**Lecture Four** -- **Carthage and the First Punic War**

**Outline**

Conflict with Carthage marked the beginning of Rome's rise to world power. The rise of the Roman Empire Falls into broad periods: the conquest first of the western and then of the eastern Mediterranean. We begin our survey of the first phase by outlining the development and nature of the Carthaginian state, Rome's greatest rival in the west. We will then survey the course of the First Punic War, and assess the ramifications of Rome's victories for both protagonists.

**I**. Rome's rise to dominance of the entire Mediterranean basin falls into two broad phases.

**A**. First came the conflicts with Carthage that led to Rome controlling the entire western Mediterranean.

**B**. The second phase was Rome's complex involvement in the affairs of the Hellenistic kingdoms to the east.

**II**. Carthage was an ancient Phoenician city run by a mercantile oligarchy.

**A**. Carthage (located in what is modern-day Tunisia) had a long history of involvement in the western Mediterranean.

**1**. By tradition, Carthage was founded in 814 BC by Phoenician traders.

**2**. Located on a superb harbor with a fertile hinterland, and endowed with an enterprising populace, the city quickly rose to a position of power.

**3**. By the sixth century BC, Carthaginian trading posts could be found all along North Africa, in western Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and Spain.

**4**. Conflict with the Greek colonies of Sicily, especially Syracuse, was frequent in the fifth and fourth centuries.

**5**. By the time the Romans had conquered the Italian mainland, a sort of balance of power obtained in Sicily, with Syracuse dominant in the eastern half of the island and Carthage in the west.

**6**. Carthage maintained her overseas interests through diplomacy backed by a large fleet and mercenary armies.

**B**. Carthage originally had been ruled by a governor, but this autocracy had early given way to an oligarchy of ruling families.

**1**. Carthage originally had been ruled by a governor, but this autocracy had early given way to an oligarchy of ruling families.

**2**. Like the Roman Republican oligarchy, two judges (*suffetes*) were elected annually, and there was a senate-like council.

**3**. An unusual feature was a permanent court of 104 lifetime members, who scrutinized the affairs of professional generals and admirals.

**C**. Carthaginian motivation was driven by concerns of profit and cost-effectiveness, which differed greatly from Roman motivation.

**1**. Carthage was run like a large company, with citizens getting share in the profits of trade.

**2**. The Carthaginians resorted to war when necessary, but preferred peaceful means of resolving potential conflicts.

**3**. In contrast, the Romans were motivated by the sociopolitical considerations of loyalty to one's friends and allies, and of maintaining face.

**III**. The First Punic War started small and by accident, but developed into a titanic struggle for control of Sicily.

**A**. The spark that ignited the First Punic war was small.

**1**. Italian adventurers, called the Mamertines, seized the eastern Sicilian city of Messana, and, when pressured by Syracuse, appealed first to Carthage, and then to Rome.

**2**. The humiliation of the Carthaginian fleet, and the movement of the Romans into Sicily caused the Carthaginians to send troops to Sicily to crush the Mamertines.

**3**. This affair brought Rome and Carthage into open conflict.

**B**. The course of the war fell into three phases.

**1**. The first phases (264 -- 260 BC) saw Roman and Punic armies fighting on land in Sicily. The Roman feat of arms in storming and capturing Agrigentum in 262 BC cowed the Carthaginians, who avoided engaging the legions in a set- piece land battle for the rest of the war.

**2**. Roman frustration at the Punic ability to resupply Sicily by sea led to the second phase of the war, fought on the Tyrrhenian Sea and in Africa (260 -- 255 BC).

**a**. The Romans built a huge fleet in a few months, and put to sea in 260 BC, defeating the Carthaginians at the Battle of Mylae.

**b**. A Roman invasion of North Africa in 256 BC ended with the ambush and defeat of the Roman force in 255 BC, followed shortly thereafter by the destruction of the Roman fleet in a storm off Sicily.

**3**. The third and final phase of the war was fought on Sicily and the surrounding seas (255 -- 241 BC).

**4**. The Carthaginian fought most of this phase of the war as a guerilla campaign from their impregnable bases at Mt. Eryx and Mt. Hercte in western Sicily. Both sides also vied for control of naval bases in Sicily.

**5**. Carthaginian cost-effective thinking hampered their war effort, and, in 241 BC, when they faced a new Roman fleet at the Aegates Islands, they were roundly defeated.

**C**. The Romans imposed weighty terms on defeated Carthage.

**1**. In 241 BC, the Carthaginians surrendered.

**2**. The Romans imposed a huge war indemnity, and debarred Carthage from Sicily (which Rome promptly annexed as its first overseas province).

**IV**. The First Punic War had ramifications for Rome and for Carthage.

**A**. Rome enjoyed several benefits as a result of its victory in the First Punic War.

**1**. The Romans had been drawn out of the Italian peninsula, and now possessed their first overseas province, the fertile island of Sicily.

**2**. The Romans now possessed the largest fleet in the Mediterranean.

**3**. They took advantage of their fleet and Punic weakness to annex Sardinia and Corsica in 238 BC, further encroaching into the traditional Carthaginian sphere of activity.

**4**. Roman tenacity and determination in the face of adversity had been made clear to all.

**B**. Defeat drove Carthage to new pastures.

**1**. The closing of the seas around Sicily and Italy drove Carthage westward.

**2**. Between 241 and 220 BC, the Carthaginians carved out a small empire in Spain.

**3**. In certain Carthaginian circles, the Roman victory was too bitter a pill to swallow, and an even larger conflict was to emerge from this circumstance.

**The Second Punic (or Hannibalic) War**

We now turn our attention to one of the most famous and dramatic wars in all of European history: the Second Punic, or Hannibalic, War (218 -- 202 BC). More even than the First Punic War, this was a colossal life-and-death struggle for both sides. Defeat would mean utter annihilation for the Romans; for the Carthaginians, it would decisively end their waning dominance in the western Mediterranean. The course of the war, with its crushing defeats for Rome, is outlined. The scope and scale of the conflict are considered. Finally, the ramifications of the war are discussed.

**I**. While Carthage was active in Spain, Roman attention was diverted to the Adriatic Sea and the Po Valley.

**A**. The activities of pirates along the eastern Italian seaboard drove Rome to conduct military operations in Illyria on the eastern Adriatic. In 229 BC the region was declared a Roman protectorate.

**B**. To block another Gallic incursion into Italy from Gallia Cisalpina, the Romans invaded the region in 225 BC, and annexed it as a province in 220 BC.

**II**. Carthaginian expansion in Spain provided the spark that ignited the Second Punic War.

**A**. Under able leadership, the Carthaginians gained control of much of eastern Spain by 220 BC, a fact finally noticed by the Romans.

**1**. The main Carthaginian leader was Hamilcar Barca, a veteran of the Sicilian campaigns in the last phase of the First Punic War.

**2**. Hamilcar Barca was the father of Hannibal.

**3**. Sometime in the mid-220s BC, the Romans and Carthaginians reached agreement on spheres of influence in Spain, according to the account of Polybius.

**a**. The details of this "Ebro Treaty" are disputed.

**b**. Carthage undertook not to extend its power north of the River Ebro.

**c**. Whether the Romans undertook not to interfere south of this river is not made explicit in our sources.

**4**. The Romans took under their protection the town of Saguntum, which lay south of the River Ebro. It is not clear when this agreement with Saguntum was reached -- was it before or after the Ebro agreement?

**5**. Hannibal had been in command in Spain since 221 BC. War was declared in 219 BC, following Hannibal's attack on Saguntum and the rejection by Carthage of a Roman ultimatum to hand him over for trial.

**B**. The Second Punic War was fought simultaneously in several theaters of operation, and it stretched the resources of both sides to their limits.

**1**. The Romans prepared for a replay of the First Punic War.

**2**. In Hannibal, however, the Romans faced one of history's greatest military minds.

**3**. Hannibal seized the initiative, and invaded Italy from the north, forcing the Romans to fight for their very survival.

**a**. Hannibal marched his army over the Pyrenees, through hostile territory in southern France, and over the Alps. He arrived in Italy in the spring of 218 BC, catching the Romans completely by surprise.

**b**. After defeating a small Roman force at Ticinus, Hannibal crushed a large Roman army at Trebia in 218 BC. The following year he ambushed and destroyed a consular army at Lake Trasimene in Etruria.

**c**. Facing the crisis, the Romans declared a dictator, Q. Fabius Maximus, who adopted "Fabian tactics" in dealing with Hannibal during the rest of 217 BC.

**d**. New consuls in 216 BC advocated crushing Hannibal with a single stroke. A joint consular army, some 80,000 strong, charged the Punic army at Cannae in 216 BC.

**e**. The resulting defeat was the worst reverse ever inflicted on Roman arms, and it left Rome itself open to attack by Hannibal.

**4**. Hannibal, however, could not drive home his advantage.

**a**. The Romans did not negotiate a peace, as might have been expected.

**b**. The Roman allies in central Italy stood firm, and did not defect to Hannibal.

**c**. Hannibal had no siege equipment, and no local support to press a siege of Rome.

**5**. Despite his spectacular early successes, Hannibal's subsequent campaign in Italy (216 -- 203 BC) was little more than an irritant to the Romans, whose attentions were diverted elsewhere.

**6**. The Romans were simultaneously fighting Carthaginian forces in Spain and Sicily.

**a**. The Roman objective was to prevent reinforcement of Hannibal.

**b**. The campaigns were difficult, and marked by several Roman defeats, but eventually the Romans prevailed in both theaters.

**c**. Syracuse had foolishly sided with Hannibal after Cannae. It was taken in 211 BC, and Sicily was secured for Rome.

**d**. Hasdrubal, Hannibal's brother, succeeded in breaking out of Spain and making it to Italy, but he was defeated and killed at the Battle of Metaurus in 207 BC.

**C**. The emergence of C. Cornelius Scipio on the Roman side spelled victory for the Romans.

**1**. Victorious in Spain, young Scipio advocated an invasion of Africa to draw Hannibal out of Italy.

**2**. Despite intense opposition, he won the debate and took a large force to Africa in 204 BC.

**3**. Hannibal left Italy the following year to defend his homeland. He was defeated at the Battle of Zama in 202 BC.

**4**. Carthage surrendered.

**5.** Roman terms were harsher than at the end of the First Punic War.

**a**. Carthage had to pay a huge war indemnity.

**b**. Carthaginian territories in Spain were ceded to the Romans, and in Africa large tracts of Punic territory were awarded to the native kingdom of Numidia (modern Algeria), now a Roman ally.

c. The Carthaginian navy was limited to ten ships.

**6**. As for Hannibal, he was spared, but hounded by the Romans for the next twenty years, until he was forced to commit suicide in 182 BC.

**III**. The Second Punic War had several important consequences for Rome. It revealed much about the Roman mentality; for the Carthaginians, it led to their ultimate annihilation.

**A**. The Romans had become masters of the Mediterranean.

**1**. In 196 BC, Rome formed two new provinces in Spain from the former Punic holdings there.

**2**. Rome would be occupied for the next two centuries in conquering the rest of the Iberian peninsula.

**3**. Roman interest in the south of France increased; Rome was concerned to keep a land route open to her new Spanish possessions. Control of this region was secured by 180 BC.

**4**. Above all, the war highlighted Roman tenacity in the face of adversity, and the iron grip the Romans held on Italy through their carefully constructed Confederation.

**B**. Carthage lost everything, and was eventually destroyed by the suspicious Romans.

**1**. Roman suspicion of Carthage remained strong in subsequent years.

**2**. In 149 BC, in one of the most disgraceful episodes in Roman history, the Romans picked a fight with Carthage, and besieged it.

**3**. The Carthaginians held out for three years, but the city fell, and was destroyed in 146 BC.

**4**. The site remained vacant for a century.