

# MASTERS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

While Rome was gaining control of Italy, the western Mediterranean was dominated by the great trading empire of Carthage, on the coast of North Africa. As long as they weren't competing for trade, the Romans and the Carthaginians left each other in peace. But in 264BC, a series of bitter wars broke out between them. These wars - called the Punic Wars - would eventually decide who ruled the Mediterranean.

*The Romans added a spiked drawbridge - called a corvus - to their ships. Here, you can see it being used to board a Carthaginian ship.*

## ALL AT SEA

The First Punic War began when both Rome and Carthage stepped in to sort out a dispute on the island of Sicily, off the coast of Italy.



*Coin showing Hamilcar Barca, who led the Carthaginian army during the First Punic War*

To win the war, Rome would have to defeat the powerful Carthaginian navy, but the Romans had very few ships and no experience of fighting at sea.

Luckily, they found a stranded Carthaginian warship and used it as a model to build a fleet of their own. The Romans won two early sea battles - but twice lost all their ships in violent storms.

Having rebuilt their fleet, the Romans finally defeated the Carthaginians in 241BC. Carthage was forced to pay a huge fine and also agreed to let Rome have control of Sicily - its first overseas territory. The Romans later seized Sardinia and Corsica as well.

## HANDLING HANNIBAL

In search of a new empire, the Carthaginians invaded Spain. In 219BC, they attacked the Spanish city of Saguntum - an ally of Rome - provoking the Second Punic War. The next year, the Carthaginian general, Hannibal, set off with 35,000 men and 37 elephants to invade Italy.

### INTERNET LINK

*For links to websites with information on Hannibal and an animated map of the Second Punic War, go to [www.usborne-quicklinks.com](http://www.usborne-quicklinks.com)*



*When the corvus was dropped onto the enemy's ship, Roman soldiers could charge across.*

