The wealth of Africa
Carthage
Teachers’ notes
THE WEALTH OF AFRICA: USING THESE RESOURCES

This educational resource consists of 16 sets of resources on African civilisations, countries and themes.

Each set of resources includes:

• Teachers’ notes
• Students’ worksheets
• A presentation

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Teachers’ notes

These are intended to provide background material for teachers, but can also be referred to by students who want more contextual information.

Students’ worksheets

These are stand-alone worksheets which can be downloaded as classroom resources or viewed on the interactive whiteboard. They are self-contained, with tasks and questions and a limited number of sources in which the language has been slightly amended to make them more accessible to the likely reading ages of the students. They are also designed to be used independently of the teacher, e.g. for homework.

If teachers do not wish to spend more than one or two lessons on Carthage, then the sheets will prove ideal for small project work, with groups of students taking one sheet, finding interesting and relevant information, and reporting back to the rest of the class. A specimen lesson plan along these lines is given below.

Presentation

This provides a simpler and more visual introduction to the civilisation. It contains some of the images and sources found in the other sections, and can be shown on the whiteboard or used at home to give an overview of the main topics covered.

Your feedback

Please help the British Museum improve its educational resources for schools and teachers by giving your feedback. The first 250 teachers or tutors to complete the online survey before 12.00 on 1 September 2011 will receive a printed set of illustrations of African civilisations by artist Tayo Fatunla. Visit www.surveymonkey.com/s/wealthofafrica to complete the survey and for terms and conditions.
LESSON SCHEME: CARTHAGE IN AN HOUR

Aim
To decide how advanced the Carthaginian civilisation was.

Starter: Impressions of Carthage
Scroll quickly through the images in the presentation, and get feedback from students on their first impressions, especially on how advanced they consider the civilisation to have been. (10 minutes)

Research
Divide the class into groups with one group per resource sheet. Each group has to look at the question at the top of the sheet, and decide on the answer by studying the sources. The group should note 5–10 relevant facts that it can feed back to the rest of the class as evidence of its answer. (20 minutes)

Feedback
Each group feeds back its findings, opinion and evidence to the rest of the class, who could take notes. (15 minutes)

Discussion
Pupils could debate the question of how well-organised Carthage was, and whether it was an agreeable place to live. (15 minutes)

Homework
E.g. The ambassador for Carthage defends his country – pick and explain five details that show how advanced Carthage was at this time, or look at the presentation, if not already done in class, or do further research into one of the topics to find more information.
CARTHAGE 814–146 BC: TEACHERS’ NOTES

Introduction
Carthage (which means ‘new town’) refers both to the ancient city in what is now Tunisia, and to a territory which covered parts of North Africa, southern Spain and the island of Sicily. It reached the height of its power at the same time as the Greek city-states, shortly before Rome’s peak, and it was a major force in terms of trade and warfare in the Mediterranean. The Carthaginians were African only in as much as they happened to build their society on the north coast of the continent. Although they did create some trading links, they paid little attention to the interior, apart from exacting tribute, crops and mercenaries, and remained at heart a Mediterranean, rather than an African, power. They are remembered today mainly for their epic struggles against the Roman Republic, and the closeness they came, through Hannibal’s invasion, to destroying it.

Why study Carthage?
Although they have been little studied, the Carthaginians are a fascinating society, full of contradictions. In line with their Phoenician roots they were obsessive traders, and affairs of state became dominated by business. Yet to promote and maintain their trading dominance they became a warlike and expansionist nation, ruthlessly conquering and fighting other Mediterranean peoples. They had brilliant generals and admirals, but left the business of soldiering to mercenaries. They overthrew their ruling dynasty to form a more constitutional form of government, but generals who failed in war were routinely executed. They produced little art, and may have practised child sacrifice, yet they were one of the first societies to have produced a comprehensive coinage system.

Carthage will be of interest to students of History following the English National Curriculum as an example of an ancient, North African civilisation. In terms of the ancient world, it is normally only Egypt, Greece and Rome which are studied, and so Carthage provides a fascinating contrast of a little-known society that could, and did, rival the more famous ones. It can be used to counter the notion of African civilisations being backward, or in KS2 as a contrast to other classical civilisations.

In terms of the wealth of Africa, Carthage was important as a hub of trade in the Classical Mediterranean, generating wealth and business opportunities, and linking Africa to the markets of Europe. It is also notable for its sophisticated coinage.

Geography
The city of Carthage was built on a thin isthmus which was defended from the mainland by a series of walls. The site was excellent for trade, having sheltered bays, which were added to with a series of artificial harbours. The location was ideal for controlling the movement of ships between the eastern and western Mediterranean, and helps explain Carthaginian success. It also justifies the amount of effort they took in attempting to control Sicily on the other side of the Mediterranean passage, and the land on both sides of the Pillars of Hercules/Straits of Gibraltar.
City
The city had massive walls, 23 miles in length, longer than the walls of comparable cities. The 2.5 to 3 miles of wall on the isthmus to the west were never penetrated.

The city had a huge necropolis (burial ground), a religious area, market places, a council house, towers and a theatre, and was divided into four equally sized residential areas with the same layout. A high citadel called the Byrsa stood roughly in the middle of the city. It was one of the largest cities in the ancient world – some say second only to Alexandria.

Trade
Carthage sent caravans across the Sahara to West Africa and traded its manufactured and agricultural goods for African gold, ivory, salt, wood, ebony, skins, and hides. Carthaginian merchant ships also ventured to West Africa where they traded bronze, textiles, ceramics and fine metalwork in what is now Senegal and Nigeria. In the 5th century BC, the Carthaginian navigator, Hanno, sailed to what is now Senegal in an attempt to establish a trading post to take advantage of the gold trade. Later, Carthage developed a monopoly on bronze production. As a result, Carthage became extremely wealthy and its impressive buildings, splendid temples, and lavish houses were an indication of how the region had benefited from trade. The fine houses were often situated around magnificent central courtyards. Carthaginian merchants became some of the wealthiest people, owning large vineyards and extensive plantations on which they grew wine or pastured animals. In time these merchants were to be found in practically all of the Mediterranean ports including those of Greece, Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean.

Carthaginians had well-regulated trading connections that included commercial treaties involving imports and exports. Trade with Iberia (Spain) was important for obtaining silver, lead and tin ore for bronze. Carthage’s naval power enabled it to establish a monopoly on the tin trade with Britain. After tin, silver was the most important commodity. Carthage’s strategic position between Africa and Sicily gave it control of trade to the eastern Mediterranean. It also controlled the making of the Tyrian purple dye which was often more valuable than gold.

Carthage produced finely embroidered and dyed cotton, linen, wool, and silk, as well as artistic and functional pottery, faience, incense, and perfumes. Its artisans worked with glass, wood, alabaster, ivory, bronze, brass, lead, gold, silver, and precious stones to create a wide array of goods, including mirrors, highly admired furniture and cabinetry, beds, bedding, and pillows, jewellery, arms, implements and household items. It traded in salted Atlantic fish and fish sauce, and brokered the manufactured, agricultural, and natural products of almost every Mediterranean people.

Carthage did not issue a coinage until the end of the 5th century BC. This may have been because its trade with Africa and the tin trade with Britain was done through exchanges of goods, while deals with Greeks were paid for in silver bullion.

Carthage’s trading monopoly was dependent upon its military power. Only Carthaginians were chosen for the navy, although sometimes slaves were conscripted, while for the less reputed army, mercenaries formed the main component.
Agriculture

The Carthaginians living in northern and eastern Tunisia became famed for their agricultural techniques and used irrigation methods that transformed the desert into fertile land. Their raisin wines were extremely popular in Rome and Greece, and nuts, grain, dates and fruits were exported to the Middle East.

However, the most important factor in Carthage’s regeneration was the expansion into Tunisian regions. Until the 5th century BC, much of Carthage’s food had been imported from Phoenician allies in Sicily and Sardinia or bought from Libyan farmers. Due to the disputes over Sicily, the Carthaginians had to rely upon local supplies. This encouraged them to explore agricultural methods in Tunisia’s fertile area.

By the 4th century BC the Carthaginians had transformed themselves into farmers. In the fertile area of Cape Bon, east of Lake Tunis, they created market gardens and orchards with a variety of fruit trees and with cattle grazing on the land.

The Carthaginians were involved in the cultivation of olive groves. Olives were a key crop, essential for both cooking but more importantly lighting. The description of how the olives should be planted is adhered to even today in Tunisia. As a maritime trading nation they also took the cultivation of olives to new colonies, namely Tripolitania.

In addition, they grew dates, figs and almonds. They also kept bees for both honey and beeswax for use in industry and medicines. Although they did not cultivate cereal crops, they benefited from the produce of the Libyan farmers within their colonies through a system of taxation. These fertile lands also saw the rearing of cattle and sheep for domestic use and export. Carthaginian horses were particularly prized by the Romans.

Government

Carthage could best be described as an oligarchy, with two leaders – known as Suffets – elected annually, probably by a Council of Elders, or senate, of about 300 of the aristocracy. There may also have been a popular assembly, local councils and even trade unions. An organisation of judges, known as the Hundred and Four, were in charge of military affairs. These judges had become all-powerful until Hannibal took over and limited their influence by making them subject to annual rotation.

Foundation

By tradition, Carthage was founded by Queen Dido, who had fled from the city of Tyre in Phoenicia after her husband was killed by her brother. Aeneas of Troy, the father of the Romans, became Dido’s lover while returning from the Trojan War, but he then abandoned her. In her grief she killed herself, cursing Aeneas and his descendants as she died.

Whatever the truth of this, it is known that the Phoenicians began establishing colonies around the Mediterranean in order to exploit trading opportunities, and it was they who established Carthage. This colony would become their most lucrative base.
War with the Greeks

By the 6th century BC, the Greeks were also colonising the western Mediterranean. They were trying to gain access to the Spanish metal trade and the northern European tin trade. They soon became envious of Carthage’s wealth and power in the region, and they began to contend for control. Sicily, which was under Carthage’s control, and a major trading state, became the scene of a number of battles as the Greeks sought to take over the island.

At first the Carthaginians sought help from one of their trading partners, the Etruscans, who were powerful in the Italian region. They initially helped to drive the Greeks out of Corsica and for a time Carthage was able to regain control of the metal trade. However, the Greeks grew in strength and in 480 BC, under the leadership of Gelon, the ruler of Syracuse, they attacked and drove the Carthaginians out of Sicily. Carthage did not regain the island until around 310 BC.

The Punic Wars (264–146 BC) and Carthage’s fall

Sicily was also the scene of the First Punic War in 264 BC where the Romans fought against the Carthaginians for dominance over the western Mediterranean. The war was mainly sea-based, and was won by Rome after it captured a Carthaginian vessel, and copied it to create its own ships. As a result of the defeat, the Carthaginians were forced to not only relinquish control of Sicily but also the islands of Corsica and Sardinia.

Hannibal, the great military leader, came to prominence during the Second Punic War in 218 BC when he battled against the Romans in a campaign lasting 16 years. During this time he famously crossed the Alps with an army which included elephants, and defeated the Romans in a number of battles that threatened to topple the Republic. In spite of his earlier successes, Hannibal was finally defeated in Zama, in modern-day Italy, in 202 BC by forces led by Scipio. The Carthaginians were forced to pay a tribute as payment for the war which amounted to 800,000 Roman pounds of silver, a huge figure that put financial pressure on Carthage’s economy.

However, it was the Third Punic War which resulted in the destruction of Carthage in around 146 BC. After the Second Punic War, the Carthaginians had been forced to give up overseas possessions, pay a large indemnity, reduce their fleet, and become subservient to Rome. Despite this the city had recovered by 150 BC and was again seen as a threat, which encouraged Rome to finally remove all danger of a Carthaginian resurgence.

It appears the Carthaginians were largely blameless in this final struggle, but Rome was determined to destroy its rival once and for all. Refusing Roman demands to abandon their city, the Carthaginians resisted a three-year siege, resulting in starvation for many, before finally capitulating. The Romans pulled the warships out into the harbour and burnt them before the city, and went from house to house, capturing, raping and enslaving the people. 50,000 Carthaginians were sold into slavery. The city was set ablaze, and only ruins and rubble remained. After the fall of Carthage, Rome annexed the majority of the Carthaginian colonies.

The traditional report that the city was sown with salt has been questioned by at least one modern scholar, but the fact that after the destruction of the city in 146 BC the site was virtually uninhabited until the Romans built their own colony over the ruins in 122 BC implies a basis to the legend.
Religion

The Phoenicians who settled in Carthage were a very religious people bringing with them many of their beliefs and practices. Their main god, Baal (Hammon), who was lord and protector, was frequently mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, while other lesser gods included Melqart and Eshmoun. Like many religious people, the Carthaginians tended to give their children names that were associated with their god, such as Hannibal which signifies ‘favoured by Baal’, while Hamilcar, who was a general in the first Sicilian war, means ‘favoured by Melqart’. The Carthaginians were also influenced by the spirituality of neighbouring civilisations such as the Greeks, Egyptians and Romans, and they adopted numerous gods associated with these belief systems. By the 5th century BC, Tanit, the fertility goddess who was a companion of Baal, was also added to the list of deities. By the time of its destruction, Tanit had become the main deity in Carthage and the region had numerous places of worship dedicated to her.

It is hotly debated as to whether the Carthaginians practised child sacrifice. In the child necropolis of Tophet, tens of thousands of urns have been found holding the cremated bones of infants, stillborn babies and even foetuses. Some say that this was a rumour spread by the Romans to discredit the Carthaginians.

After Rome took control of Carthage and subsequently came under the influence of Christianity, the region also adopted this faith. The 7th century AD saw the rise of Islam which resulted in many Carthaginians becoming Muslims.
REFERENCES


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