

The Punic Wars

(Punic = Poenic = Phoenician = Carthaginian)

First Punic War (264-241BC)

By 264 Rome was dominating all of Italy, including the Greek cities in the south. The Greeks nearby in Sicily felt threatened by Carthage and asked the Romans to help. The Romans fought against Carthage and eventually became as good as them in sea battles.

When the Romans won the war, Sicily and Sardinia/Corsica became the first “provinces” of Rome.

Second Punic War (218-202BC)

The Carthaginian general Hannibal was determined to get revenge and built up an army in Spain where the Carthaginians had many settlements (e.g. Nova Carthago - Cartagena). When he was ready he attacked Rome’s ally Saguntum and so provoked war.

With a large army including elephants he marched over the Pyrenees, crossed the River Rhone and then the Alps. He then spent 15 years in Italy winning battles whenever the Romans attacked, but he never captured Rome itself.

In the end he was defeated when the Roman general Scipio built up an army in Spain and attacked Carthage. Hannibal left Italy and was defeated by Scipio. Carthage was not destroyed. The coast of Spain now became a Roman province.

Third Punic War (149-146BC)

The Carthaginians provoked war fifty years later, and the Romans attacked and completely destroyed it. ‘Africa’ became another Roman province. They made Greece a province in the same year.