The wealth of Africa
Carthage

Students’ worksheets

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Carthage

Front cover image: Stela of Tanit with fruit, British Museum

CARTHAGE

Century BC

9th
814 – Carthage founded by Elissa (Dido)

8th
507 – 1st treaty with Rome

7th
480 – Death of Hamilcar I, Court of Magistrates established

6th
348 – 2nd treaty with Rome

5th
306 – 3rd treaty with Rome

4th
263–241 – 1st Punic War

3rd
219–204 – 2nd Punic War, Hannibal crosses the Alps

2nd
149–146 – 3rd Punic War, Carthage destroyed

8 14 – Carthage founded by Elissa (Dido)
SHEET 1: WHAT WAS THE CITY OF CARTHAGE LIKE?

Much of the original Punic [Carthaginian] city was destroyed, or built over, by the Romans. We have to rely mainly on archaeological evidence for what it once looked like.

Source 1
Each [city] wall was divided vertically by two vaults, one above the other. In the lower space there were stables for 300 elephants, and alongside were receptacles for their food. Above were stables for 4,000 horses and places for their fodder and grain. There were barracks also for soldiers, 20,000 foot and 4,000 horse.

Appian (c. AD 140): 95

Source 3
The old city, clustering around the Byrsa [citadel], probably remained an over-crowded beehive of activity, with high, flat-roofed houses almost touching each other across the narrow streets. But on the sea side there grew up a modern city, with fine public buildings, laid out in accordance with Greek town planning schemes. Around the market place ran colonnades adorned with fine Greek statues pillaged from the cities of Sicily; here too were the law courts and official buildings, together with a temple of Apollo.

Scullard 1955: 102

Source 5
The harbours had communication with each other, and a common entrance from the sea 70 feet wide. The shipyards could fit 220 vessels. And there were ionic columns in front of the houses for the ships, two in front of each, turning the appearance of the harbour and the island into the image of a portico. On the island a cabin had been constructed for the admiral. And the island lay opposite the entrance, and had been raised to a great height; so that the admiral could observe everything approaching by sea.

Appian (c. AD 140): 96

Task
Make a tourist guide to Carthage in 300 BC.
SHEET 2: HOW GOOD WERE CARTHAGINIAN PRODUCTS?

Many historians seem to think that the Carthaginians were only interested in money, and cared nothing for art and culture. Look at what they made and see whether you agree.

Source 1
In Roman times Punic [Carthaginian] beds, cushions, and mattresses were regarded as luxuries, and Punic joinery and furniture were copied. Encyclopedia Britannica 2010

Source 2
It seems that Carthaginian manufactures were in general inferior to those of Greece, and would never have survived in an open market. Carthage secured by her military power a situation in which, free from competition, her traders could purchase precious metals with goods of little value — wine, olive oil, perfume, cloth and trinkets. These precious metals could then be used to pay for the goods which Carthage desired to import from the Greeks.
Law 1978: 124

Source 3
The pottery was cheap and unartistic, while it is noteworthy that imported products found at Carthage are generally of the poorest quality. Their own art was unoriginal, and where it showed any merit this was due mainly to Greek or Egyptian influence.
Scullard 1955: 105

Questions
1. What are the opinions of the written sources on Carthaginian crafts?
2. From the evidence of the pictures, how far do you agree with these opinions? You could compare them with Greek and Roman objects.
SHEET 3: HOW IMPORTANT WAS TRADE TO THE CARTHAGINIANS?

Historians seem to agree that Carthage's main interest was trade and making money. See if these sources confirm this idea.

Source 1
Carthage was the first well-organised commercial state of which we know. It owed its existence to trade necessities; its policies were, from first to last, controlled almost exclusively by trade interests.
Wells 1920: 499

Source 3
Carthage kept a monopoly of the supply of goods from the west — Sardinian and North African corn, Spanish silver, British tin and West African gold — to the Mediterranean world.
Law 1978: 124

Source 4
The Carthaginian Empire was commercial rather than territorial, centred on the Mediterranean rather than on North Africa. Only in the immediate hinterland of Carthage itself was a large area of territory controlled. The subject Phoenician cities paid to Carthage customs duties, but not normally tribute, and were required to supply forces for the Punic army.
Law 1978: 124

Source 6
In the Cape Bon peninsula east of Carthage, the Libyan occupants were evicted, and the land passed into private Carthaginian ownership. Here the wealthy Carthaginians developed large estates, using slave labour, on which they practised mixed farming — cereals, olives, figs, pomegranates, cattle, sheep, horses and bee-keeping. Elsewhere, the Libyans were left in possession of their land, but subjected to heavy taxation.
Law 1978: 129–130

Source 7
The main concern of the Carthaginians was to maintain their empire as a trade monopoly. This policy is illustrated by the treaties made between Carthage and Rome in 509 and 348 BC. In the first, in return for the recognition by Carthage of Roman interests in central Italy, the Romans agreed not to sail along the coast of Africa west of Carthage unless forced to do so by bad weather or enemy action, and, if so forced, not to trade, but to leave within five days.
Law 1978: 124

Questions
1. What evidence is there that trade was important to Carthaginians?
2. For what other purposes did they seize land?
3. How would having their own money help their trade?
4. If they were just interested in trade, why did the Carthaginians spend so much time fighting other countries?
SHEET 4: HOW GOOD WAS LIFE FOR THE CARTHAGINIANS?

As with anywhere, there were good and bad points about living in Carthage. See if you can sort out which were which, in your opinion, and whether you would have liked to have lived in Carthage.

Source 1
Theatres and public games were unknown. The only public festivities were religious ceremonies and there was nothing amusing about them. In this community of businessmen, the arts were regarded as useless accomplishments. Music alone seems to have been held in some respect.
Charles-Picard 1961: 154

Source 3
The Carthaginians are also considered to have an excellent form of government, which differs from any other state in several respects. The superiority of their constitution is proved by the fact that the common people remain loyal to it. The Carthaginians have never had any rebellion worth speaking of, and have never been under the rule of a tyrant.
Aristotle (c. 330 BC): 1272b24

Source 5
A close control was established [by the Senate] over the generals, and military failure was frequently punished by execution.
Law 1978: 122

Source 6
In Carthage the houses of the rich had their own perfectly equipped bathrooms, and probably private swimming pools as well. There were also public baths, some reserved for the aristocracy and others open to the general public.
Charles-Picard 1961: 130

Questions

1. How good was the Carthaginian political system?
2. How useful is the evidence in source 4?
3. Would you have liked to have been a Carthaginian?
   (Use any evidence to help you)
SHEET 5: DID THE CARTHAGINIANS SACRIFICED CHILDREN?

Most of the evidence for this claim came from Greek and Roman writers who were enemies of the Carthaginians, and wanted to make them look bad. However the picture below, incised on stone, may provide a clue. It is supposed to show a priest who has something tucked under his left arm. The outline is very faint, but it may show a child.

Source 1
According to a number of Greek and, later, Christian writers, both hostile witnesses, the Carthaginians regularly sacrificed their children to Baal-Hamon. Later, Tanit [a goddess] also received the grisly offerings according to the same writers.
Stuckey 2009

Source 2
In Carthage, the relatively high percentage of premature and newborn babies and foetuses indicates that in most cases it was the remains of cremated stillborn children that were deposited in the urns, which would be logical in a period when infant mortality must have been fairly high... This more 'human' view, however, accepts that human sacrifice was practised in Carthage in exceptional cases and with the aim of appeasing the anger of the gods in extreme situations.
Aubet 1993: 253

Source 4
When they saw their enemy camped before their walls, they were filled with superstitious dread, for they believed that they had neglected the honours of the gods that had been established by their fathers. In their desire to make amends, they selected 200 of the noblest children and sacrificed them publicly; and others who were under suspicion sacrificed themselves voluntarily, in number not less than 300.
Diodorus Siculus (an enemy of Carthage, 1st century BC): 179

Questions

1. How reliable is source 5 as evidence of child sacrifice?
2. What other explanations might there be for what is happening?
3. Is there any other evidence that Carthaginians sacrificed children?
4. Do these sources prove that Carthaginians sacrificed children?
**Sheet 6: Were the Carthaginians ‘Hard and Gloomy’?**

A problem in learning about the Carthaginians is that they wrote almost nothing about themselves. Most of our knowledge about them comes from the Greeks and Romans, who were their enemies. Be careful in making up your mind.

**Source 1**
The Carthaginians are a hard and gloomy people, submissive to their rulers and harsh to their subjects, running to extremes of cowardice in times of fear and of cruelty in times of anger.
Plutarch (1st century AD), quoted in Frend 1960: 316

**Source 2**
They [the Carthaginians] had seized from the [Libyan] peasantry half of their crops, and had doubled the taxation of the townspeople without allowing even a partial reduction of any tax for the poor.
They had applauded and honoured not those governors who treated the people with gentleness and humanity, but those who procured for Carthage the largest amount of supplies and stores and used the country people most harshly.
Polybius (c. 150 BC): 195

**Source 5**
If trading ships of other nations came within her maritime boundaries, their crews were promptly thrown overboard. They ground their subject communities with oppressive taxes and gave them no hope of ever obtaining equal rights.
Wolters 1952, 194

**Source 6**
The Carthaginians seem to have made no contribution at all to the intellectual or moral riches of mankind. Consequently, while Rome and Athens are living forces in the mind of Europe, the ancient glory of Carthage is only dimly remembered and a few broken stones are all that remains of the brilliant city that strove with Rome for the empire of the world.
Wolters 1952: 203–204

**Source 7**
In ancient times, slavery was a common aspect of everyday society. In Carthage, however, slaves were treated as human beings who were granted basic rights. They had a right to visit a temple for worship, and to marry and accumulate savings to buy their freedom. The process of liberating slaves was governed by laws. Although not allowed to take part directly in politics, women could engage in religious and economic life. There are records about women who became priests and also leaders of religious councils.
Fantar 2008

**Questions**
1. What were the positive points of the Carthaginians?
2. What were their negative points?
3. Do you agree that they made no contribution to humankind (source 6)?

**Task**
Use all the evidence available to you in this section to agree or disagree that the Carthaginians were ‘hard and gloomy’.
1. What weapons did the Carthaginians have?
2. Which would have been the most useful?
3. How easy would it have been to transport the army across the sea?
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