most often.

Sardinia. Polybius presents Rome's seizure of Sardinia and additional indemnity as a clear injustice committed while Carthage was vulnerable. The episode is important because it helps explain Carthaginian resentment and the urgency of expansion in Iberia.

Iberia, the Ebro and Saguntum. Polybius and Livy preserve overlapping but non-identical accounts. The Ebro agreement restricted armed Carthaginian movement north of the river. Saguntum lay south of it and had a relationship with Rome. The precise legal chronology is disputed, so the book treats the siege as the immediate crisis within a larger collision of expanding spheres rather than proving one side innocent by a single clause.

The Italian gamble. The strategic reading that Hannibal aimed to detach Rome's allies is supported by his conduct and by ancient accounts of his offers after victories. The book rejects two shortcuts: that he lost because he failed to attack Rome immediately after Cannae, and that Carthage deliberately abandoned him. Hornblower's recent synthesis, Polybius, Livy and the wider theatre of operations show reinforcements, money and armies committed in several regions, alongside real failures of concentration and coordination.

New Carthage, Ilipa and the Metaurus. The broad sequence and dates are secure. Tactical reconstructions depend heavily on literary narratives written to display generalship. They are used only where they explain the loss of Iberian resources and the failure of Hasdrubal to combine with Hannibal.

Sophonisba and Zama. Livy supplies the full tragic narrative of

Sophonisba, Syphax and Masinissa; the dynastic relationships are historical, while the speeches, timing and poison scene have been shaped for literary effect. Polybius and Livy agree on Scipio's victory at Zama in 202 and the decisive role of Roman and Numidian cavalry. Details of the meeting between Hannibal and Scipio and the exact formation of every line may contain similar shaping. The peace terms and the destruction of Carthage's overseas position matter more than a diagram of the battle.

Hannibal as suffete. Livy records Hannibal's political activity after the war. Hornblower's 2024 analysis supports the account of financial and constitutional reform, elite resistance and flight in 195. Private motives and factional labels remain less secure than the fact that Hannibal challenged entrenched interests and left under Roman pressure.

Carthage, Numidia and Rome. Colin Bailey's study shows that Roman arbitration did not form an unbroken sequence of decisions against Carthage; several decisions favoured it. The post-war settlement still denied Carthage independent military action and gave Masinissa room to create repeated crises. The Third Punic War is therefore not presented as the final step of a proven fifty-year Roman conspiracy.

The final war. Appian supplies most of the detailed narrative. Archaeology confirms destruction and later rebuilding but cannot reproduce six days of street fighting. Exact numbers of inhabitants, casualties, enslaved survivors and weapons manufactured during the siege are omitted because the literary totals are too uncertain for the explanatory work they would perform.

Punic after Rome. Neo-Punic inscriptions and Augustine's references to Punic-speaking people show continued language and identity under Roman rule. Andrew Wilson supports the linguistic account, while Brent Shaw's synthesis helps frame religious adaptations such as Baal Hammon with Saturn and Tanit with Juno Caelestis. These identifications do not prove that the old and Roman gods had always been identical.

What People Get Wrong

Trade and agriculture. The correction to the floating merchant-city image rests on rural archaeology and agronomic evidence, not on denying Carthage's commercial character. Sea trade and territorial extraction worked together.

Mercenaries and Hannibal. The army correction follows the distinctions in Polybius and modern military scholarship. The support correction does not acquit the Carthaginian government of strategic failure. It replaces a story of deliberate betrayal with dispersed commitments, institutional distance and competing priorities.

Marching on Rome. The familiar exchange in which Maharbal tells Hannibal that he knows how to win but not use victory comes through Livy and later tradition. It cannot establish that an immediate march would have captured a fortified city. The myth remains useful only as evidence of later frustration with the failure to convert Cannae into political collapse.

The tophet. The correction is based on the combined record of hostile texts, specialised sanctuaries, inscriptions, cremated remains and modern osteology. None of those sources can carry the conclusion alone.

Why Rome destroyed Carthage. Carthaginian prosperity, Roman fear, political competition, strategic interest and the treaty breach all belong in the explanation. The evidence does not show that Carthage in 149 possessed an imminent invasion plan or military capacity comparable with Hannibal's state.

Salt. R. T. Ridley traced the salting story and showed that it is absent from the ancient accounts of Carthage's destruction. Its late appearance makes it a modern legend. The real sack requires no invented ritual to make it severe.

Erasure. Political independence, population and archives suffered catastrophic destruction. Punic language, local practice, agricultural knowledge and the value of the site continued. Erasure is used for loss of

statehood and narrative control, not for the disappearance of every Punic person or custom.

Use It

The analytical lenses in this section are interpretations of mechanisms established earlier rather than new historical claims. The book does not propose that a modern organisation, alliance or state is equivalent to Carthage. Its portable questions concern differentiated obligations, the material production behind visible power, conversion of tactical success into political settlement, political depth behind military capability and the separation of state collapse from cultural disappearance.

Terms

Punic. The term derives through Latin usage for western Phoenician people and culture. It is used linguistically and historically, not as a claim of pure descent.

Liby-Phoenician. Ancient usage varies. The term can refer to Punic communities in Africa or to people understood as combining local and Phoenician affiliation. It should not be treated as a precise modern ethnic classification.

Cothon. The word is used for an artificial harbour basin. Carthage's double harbour is its most famous example, but the term does not require every cothon to have the same circular naval design.

Suffete and Hundred and Four. The Phoenician title behind suffete means judge. Hundred and Four is the conventional modern rendering of an oversight body whose exact membership and powers cannot be reconstructed fully.

Tophet. The term is modern scholarly shorthand derived from a biblical place-name. It identifies a class of Phoenician and Punic sanctuary by its deposits and stelae without deciding the cause of every child's death.

Neo-Punic. The label describes later developments in Punic script and

language under Roman rule. It does not imply a new incoming population.

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