

The first, second, and third punic wars



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I. Introduction and Overview

An ancient Roman legend tells how the twin babies Romulus and Remus were abandoned by their mother and raised a female wolf. When they grew up, they set off to found Rome, and Romulus became the city's first king. The traditional date for the founding is known of the origins and early history of Rome.

It is probable that sometime during the eight century B. C. Latin settlements on seven of Rome's hills united to form the city. In the next century, Etruscan kings, the Romans drained the marshes, developed agriculture, stimulated trade, extended the city, and subjected other Latin settlements to their rule. According to tradition, the patrician landowners led a revolt while the king was out of the city in 509 B. C. and deposed him. This marked the beginning of the republic.

After Rome had deposed its last king, the surrounding cities proclaimed their freedom. For the next two centuries Rome was almost continuously at war, first to protect itself from neighboring city-states, mainly Etruscan and Latin, and then to conquer central Italy.

Thesis Statement: This essay intends to find answers in the following questions:

- Why the Punic Wars are considered a turning point in Western Civilization, not just Roman History?
- What happened in the Punic Wars?
- What were the Causes of the war?
- Who won and lost the wars?

- What did the winners gain from winning?
- What do I think was the cause of the war?
- What else did Rome gain/lose from its victory over Carthage?
- Hannibal was even respected by the Romans, how would YOU describe him?
- What did Rome's destruction of Carthage reveal about the nature of Roman imperialism?

II. Discussion

A. The Three Punic Wars

The Punic Wars were the turning point in Western Civilization because these were the time that Rome was able to have a new beginning after the difficulties it had been through and these led to great changes. The conquest of Italy left Rome with one major rival in the western Mediterranean, Carthage, in North Africa. The two powers clashed in a series of three wars, called the Punic Wars, which ended with the destruction of Carthage. The First Punic War (264-241 B. C.) began when Carthage and Rome vied for control of the city of Messana (Messina), Sicily. Carthage occupied the city first and the roman Senate, fearing a further Carthaginian advance into Italy, sent an army of Messana and ordered a fleet built.

Roman legions defeated the Carthaginians in Sicily, and in a great sea battle off Cape Ecnomus in 256 B. C., the Romans defeated the Carthaginian fleet. However, the war dragged on, with enormous losses on both sides, until Carthage sued for peace in 241 B. C. Rome won Sicily and a large indemnity. In 238 B. C., Rome seized Sardinia and Corsica from Carthage.

Hamilcar Barca, a Carthaginian general, planned revenge, and in 237 B. C., crossed into Spain and began building and training an army. In 219 B. C., Hannibal, Hamilcar's son, seized a city in Spain allied to Rome. The Romans declared war, and the Second Punic War (218-201 B. C.) began (Luciano, 101-110).

Hannibal entered Italy by crossing the Alps, a feat that caught the Romans by surprise. He won brilliant victories at Lake Trasimeno (217 B. C.) and Cannae (216 B. C.) destroying two roman armies. For 10 years the Roman general Fabius led damaging raids against Hannibal's army while preserving his own weak forces by carefully avoiding a major battle.

The turning point came in 107 B. C., when Hannibal's brother, Hasdrubal, led an army of reinforcements from Spain. His troops were crushed by the Romans at the Battle of the Metaurus River. A Roman invasion of Africa in 204 forced Carthage to recall Hannibal. In 202 B. C. Hannibal's army was destroyed at the battle of Zama, near Carthage, by Publius Cornelius Scipio (Scipio the Elder). In May of 218 B. C. Hannibal started north from New Carthage (Cartagena) with about 40, 000 men and a corps of 37 elephants. Crossing Pyrenees Mountains, he began to meet opposition from the Gauls.

Forcing his way along the Mediterranean coast, he reached the Rhone River and moved up its valley without meeting the Roman army that had been sent to intercept him. In early autumn Hannibal took his army—including the elephants—across the Alps. Besides attacks from the Gauls, there were landslides and early snowfalls to increase the hazards of the march. Hannibal reached the Po River in late September with only 26, 000 men and a few

elephants (Grant, 56-61). The Second Punic War ended with Rome annexing Spain and taking the Carthaginian war fleet and a very large indemnity.

Hannibal's Great Victories. The first encounter with the Romans came almost at once, at the Ticinus River. In a battle involving mainly cavalry, the Carthaginians won a quick victory. The bulk of the Roman army was still intact, however, and Rome sent a second army north to join it. In early December Hannibal lured the combined force into a trap on the Trebia River near Placentia (Piacenza) and destroyed it (Bradford, 67-73).

Fabian Tactics and a Stalemate. After Cannae, many Italian cities joined Hannibal's cause. The Romans, under Fabius Verrucosus, avoided further direct conflict with Hannibal's forces. Their tactics of cautious harassment and delay resulted in 10 years of indecisive maneuvering. Gradually Rome won back the disloyal Italian cities.

Defeat of Carthage. In 204 B. C. Publius Scipio (later called Scipio Africanus the Elder) launched a campaign in Africa against Carthage itself. Hannibal was called home, and landed in Africa in 202. At the battle of Zama Hannibal's comparatively untrained troops were routed. Carthage accepted Rome's peace terms. Hannibal was named by the Carthaginians to govern the country, but Rome soon became alarmed and accused him of conspiring against the peace. Hannibal escaped to Asia Minor (Bradford, 67-73).

The Third Punic War began in 149 B. C. and ended in 146 when Roman wiped out Carthage. In 150 Numidia, an ally of Rome, had invaded Carthaginian territory. Carthage resisted, and a Roman army laid siege to the city. Finally, Scipio Aemilianus (Scipio the Younger), adopted grandson of Scipio the Elder,

broke the city's defenses. The Romans enslaved the survivors, burned Carthage to the ground, and sowed salt to make the soil unproductive.

At the end of the Third Punic War, Rome ruled Spain, Italy, Greece, and the large islands of the western Mediterranean Sea. But the city that had won this empire had changed. Great landowners bought up even more land. Rich businessmen became even richer through graft and plunder. Soldiers, now fighting far from home, stayed with the armies and were rewarded with the booty of far-off provinces (Grant, 56-61).

The class of small landowners, which had formed the backbone of early Rome, became less and less significant. A number of leaders attempted to reverse these conditions.

The first prominent reform leader was Tiberius Gracchus, who was elected tribune in 133 B. C. Tiberius secured passage of a law to recover public land, which had been illegally taken by the wealthy, and to distribute it to the poor. By increasing the number of landowners, who alone were subject to conscription, Tiberius hoped to strengthen the Roman army. The land reform and Tiberius' decision to seek reelection, which at that time was contrary to Roman practice, raised intense opposition. Tiberius was killed by a mob sent by his enemies in the Senate.

B. My perception to Hannibal

Hannibal was a Carthaginian general. He was one of the greatest military geniuses of ancient times. A master of deception, ambush, and surprise attack, he devised maneuvers that have been copied ever since. In the Second Punic War, Hannibal made a remarkable march across the Alps to

invade Italy, where he wiped out three Roman armies. Rome eventually won the war, but Hannibal's skill made the victory most.

More on Hannibal. In 195 B. C. Hannibal found refuge with the Seleucid king, Antiochus III, at Ephesus. Antiochus was persuaded by Hannibal to make an attack on Roman-held Greece. The campaign was disastrous. Hannibal, in charge of the fleet, was defeated, and Antiochus lost battles at Thermopylae (Bath, 34-42).

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Punic wars brought great change in the society of Rome; thus, this was the beginning of the Western Civilization. Its success and victory were not made possible without the remarkable contributions of Hannibal who did his part to save the place close to his heart. These wars, Punic Wars, pushed the concerned individuals to defend its territory and seek development and change in its society.