

North Africa , history of

## The city

The [Romans](#) completely destroyed Carthage in 146 BC and a century later built a new city on the site , so that little is known of the physical appearance of the Phoenician city. The ancient artificial harbour—the Cothon—is represented today by two lagoons north of the bay of al-Karm (el-Kram). In the 3rd century BC it had two parts , the outer rectangular part being for merchant shipping , the interior , circular division being reserved for warships ; sheds and quays were available for 220 warships . The harbour 's small size probably means that it was used chiefly in winter when navigation almost ceased .

The city walls were of great strength and 22 miles (35 kilometres ) in length ; the most vulnerable section , across the isthmus , was more than 40 feet high and 30 feet thick. The citadel on the hill called Byrsa was also fortified . Between Byrsa and the port was the heart of the city: its marketplace , council house , and temples . In appearance it may have been not dissimilar to towns in the eastern Mediterranean or Persian Gulf before the impact of modern civilization , with narrow winding streets and houses up to six stories high. The exterior walls were blank except for a solitary street door , but they enclosed courtyards . A figure of 700,000 for the city population is given by the geographer Strabo , but this probably included the population of the Cap Bon peninsula . A more reasonable figure could be about 400,000, including slaves , a size similar to that of Athens .

## Religion and culture

The Carthaginians were notorious in antiquity for the intensity of their religious beliefs , which they retained to the end of their independence and which in turn influenced the religion of the Libyans. The chief deity was [Baal Hammon](#) , the community 's divine lord and protector , who was identified by the Greeks with Cronus and by the Romans with Saturn . During the 5th century a goddess named [Tanit](#) came to be widely worshiped and represented in art. It is possible that her name is Libyan and that her popularity was connected with the acquisition of land in the interior , as she is associated with symbols of fertility . These two overshadow other deities such as Melqart , principal deity of Tyre , identified with Heracles , and Eshmoun , identified with Asclepius . [Human sacrifice](#) was the element in Carthaginian religion most criticized ; it persisted in Africa much longer than in Phoenicia , probably into the 3rd century. The child victims were sacrificed to Baal (not to Moloch , an interpretation based on a misunderstanding of the texts) and the burned bones buried in urns under stone markers , or stelae . At Carthage thousands of such urns have been found in the “Sanctuary of Tanit ,” and similar burials have been discovered at Hadrumetum , Cirta , Motya , Calaris , Nora , and Sulcis . (For illustration , see [Middle Eastern religion](#) .) Carthaginian religion appears to have taught the

weakness of human beings in the face of the overwhelming and capricious power of the gods . The great majority of Carthaginian [personal names](#), unlike those of Greece and Rome, were of religious significance— e.g., Hannibal , “Favoured by Baal,” or Hamilcar , “Favoured by Melqart .”

In comparison with the extent of its power and influence , the artistic and intellectual achievements of Carthage were small . What limited remains of buildings survive—mostly in North Africa and Sardinia—are utilitarian and uninspired . In the minor arts—pottery , jewelry , metalwork , objects in terra-cotta , and the thousands of carvings on stelae—a similar lack of inspiration may be felt . The influence of Phoenicia n, Egyptian , and Greek artistic traditions can be observed , but they failed to stimulate as they did, for example , in Etruria . There is no evidence that Greek philosophy and literature made much impact, though certainly many Carthaginians in the city's later history knew Greek and there were libraries in the city . One written work is known, a treatise on agriculture by a certain Mago, but this may have been based on Hellenistic models . On the whole, the Carthaginians adhered to traditional modes of thought , which no doubt gave them a sense of solidarity amid more numerous and hostile peoples . Their fanatical patriotism enabled them to offer a more prolonged resistance to Rome than any other power . Their influence on North African history was, in the first place , to bring it into the mainstream of the advancing civilization of the Mediterranean world; more particularly , it introduced into North Africa advanced techniques leading to agricultural progress , which implied in turn a change by many Libyans from a seminomadic to a stable way of life, and the possibilities of urbanization , which were fully realized in the Roman period .

## Carthage and Rome



Carthaginian Empire .

In the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, Carthage was weakened and finally destroyed by Rome in the three Punic Wars. Treaties between Carthage and Rome had been made in 508, 348, and 279, and for a long period the two powers had no conflicting interests . But by the 3rd century Rome dominated all southern Italy and thus approached the Carthaginian sphere in Sicily. In 264 Rome accepted the submission of Messana (Messina), though this state had previously had a Carthaginian garrison , partly because of exaggerated fears of a possible Carthaginian threat to Italy and partly because of hopes of gain in Sicily . For Carthage, a Roman foothold in Sicily would upset the traditional balance of power on the island . The ensuing [First Punic War](#), which lasted until 241, was very costly in human life, with losses of tens of thousands being recorded in some naval engagements . Contrary to expectation , the Carthaginian fleet was worsted on several occasions by the newly built Roman; on land the Romans failed to drive the Carthaginians out of Sicily, and a Roman invasion of Tunisia ended in catastrophe . Carthage made peace after a final naval defeat off the Aegates (Egadi) Islands , surrendering its hold on Sicily . Sardinia and Corsica fell to Rome in 238.

In response to the defeat, Carthage , under the leadership of [Hamilcar Barca](#) and his successors (usually described as the Barcid family), set about

establishing a new empire in Spain. The object appears to have been to exploit the mineral wealth directly rather than through intermediaries and to mobilize the manpower of much of Spain into an army that could match that of Rome. Hamilcar and his son-in-law Hasdrubal built up an army of more than 50,000 Spanish infantry and occupied half of the Iberian Peninsula. Finally, in 219, [Hannibal](#), Hamilcar's son, ignored Roman threats designed to prevent the consolidation or extension of the new empire. His invasion of Italy and the crushing defeats he inflicted on the Romans at Lake Trasimene (217) and Cannae (216) were the gravest danger Rome had ever faced. The majority of Rome's allies and subjects in Italy remained loyal, however, and Hannibal found increasing difficulty in getting supplies and reinforcements. After clearing Spain of the Carthaginians (209–206), [Scipio Africanus](#) landed near Utica in 204 with a Roman army. In 203 Hannibal was recalled from Italy; but he was defeated by Scipio at the [Battle of Zama](#) (in the vicinity of present-day Sāqiyat Sīdī ġūsuf, in Tunisia) in 202. Carthage made peace soon afterward, surrendering its fleet, its overseas possessions, and some of its African territory. During the next 50 years it retained some measure of prosperity, although frequently under pressure from the Numidians under King Masinissa. From 155 irrational fears of a Carthaginian revival were stimulated at Rome by [Cato the Elder](#), and in 149, on flimsy pretexts, the Carthaginians were forced to choose between evacuating their city and settling inland or a doomed resistance. They chose the latter, and, after a three-year siege, the city was destroyed and its site ceremonially cursed by the younger Scipio.