

The True Cause of the Punic Wars

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BACKGROUND: THE PUNIC WARS AND TREATIES

The Punic Wars were a series of three bitter wars fought from 264-146 BCE. They pitted the maritime republic of Carthage against the budding Roman Republic. The first war was sparked by Roman intervention in Sicily. The result of this series of wars was the final destruction of Carthage and the beginning of the Roman conquest of the entire Mediterranean. Before the states came to blows relations were quite amiable and several treaties had been signed designating trade rights and spheres of influence.

RESEARCH: THE LOST TREATY

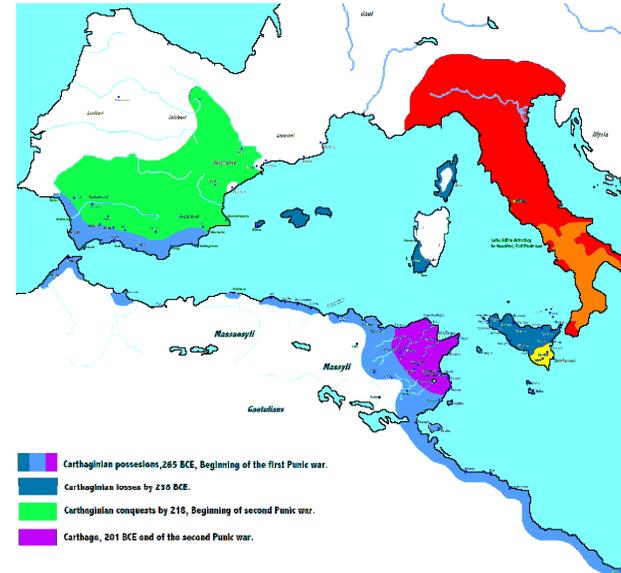
The goal of this research was to study the politics that lead up to the three Punic Wars. This study is best facilitated by the examination of the treaties between Rome and Carthage, especially the one in the History of Philinus of Agrigentum. Philinus was a Greek historian from a southern Sicilian town of Agrigentum and he lived during the first two Punic Wars. This treaty, circa 306 BCE, is hotly debated among modern scholarship because one of its clauses states that Rome would not enter Sicily and that Carthage would not enter Italy. The authenticity, even the existence, of this treaty has been debated since antiquity.

TIMELINE

- c. 306 BCE: Treaty of Philinus
- Third Century BCE: Life of Philinus
- 264-241 BCE: First Punic War
- 218-201 BCE: Second Punic War
- c. 200-c. 118 BCE: Life of Polybius
- 149-146 BCE: Third Punic War
- 64/59 BCE-17 CE: Life of Livy



Drawing of Hannibal crossing the Alps with elephants
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- Carthaginian possessions, 265 BCE, Beginning of the first Punic war.
- Carthaginian losses by 230 BCE.
- Carthaginian conquests by 218, Beginning of second Punic war.
- Carthage, 201 BCE end of the second Punic war.

Map of Carthaginian and Roman territory through the Punic Wars
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ARGUMENTS FOR EXISTENCE

- The Roman historical tradition does not dispute the existence of the treaty, but, due to the Romans' bias, historians found ways to blame Carthage for breaking it first. The Roman Historian Livy has a Carthaginian in a speech, against the 2nd Punic War, reference how they broke the treaty by attacking an Italian city (Liv. 21.10). Livy is also known to harbor anti-Carthage sentiments (Liv. 21.4-5).
- The treaty of Philinus fits into an existing treaty pattern. The previous treaties mark out colonization and trade rights between the states (Pol3.22-24). Polybius, the reliable historian, makes this statement about the last treaty, "They shall both have it permissible for either of them to help the other in the other's territory at a time of war." (Pol. 3.26) This statement only makes sense and would fit in the treaty pattern if the treaty of Philinus existed.



Bust of Hannibal Barca
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"Cartago delenda est"

Roman records were not always well kept, some decayed or were lost, others were tampered with. Cary in his essay "A Forgotten Treaty" writes, "In 52 B.C. Pompey broke into the Record Office and altered the text of the law on his own authority." When Polybius started to write *The Histories* in c. 168 BC, Cato the Elder – the famous, anti-Carthaginian, Roman, was in charge of the Roman records; one hypothesis is that Cato tampered with the record of the treaty.



Bust of Cato the Elder
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CONCLUSION

I argue that the Treaty of Philinus did exist, and its existence had far reaching consequences and implications for understanding that critical period of history, as it is the true cause of the Punic Wars. Accepting the veracity of Treaty of Philinus as valid puts their actions in the following wars in a different light. This is especially evident in regard to Rome's own self-image as an imperial power and how Rome is viewed today.

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