

Of all the Hellenistic states of the ancient world, Carthage appears as one of the most unusual. Originally founded as a maritime and commercial power by the Phoenicians, Carthage realized that a land empire was also necessary to increase its financial prosperity. As a result the Carthaginians embarked on a campaign of conquest in North Africa, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and Spain. Each of these areas was important for trade or raw materials.

By the seventh century B.C. only an elite unit of noble citizens known as the Sacred Band formed any part of a regular standing army. They were basically a home defence force and rarely left the vicinity of Carthage. The Carthaginians found it far more advantageous to hire foreign mercenaries and Libyan and Numidian allies to fight their wars for them. Mercenaries were plentiful throughout the Mediterranean and the Carthaginians were wealthy enough to hire several armies of these soldiers of fortune. At times even mercenary generals were put in command of the army. It was not uncommon to see a Carthaginian army composed of Spanish and Numidian cavalry, and infantry from Libya, Iberia, the Balearic Islands, Gaul and Italy. Hoplites from Greece and Sicily as well as peltasts from Macedonia could also enter into this array. By adding to this mixture the odd Libyan four-horse chariot and elephants from Africa and India, the Carthaginian army took on a very diverse and exotic appearance.

Most of these troops were light troops of the peltast variety. As a result they could operate with great efficiency in rough terrain, where a cavalryman, hoplite or legionaire would be practically useless. Therefore the best Carthaginian generals relied heavily on dirty tricks and ambushes. This led Carthage's less flexible Roman adversaries to accuse them of "Punic treachery". This did not worry the Carthaginians much since they fought their wars on a profit and loss basis. If their army was victorious, the wealthy merchants would gain the wealth of a newly acquired area. If the army was destroyed, another army would simply be recruited and sent out again. The loss of foreign mercenaries made no difference to Carthage. Since Carthaginian generals were not limited in their actions by worrying about the safety of citizen soldiers, they were able to take greater risks than, for instance, a consul with a Roman citizen army. During the early campaigns of conquest Carthaginian generals were encouraged to win by the fact that losing generals were impaled.

The army itself was organized on the standards and drill of the Greek states. (It was not uncommon to find a Spartan mercenary general either training or commanding the army.) Officers were usually Carthaginian nobles or mercenary generals from one of the Greek states. Hannibal's staff for his invasion of Italy in 218 B.C. is typical in this respect. Two Carthaginian generals, Maharbal and Hanno, were veterans of the First Punic War. Another aged tactician, Hert, was also part of the staff. Lesser officers were former chieftains of Spaniards and Libyans. Synhalus, the Egyptian, was the physician-in-chief; and two Greeks, Sosilos and Silenos, served as chief secretaries. The expedition astrologer, Bog, was from Asia. In order to send out orders to the various contingents, many skilled translators had to be employed.

As an army, the Carthaginians found themselves strong in cavalry but much weaker in infantry to their main rival, Rome. When they fought a pitched battle, their own lack of good heavy infantry and the Romans' lack of cavalry usually led to a double

envelopment of the Roman army. The problem then was to prevent the Romans from breaking out of the ring through the Carthaginian centre before the flanking forces closed in. This combination of troops took exact timing on the part of the Carthaginian generals.

The main problem with mercenaries was that they tended to lose heart if their pay was not readily available. For this reason there were several mercenary revolts, most of a minor severity. However, once a large mercenary army besieged Carthage just after the close of the First Punic War when their Carthaginian employers refused to give them their back pay. In contrast, Hannibal managed to hold together a multi-racial army in Italy for fourteen years, with limited pay, and maintained a unique esprit de corps which had been seen in few armies of the day. With Carthage's defeat in the Second Punic War, she was deprived of the recruiting of mercenaries and as a result lost her empire and prosperity.