

Free essay on the first and the second punic wars

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The Punic Wars is a series of three wars between Rome and Carthage. It was called “ Punic” since the Latin word for Carthaginian was Punici (Silvermann, 1996). Carthage was a large city where Tunisia is now located. This city was founded by the Phoenicians in the 9th century BC. During this time, Carthaginian navy was the biggest in the ancient world. However, they did not have their own army and they just hired mercenaries. Carthaginians were famous as sailors and the Punic Wars became important because it catapulted Rome in ancient history as a powerful empire in both lands and seas (Silvermann, 1996). The war also transformed Rome from an agrarian based economy to a merchant based one. The Second Punic War almost destroyed Rome itself (Silvermann, 1996).

The First Punic War transpired on 264 – 241 BC under the Sicilian and African soil. It was fought for more than twenty years before Rome finally conquered the Sicilian island. This island was separated from the main land by a narrow strait called the Strait of Messina. On the other side of Messina, on the Italian side, was a town named Rhegium. It was taken possession by lawless bodies of soldiers and the Romans soldiers delivered Rhegium. The Sicilian authorities advanced to deliver Messina. The Romans and the Sicilian troops engaged and they negotiated that if the Romans saved them, they would deliver Messina into their hands (Bedford & Bradford, 2001).

The initial conflict between Hiero II of Syracuse and the Mamertines of Messina began (Bedford & Bradford, 2001). The Mamertines betrayed the Carthaginians by requesting the Roman Senate for support against Carthage. Hence, the Romans sent soldiers to Messina. The Carthaginians retaliated by aiding Syracuse. Carthage was forced to pay homage to Rome.

The Carthage tried to engage Rome on the seas hence, they initially defeated Rome. However, the Roman navy expanded itself and made a fleet of more than one hundred ships. This provided an "assault bridge" which was known as *corvus* (Bedford & Bradford, 2001). This bridge brought the Carthaginians to a standstill then the Romans engaged the enemies with hand-to-hand fighting. The new weapon would be more helpful in the . This was the first Roman naval victory. Rome continued to win in the war and this was especially true when it won in the huge . This battle was considered as one of the largest battle in history and it involved ships and crews of about 300 rowers and 120 combat troops per ship. It was one of the largest naval battles of the ancient Mediterranean world (Bedford & Bradford, 2001). Thus, the Carthaginians were defeated in 241 BC and they signed a peace treaty whereby Rome has a total control of Sicily (Bedford & Bradford, 2001).

With their empowered navy, Rome continued to besiege Carthage and they took the islands of Corsica and Sardinia from Carthage in 238 BC (Sidwell, 1997). Then, Rome took full control of the Mediterranean seas. The Romans also attacked Carthaginian fleet in Africa. The army was under the command of a strong plebeian consul, Marcus Atilius Regulus. He fought a great battle with the Carthaginians even though he was not familiar with Africa, then known as a place of unknown terror (Sidwell, 1997). Regulus landed at some distance from the city. He did not instantly advance towards the city. When he did, he encountered an enormous serpent at the River Bagrada. This poisonous serpent's breath was said to kill all who approached it. This was known as the Grace of Baal and the Roman weapons cannot kill it. When the machines for throwing huge stones against city walls were hurled against the

serpent, its backbone broke and it was finally killed (Sidwell, 1997).

In between the First and the Second Punic War, Hamilcar Barca, a Phoenician hero and military leader, conquered much of Spain. He was vengeful for Rome but he was not able to conquer it. He taught his son, Hannibal, to hate Rome (Sidwell, 1997).

So, in 219 BC, Hannibal besieged Saguntum City, which was near the modern city of Valencia, a protectorate of Rome. This initiated the start of the Second Punic War (Sidwell, 1997). This war lasted until 201 BC (Sidwell, 1997).

Actually, the Saguntines were the ones who started the war by attacking the tribes. Carthage did not hand over Hannibal as Rome requested that was why Rome and Carthage war again ensued. Hannibal crossed the Alps with war elephants and conquered Italy from the north. His troops defeated the Roman army in several battles such as the Battle of the Trebia, the Battle of Lake Trasimene and the Battle of Canne (Sidwell, 1997).

Another Roman statesman, Scipio invaded Carthage in 203 BC. He faced Hannibal who just returned from Africa. After the Battle of Cannae, the Romans were put into heavy trials when everything seemed to be turning against them. Under the intelligent counsels of Fabius Maximus, new plans were made to recover Italy (Sidwell, 1997). They had to persist in Italy while at the same time, they had to meet the continued attacks of Hannibal. Also, in Spain, they had to prevent Hasdrubal's reinforcements and in Sicily, they had to prevent the cities from being inspired by what happened in Syracuse. Lastly, in Greece, the Romans had to prevent the king of Macedonia from interfering in their affairs with Italy (Sidwell, 1997). In the face of all these tactical problems, the Roman people, supported by the faithful Latin towns

and colonies, remained steadfast. They pushed on with the war with greater fervor and strength than ever before.

Then, by the work of faith, the events turned in favor of the Romans. Scipios was able to finally defeat Hasdrubal in Spain. Then Hannibal's army was repulsed in Campania. The Romans were also able to prevent Macedonia from giving any aid to Hannibal. They formed a league with the Aetolian cities of Greece and by sending them a few troop, they had an ally there. After then, the Romans captured Syracuse. Hannibal's forces were weakened as they were forced to send their men towards their protectorates in several parts of southern Italy (Sidwell, 1997).

Hannibal directly marched to Rome to ask that Rome withdraw its armies from Capua. While he plundered the towns and destroyed the fields of Latium and rode about the Roman walls, he was ignored by the Roman soldiers and leaders. They all knew the strong protection of their cities and gates. Thus, Hannibal was left with no recourse than to withdraw into the southern part of Italy. Capua was then besieged by the Romans. They were punished for betraying the Roman empire. The citizens were turned into slaves and the city was placed under a Roman prefect (Liddle, 1885). This showed that Hannibal could not protect his southern Italian allies and this weakened his influence as a conqueror. The Romans finally defeated Hannibal in the Battle of Zama in 202 BC. This was an open battle. After this, Carthage paid a huge indemnity and it was left with no army nor navy.

According to historians, the real reasons for ensuing the Second Punic War were many.

The Roman and the Carthaginian empires intensified their rivalry and they struggled for supremacy in the western Mediterranean. The Romans were also envious of the rapid growth of the Carthaginian dominion in Spain. As Rome was conquering Cisalpine Gaul, Carthage was then building up a large empire in the Spanish peninsula. The Carthage was establishing his new army with which to invade Italy. This was under the leadership of Hamilcar Barca, a Carthaginian soldier. His initiatives and strategies were continued by his son-in-law, Hasdrubal Barca, who founded the city of New Carthage as the capital of the new province (Liddle, 1885).

Rome was insecure when Carthage was able to extend its territories in the north. It forced Carthage make a treaty not to extend her conquests beyond the river Iberus (Ebro), a northern part of Spain (Liddle, 1885). Rome also offered protection to the Greek city of Saguntum, south of the Iberus. Then, Carthage also worked on its expansion in the southern part of Spain, without infringing upon the rights of Rome. This was until Hasdrubal Barca died.

Rome was recognized as the mistress of the western Mediterranean.

Carthage, while was not reduced into a province, became a dependent state. Syracuse was annexed to Sicily while the Spanish territory was divided into two provinces. Rome became more hostile to Macedonia and this paved the way for her dominion in the East (Liddle, 1885).

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