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International Relations

# PERSPECTIVES ON SEAPOWER AND INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS. THE CASE OF ROME AND CARTHAGE

**Mihai MURARIU**[1]

**ABSTRACT:**
*THIS PAPER DEALS WITH PERSPECTIVES ON SEAPOWER AND INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS, FOCUSING ON SOME OF THE FUNDAMENTAL TRENDS WHICH CAN BE ENCOUNTERED IN THE EMERGENCE AS WELL AS THE EXPANSION OF OPEN MARITIME POLITIES. A LOOK AT THE ROMANO-CARTHAGINIAN CONFLICTS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN WILL SHOW THE MANNER IN WHICH THE SEA AND SEAPOWER INFLUENCED THE POLITICS, CULTURE AND STRATEGIES OF BOTH POLITIES, WHILST ALSO AFFECTING THE EXISTING INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM. SIGNIFICANTLY, ROME AND CARTHAGE PROVIDE US WITH THE CASE STUDY OF TWO POLITIES IN SOME ASPECTS, COULD BE QUITE SIMILAR IN OTHERS. THUS, ROME OFFERS THE EXAMPLE OF A CONTINENTAL POWER WHICH UNDERSTOOD ITS GRADUAL CONQUEST OF THE SEA IN MILITARY TERMS AND OF A SOCIETY WHICH, IN VICTORY AND EXPANSION, COLLAPSED IN ON ITSELF AND EVENTUALL BECAME A HEGEMON OF THE MEDITERRANEAN-CENTRIC INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM. BY CONTRAST, CARTHAGE, ORIGINALLY A MONARCHY AND THEN A REPUBLIC, WAS ALSO A COMPARATIVELY OPEN SOCIETY, A WEALTH-BASED OLIGARCHY AND MARITIME POWER WHICH WAS FORCED BY ROMAN PRESSURE TO TEMPORARILY BECOME CONTINENTAL, IMPERIAL, AND THEN RETURN TO ITS MARITIME ROOTS AND BECOME YET MORE OPEN AND DYNAMIC UNTIL ITS FORCEFUL INTEGRATION IN THE NEW ROMAN-LED INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM.*

**KEY WORDS:** SEAPOWER, INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS, ROME, CARTHAGE.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper considers the importance of revisiting and integrating historical case studies into contemporary political science as well as international relations debates, focusing mainly on the role of seapower as a complex tool of statecraft in a highly competitive international system. Firstly, such an approach is all the more important as history, political science and international relations theory have sufficient common ground for interdisciplinary endeavours[2]. Moreover, the question of seapower and the advantages typical of what one may call open maritime polities remains relevant in the digitally-dominated 21st

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[2] See Geoffrey Roberts, "Theory and the Narrative Turn in IR", *Review of International Studies* 32/4 (2006): 703-714.

century for a number of reasons, starting from the fact that most of the global trade is still dependent on maritime transport, that global communications make use of underwater cables, and, among others, that strategic maritime checkpoints will likely contribute to rising navalism and securitization.[3]

A fundamental division between somewhat more rigid continental hegemons and somewhat more innovative maritime polities can be observed[4], yet one must also consider nuances. To take a classic example, conservative, rural, land-centred Sparta defeated maritime, mercantile, innovative Athens, but remained trapped by a regional mindset demanded by its unique social system. Yet when its short-lived hegemony ended in defeat, Sparta attempted to radically reform its society and especially its military – surprisingly much more so than supposedly innovative Athens. By comparison, the more conservative, mostly rural, and land-centred Rome defeated the more maritime and mercantile Carthage. Supplanting its position in the Western Mediterranean, Rome underwent a series of dramatic economic, social and ultimately political transformations in the process, which came to affect the entirety of the Mediterranean-centred international system. Although rarely military essential, the manifold uses of seapower were nonetheless the key for maintaining both of these imperial systems. It arguably also provided important lessons – as well as convenient but inaccurate myths – about the competitive advantages of continental and maritime states, and, perhaps, of the role of institutions in affecting power balance in international systems to later generations of statesmen, historians, and political scientists.

The cases of Rome and Carthage are important to consider in this respect as some of the paramount symbols of competitors in an international system – from the ancient world to the contemporary one. The method employed in the article is that of an interpretative synthesis regarding the nature of Roman and Carthaginian polities on one hand, and the complex impact of seapower in international relations on the other. Significantly, the examples of Rome and Carthage provide us with the remarkable case-study of two polities which were shaped in different ways by maritime politics and seapower and which, while fundamentally different in some aspects were otherwise extremely similar.

## ROME AND CARTHAGE: A TEST OF STRENGTHS

Despite the willingness of its patricians to compromise on certain social issues, the society of ancient Rome during the 3rd century BC was dominated by a primarily militaristic, landed oligarchy. This mostly remained the case even as its conflicts with Mediterranean powers made its elites truly discover the value of the sea and international trade. Rome eventually built its international system on the ready willingness of the state to employ its martial might, intervening first throughout Italy and then across the Mediterranean in a remarkable display of "empire by invitation" – often in the name of restoring local liberties but in actuality ensuring the submission or integration of other polities into the Roman system. For instance, the Romans would quickly exploit the situation of city-states like the trading power of Rhodes or the Achaean League, using arbitration, alliances, or outright provocations to ensure that the Roman state would impose its dominance throughout the eastern Mediterranean. That the Roman-led system was anything but liberal can be deduced from the very different meanings a term such as *fides* (fidelity) could have for the Romans on

[3] See Geoffrey F. Gresh, *To Rule Eurasia's Wave. The New Great Power Competition at Sea* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020).
[4] See Andrew Lambert, *Seapower States. Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict that Made the Modern World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018).

one side – who understood it as the submission of a foreign power to Roman aims – and for the Greeks on the other, who treated it more like a form of alliance and friendship.[5]

Certainly, Rome dominated other Latin polities and then Italy through a network of alliances, yet these alliances were mostly built on the victories Rome had won against its erstwhile enemies. To be sure, the Romans were quite remarkable in their ability to unify the elites of the Italic peoples. Even more impressively, this was a feat which they would manage to replicate in various regions around the Mediterranean, particularly through their unusually lax attitude towards the granting of citizenship, though also as a result of pressure felt during the Latin and Social Wars respectively. Having said this, the outstanding feature of the Roman state was its comparatively inclusive nature and ability to create a lasting political order through the gradual participation of conquered territories into Roman politics, with peripheral elites flocking to the capital. Thus, many Roman commanders originated from conquered Italic peoples. In any case, even if the Roman political order could selectively be more inclusive than, for instance that of Greek city-states – which were notorious for their inability to form stable large-scale polities comparable to monarchies – it was still built to a large extent on the Roman ability and desire to use martial might.

Traditionally, the Roman and Carthaginian states have tended to be considered as existential rivals and fundamental opposites in terms of social organisation – a quintessential land power and a quintessential seapower. However, their evolution in an interconnected Western Mediterranean world and ultimately their military interactions show a different picture, namely, one of somewhat mirrored imperial polities. Hoyos compares the state of Roman and Carthaginian politics, arguing that the Romans had on the whole a more open system – with "no Roman family or coterie of friends able to dominate it for decades or largely exclude opponents from policymaking" – a style of politics which apparently could also be found in other republics, such as Tarentum, Athens, or Rhodes, and, partially 4th and 3rd century Syracuse, where democratic politics occasionally surfaced in an otherwise closed and autocratic system.[6] At the same time, this perspective perhaps underemphasizes the great transformations of the Carthaginian system from a sea state monarchy to an oligarchic republic and finally to an increasingly democratic republic from the Second Punic War onward, as the state returned to its strongly maritime roots.

In any case, by the middle republic, Roman plebeians themselves were divided into at least three major subgroups, including "a destitute rural proletariat", "independent and self-sufficient peasant farmers in the countryside and artisans in the city", and "rich and prominent families" which aspired to a status equal to that of the patricians.[7] Through a long process mixing agitation and confrontations, the plebeian groups eventually achieved legal equality and the access to the highest offices. By contrast, the Barcid supremacy seemingly enabled a curious turn in the Carthaginian politics. Thus, the Barcids in Iberia would depend upon support of collaborators in their homeland and which, in the close of the Second Punic War, led to the increased opening of the Carthaginian political system. Rome would gradually evolve in the opposite direction towards an all-encompassing monarchy, as "Julius Caesar's career path would reverse Hannibal's".[8] After all – the inclusion of other elites aside

[5] Sarah H. Davies, *Rome, Global Dreams, and the International Origins of an Empire* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020).
[6] Dexter Hoyos, Hannibal's Dynasty: Power and politics in the western Mediterranean, 247–183 BC (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 207.
[7] Gary Forsythe, *A Critical History of Early Rome. From Prehistory to the First Punic War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 158.
[8] Hoyos, *Hannibal's Dynasty*, 208.

– if one follows Polybius, Rome would *become* less democratic than its great rival, Carthage. As Quinn rightly shows, rather than truly stressing their fundamental differences Polybius believes that Rome and Carthage are at different points in a similar imperial trajectory.[9] In the Polybian understanding of natural institutional change – that is, growth, zenith, and then decline towards mob-rule – Carthage had passed her zenith during the Second Punic War, as the "masses" influenced policy rather than "the best men" as in the case of the Roman Senate:

> By the time they embarked on the Hannibalic War, however, the Carthaginian system had become worse than that of Rome. Everything—every physical body, every political system, and every realized action—naturally goes through successive phases of growth, prime, and decline, and in every respect things are at their best during their prime. This explains why at that time a qualitative gap had opened up between the two states. In so far as Carthage had grown strong and successful before Rome, by the time in question it had already passed its best, but (in constitutional terms, at any rate) that was precisely the period of Rome's prime. That is, while in Carthage the common people had by then become the dominant political force, in Rome this was still the Senate. Since policy was decided in Carthage by the masses and in Rome by the best men, Roman policies would prevail. Hence, even though the Romans met with decisive defeats, in the end, thanks to sound decision-making, they defeated the Carthaginians in the war.[10]

If the origins of Carthage as a city-state with a limited hinterland made it reliant on merchants and maritime trade, the overall image changes in the following centuries. Thus, it is important to mention that Carthaginians nonetheless included no known political figures which were predominantly merchants, with maritime commerce being combined with the wealth generated by agricultural estates and mines – somewhat similarly to the Roman elites – and with the citizen assembly gaining increasing amounts of power.[11] As the permanent Carthaginian fleet is recorded later in Carthaginian history[12], this might partially explain the long-lasting dominance of landed interests over purely maritime ones. Moreover, Carthage always had a much smaller citizen core, a result of the somewhat limited number of Phoenicians, who were nonetheless likely united culturally by the sea. In comparison, Rome was subject to migration from neighbouring hill tribes almost from the onset of its history, which likely contributed to its culture of quickly integrating new elites as it expanded over the centuries.

As a Phoenician colony, Carthage quickly became an interstitial economic nodal point and the centre of an increasingly palpable maritime hegemony across the Western Mediterranean. Lambert interprets the Carthaginian state as relatively open society for its time, yet – crucially – also representing undergoing a transition from the status of a seapower state towards a continental empire. In other words, "Carthaginian strategic culture reflected a commercial/maritime focus, a concern for stability and prosperity over conquest and territory, the combination of wealth and a weak manpower base that emphasised the need for allies and mercenaries, and above all a willingness to compromise to preserve the state".[13]

At the same time, the traditional focus on Roman exceptionalism when it came to conflicts is convincingly nuanced by Eckstein, who argues that it was the Roman openness towards new methods and people, along with their ability to integrate them into a stable structure – rather than an exceptionally aggressive nature. Following Mommsen, Eckstein

[9] Josephine C. Quinn, "Translating Empire from Rome to Carthage", *Classical Philology* 112 (2017): 314.
[10] Polybius, *The Histories* (transl. R. Waterfield). (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.51.
[11] Dexter Hoyos, *Carthage. A Biography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021).
[12] Nathan Pilkington, *The Carthaginian Empire. 550-202 BCE* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019).
[13] Lambert, *Seapower States*, 83.

believes that the ability to create a well-integrated polity gave Rome "exceptional advantages in scale of resources and in control over those resources" in the "competition against large but fragile dynastic empires, or against small and hence limited city-states or mere tribal groupings" – advantages which, alongside the martial nature of the Roman state, led to its long-standing success.[14] While linking the supposed unique Roman aggressiveness to international relations theory and the admittedly widespread nature of militarism in the societies of the ancient world, Eckstein's important work can be somewhat excessive in downplaying the nature of Roman militarism, perhaps somewhat losing sight of the fundamental, sacral importance of war for the Romans. Recent works have re-evaluated such perspectives, acknowledging that the Romans sometimes acted exceptionally aggressively in exploiting the existing international system, while other times preferring not to interfere.[15]

Moreover, one of the essential reasons for Roman success can be found in their many military colonies which acted as ever more distant points of defence for the political centre and allowed assimilation of the Italics to be possible in the first place.[16] Thus, when compared to the militarism displayed by its Italic and Hellenistic rivals, the remarkable determination to achieve victory manifested through Roman militarism was nonetheless of an altogether different intensity. Nonetheless, despite the differences separating their mostly continental and mostly maritime societies, Roman and Carthaginian elites seem to have had a similar perception of themselves as representatives of a universal empire, which contrasted with the newer Hellenistic models based around more or less limited, clearly defined borders.[17]

As Strauss puts it, the regular, close contact between two great cities of the Western Mediterranean made them see their own most dangerous characteristics in each other, with the states being mirror images rather than polar opposites.[18] Thus, both states "shared an ethos of aggressive armed expansion", both had mixed, oligarchical regimes which alternatively dominated or struggled with the wider populace, and both were controlled by landed aristocrats who were nonetheless also reliant on commerce, even as Carthaginian elites were considerably more maritime oriented than the Roman ones.[19] Both societies gradually expanded beyond the interconnected, yet localised rivalries found throughout the Mediterranean-centric international system. The Carthaginians began to break with their centuries-long policy of remaining mostly restricted to the coasts, expanding into the mainland, whilst the Romans would vigorously push beyond the borders of the Italic peninsula. This expansion was decisively influenced by the experience of the First Punic War, yet it was likely also a result of internal political and social pressures and changes.

The First Punic War was characterised – to an extent – by Roman dominance on land and Carthaginian dominance on the sea, with both powers proving their capability to adapt to this.[20] Of course, the overall military situation was more complex, with each side suffering reversals in the area of their greatest strengths. This was the case when Romans were

[14] Arthur M. Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy, Interstate War, and the Rise of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2006), 257.
[15] See Davies, *Rome, Global Dreams, and the International Origins of an Empire*.
[16] Stephen Oakley, "The Roman conquest of Italy", in *War and Society in the Roman World*, ed. John Rich and Graham Shipley (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 9-37.
[17] Quinn, "Translating Empire from Rome to Carthage", 317.
[18] Barry S. Strauss, "The War for Empire: Rome versus Carthage", in *Great Strategic Rivalries. From the Classical Word to the Cold War*, ed. James Lacey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 83.
[19] Strauss, *The War for Empire: Rome versus Carthage*…, 83.
[20] Strauss, *The War for Empire: Rome versus Carthage*…, 86-87.

suddenly matched in land warfare by Hamilcar Barca during the later stage of the war. It also happened to the Carthaginians during the first half of the war, when they were outmatched by the Roman fleets and their tactics of turning naval battles – traditionally determined by ramming and missile fire – into battles of assaulting and overwhelming enemy ships with marines.

The conflict can be said to have been as much one between institutions as it was between armies and resources. Initially, the Carthaginian institutions sustained the proven strategy of holding on to fortified Sicilian settlements, expecting that the conflict would be similar in conduct to the Sicilian wars of the previous centuries. However, the willingness of the Roman republic to continuously mobilise vast resources and its sheer tenacity of absorbing losses which would have broken the back of most other states, eventually made it clear that Carthage faced an enemy like no other throughout its long history. That is, they now faced a militant republic with a remarkably stable state structure, able to withstand immense pressure brought on by internal turmoil and military defeats. To top it off, the Roman martial culture was also a factor, as Polybius observes:

> At sea, as one would expect, the Carthaginians are better trained and equipped, because naval expertise has long been ingrained there. In fact, they have more to do with the sea than anyone else in the world. The Romans are far better at land-based operations, however. The land army is their overriding concern, whereas the Carthaginians completely ignore their infantry, and take only a little more interest in their cavalry. The reason for this is that the Carthaginians use foreign mercenaries, whereas the Roman army consists only of domestic troops and Roman citizens. In this detail especially, then, the Roman system is plainly superior, since while Carthaginian freedom always depends on the commitment of mercenaries, the Romans depend on their own valour and on the support of their allies. So even if they lose in the early stages, the Romans, unlike the Carthaginians, turn defeat into overall victory: their country and their children are always† directly at stake for them, so their emotions remain high and they continue fighting with passion until they get the better of the enemy. Hence, even though their naval expertise falls well short of that of the Carthaginians, as I have already said, the valour of their troops brings them victory in the end. Of course, experience is a major factor in naval warfare, but it is the commitment of the crews that invariably tips the scales towards victory.[21]

This was not only due to the sacrifices the Romans were willing to make, but also due to their determination in winning the seas from the Carthaginians, which they eventually did – in some of the greatest naval battles in human history in terms of the number of participants. Indeed, they famously landed a force in Africa which came close to completely defeating the Carthaginians before itself being decisively defeated with the help of a mercenary Spartan officer. Just as dramatically as the tides had shifted with the near-annihilation of the Roman army in Africa, the outmanoeuvring and destruction of most of the Roman fleet accomplished by admiral Adherbal at Drepana in 249 suddenly revived Carthaginian fortunes. Moreover, a number of successful naval operations and storms eradicated the remainder of the Roman fleets, threatening to undo the entire Roman effort over the past years, with the talented general Hamilcar Barca arriving in Sicily and Carthaginian forces raiding the southern Italian countryside. At the same time, the Carthaginian strategy shifted towards a simultaneous – and successful – expansion of its African hinterland, possibly as a means to support its existing war against Rome, who had proven an alarming ability at militarising seapower for most of the conflict. Nonetheless, this

[21] Polybius, *The Histories*, 6.52.

meant that the Sicilian front was suddenly somewhat less important. After all, a commander as resourceful as Hamilcar Barca had to begin his campaign by neutralising a potential mutiny among the mercenaries in service of Carthage.

The idea of a certain kind of Carthaginian passivity or quietism has been increasingly challenged in the last few decades, including Rawlings[22], and Eckstein[23], the latter linking this perception of passivity more to cliches regarding Eastern torpor and mercantile, even antisemitic tropes. Rawlings shows how the Carthaginian navy as a whole was a complex tool which clearly embodied the manifold complexities of seapower, including a simultaneous blending of military, commercial, and political fields, which ultimately made possible imposing and maintaining a true thalassocracy in the Western Mediterranean. At the same time, Rawlings makes it clear that the Carthaginian reputation for timidity towards armed conflict is unfounded.[24] This is especially noteworthy considering the often-facile connection of socially relatively open maritime powers with peaceful commerce, rather than with their historical propensity for piracy – and sometimes with military operations as well.

In turn, Deveraux points to the great costs and strategic challenges faced by Carthage in the First Punic War. Thus, Devereaux shows the fundamental geographic and economic constraints faced by Carthage in Sicily in comparison to Rome, with the former always in need of an expensive fleet to project its power on the island – and on a longer sea-crossing too – while the latter did not require this in order to sustain military operations.[25] Indeed, the fact that Carthage was able to sustain the war for such a prolonged period and recover from the Roman attack on its heartland as well as taking back command of the seas during the last phase of the conflict, shows remarkable resilience and determination, rather than passivity or quietism.

While Polybius emphasizes the mutually exhausting nature of the conflict for both Rome and Carthage, he argues that the Punic will to fight alone remain unchanged, with peace only possible due to the inability to supply the Sicilian army after the destruction of its supplies-laden fleet.[26] Hamilcar remained undefeated in the field and, significantly, Carthage demonstrated that it had not actually exhausted the entirety of its military potential during the Mercenary War. That the state possessed a remarkable capacity for recovery was demonstrated first in the Mercenary War and especially in the Iberian conquests soon masterminded by Hamilcar and his successors. Thus, the Barcid dominance in Iberia arguably created a somewhat separate, imperial proto-state which was technically part of the Carthaginian republic yet matching its African dominions in size and strength.

The Roman response after the end of the First Punic War is perhaps telling regarding the Carthaginian potential. Lambert links renewed Roman hostility and the conquest of Corsica and Sardinia to the political rise of Hamilcar Barca and the "inclusive, levelling politics" of the Popular Assembly to the detriment of the Council of Elders in the closing stage of the Mercenary War, arguing that Carthaginian citizens had considerably more political power than Roman citizens.[27] While there is no direct evidence to back the claim that more inclusive politics – or, in any case, the relative decline of the existing oligarchic

[22] See Louis Rawlings, "The Carthaginian Navy: Questions and Assumptions", in *New Perspectives on Ancient Warfare*, ed. Garret Fagan and Matthew Trundle (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 253-287.
[23] See Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy*, 163.
[24] Rawlings, "The Carthaginian Navy" 285-287.
[25] Bret Devereaux **"**Strategy and Cost: Carthaginian Naval Strategy in the First Punic War Reappraised", *Historia* 69/4 (2020): 475-477.
[26] Polybius, *The Histories*, 1.62.1.
[27] Lambert, *Seapower States*, 90-91.

elite – brought about the sudden, decisive hardening of Roman attitude, there is arguably no reason to completely reject this hypothesis out of hand.

Likely drawing on the lessons of the war, the Barcid imperial proto-state in Iberia took a more active approach with regards to recruiting allies rather than mercenaries as well as in the relatively rapid expansion of their territories. Indeed, Barcid Iberia had the potential to become a continental system of alliances just as Rome had in Italy – the difference being that Barcid Iberia was linked by a family, whereas the Italic peoples were bound by the Roman Republic. Another difference was the fact that this Barcid imperial project took place far from the Carthaginian political centre and thus was subject to logistical difficulties and the danger of being isolated – as the Second Punic War showed through Scipio's campaign. Thus, by taking Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica, the three strategic islands on its western flank, Rome would permanently prohibit Carthaginian naval presence from truly threatening the Italian heartland. Carthage would never recover its maritime pre-eminence and would instead shift towards the continental strategy of the Barcids, which was employed highly effectively in Iberia and then famously in Italy by Hannibal. Yet, crucially while Rome created new buffer regions around its core lands, Carthage was forced to seek new resources even further from its capital than Sicily had been. This structural-strategic imbalance would tell during the later conflict, which progressively swung in Rome's favour despite the enormous pressures on its alliance-system. Somewhat ironically, it was only after the disastrous Second Punic War that the sea appears to have become a central focus of the Carthaginians once again, ensuring remarkable prosperity.

Lambert[28] and Le Bohec[29] argue for the importance of the possible conflict between the Roman imperial system and the more open, democratic governments of the ancient world – with Lambert particularly focused in pursuit of this dichotomy. And while Lambert's attempts to link Carthage to the legacy of other seapowers is perhaps forced, it is certainly the case that seapower was the key to the survival of what appears to have been an increasingly open society. Thus, in Lambert's interpretation:

> The resilience of Carthaginian seapower culture reflected the critical role of maritime commerce in the life of the state, the enduring Phoenician heritage and the growing awareness of their connection with other seapowers, past and present, not least Athens. After a brief dalliance with Macedonian military glory, armoured manpower and elephants, Carthage returned to maritime trade and manufacturing. The Carthaginian economy recovered quickly after the Second Punic War; trade and agricultural exports made the city rich, funding a fresh round of major civic works. These grand projects symbolised the success of post-war reconstruction; they represented Carthage, and included the great naval harbour, a defiant statement of wealth and pride, built by the popular Assembly of a revived state. The circular harbour combining scale, elegance and power humbled the shipsheds of thalassocratic Athens, and stood ready to house, service and sustain a mighty naval force. The fleet, which the Romans had so publicly destroyed, was the ultimate symbol of Carthaginian power. The sheds tantalised and bewitched the imagination of all who arrived at the city by sea.[30]

Le Bohec, echoing Gilbert Charles-Picard, admits that while written sources pointing to this hypothesis are few, it likely represents the single most important reason for the Third Punic War and the destruction of both the maritime city-states of Carthage and Corinth in 146

[28] See Lambert, *Seapower States*.
[29] Le Bohec, "The 'Third Punic War': The Siege of Carthage (148-146 BC)", in *A Companion to the Punic Wars*, ed. Dexter Hoyos (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 431-432.
[30] Lambert, *Seapower States*, 99.

and the equally harsh treatment and destruction of the famous Iberian fortress of Numantia in 133.[31] In other words, by these acts of cruelty, the Roman elites pre-emptively intimidated any other city-states or alliances with similar ambitions of independence from Roman supremacy:

> In more recent times the Romans, when they went in pursuit of world empire, brought it into being by the valour of their arms, then extended its influence far and wide by the kindest possible treatment of the vanquished. So far, indeed, did they abstain from cruelty and revenge on those subjected to them that they appeared to treat them not as enemies, but as if they were benefactors and friends. Whereas the conquered, as former foes, expected to be visited with fearful reprisals, the conquerors left no room for anyone to surpass them in clemency. Some they enrolled as fellow citizens, to some they granted rights of intermarriage, to others they restored their independence, and in no case did they nurse a resentment that was unduly severe. Because of their surpassing humanity, therefore, kings, cities, and whole nations went over to the Roman standard. But once they held sway over virtually the whole inhabited world, they confirmed their power by terrorism and by the destruction of the most eminent cities. Corinth they razed to the ground, the Macedonians (Perseus for example) they rooted out, they razed Carthage and the Celtiberian city of Numantia, and there were many whom they cowed by terror.[32]

Moreover, by the first century BC, the Roman regime would become increasingly authoritarian and absolutist, exemplified by the desire of the state to go as far as control even religious communication during great calamities or victories.[33] This, along with a tightening grip on the wider Hellenistic world, and the replacement of existing democracies with oligarchies or with direct Roman control, underlined the transition towards the clearer authoritarianism of the Augustan restoration and its imperial successors. Thus, in wresting control of the sea from the Carthaginian state, Rome was firmly set on the path of a universalising vision, which brought about a new globalised community in a heterarchic international system built of overlapping spheres of obligations, authority, and autonomy.[34]

## CONCLUSION

Thus, the image of a purely maritime, mercantile polity defended only by mercenaries being decisively defeated by a purely continental, agrarian polity defended only by citizen-levies, remained profoundly influential, for all of its inaccuracies. For over two millennia, the contrast between the supposedly fundamentally different polities of Rome and Carthage continued to shape language, symbols, and even political actions taken in the international arena.[35] Lastly, the cases of Rome and Carthage prove illuminating for a series of enduring facets of international relations and of the importance of the multidimensional nature of seapower. The outcome of this conflict was a new imperial system which would encompass the later Mediterranean-centric maritime order. In turn, it would greatly influence the dynamic Western ocean-centric maritime order of the last five centuries.

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[31] Le Bohec, "The 'Third Punic War'", 431.
[32] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* (transl. F. R. Walton) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 32.4.4.
[33] Jörg Rüpke, *Pantheon: A New History of Roman Religion* (transl. D. M. B. Richardson) Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 101.
[34] See Davies, *Rome, Global Dreams, and the International Origins of an Empire*.
[35] See Quinn, "Translating Empire from Rome to Carthage".

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