Article

Generals and judges: command, constitution and the fate of Carthage

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Abstract

This paper considers the structure and priorities of the Carthaginian state in its imperial endeavours in both North Africa and across the Mediterranean, focusing especially on the well-documented period of the Punic Wars (264–146 BC.). It suggests that Carthaginian constitutional structures, in particular the split between civil *shofetim* ('judges') and military *rabbim* ('generals'), impacted the strategic outlook and marginal bellicosity of the city, making it less competitive against its primary peer-rival in the Western Mediterranean, Rome.

جنرالات وقضاة: القيادة والدستور ومصير قرطاج

مايكل ج. تايلور

تتناول هذه الورقة هيكل وأولويات الدولة القرطاجية في مساعيها الإمبراطورية في كل من شمال إفريقيا وعبر البحر الأبيض المتوسط، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على الفترة الموثقة جيداً للحروب البونيقية (264 146 قبل الميلاد). و التي تشير إلى أن الهياكل الدستورية القرطاجية ولا سيما الانقسام بين (shofetim) المدني او القضاة و (rabbim) العسكري او الجنرالات ، قد أثر على النظرة الإستراتيجية والعدوانية للمدينة، مما يجعلها أقل قدرة على المنافسة ضد روما منافسها الأساسي في غرب البحر الأبيض المتوسط.

Key words: Carthage, warfare, *rab* (general), *shofet*, exogamy, Punic Wars

Carthage was a major imperial power in the Western Mediterranean from the fifth century BC until its decisive defeat by Rome during the Second Punic War (218–201).[1] The city is one of the handful of pre-modern republican city-states to achieve a substantial imperial domain, a small club that includes Athens and Rome in the ancient world and Genoa and Venice during the Renaissance. This paper examines, in a line of constitutional analysis originating with Aristotle and Polybius, the extent to which the idiosyncratic organization of Carthage's political institutions impacted its military performance and imperial ambitions. There is reason to believe that overall, republican (i.e. non-monarchic) states in the ancient world enjoyed significant advantages in policy endeavours in contrast to monarchic configurations of similar size and scope (Ober 2008; Taylor 2020). However, republican city-states generally struggled to expand beyond a certain point and still maintain manageable internal politics, and this constraint explains why most ancient empires were monarchic, from the ethnic kingships of the Persians and Macedonians to the imperial monarchy in Rome after Augustus, as it was easier to scale up obeisance to a monarch than political participation in a republic.

Nonetheless, in ancient republics, electoral competition spurred military aggressiveness, as elites pursued the political rewards from the glory of military victories and distribution of spoils. Decentralized power structures blunted the political fall-out of military defeat, responsibility for which could be diffused without necessarily shattering the legitimacy of the entire government, as might be the case if a Hellenistic king lost a battle where he was personally in command (e.g. Appian, *Syriaca,* 37). The privileges that republics offered to their citizens, chiefly political participation, social distinction and the capacity to negotiate matters of military service and taxation, made republican systems more robust during times of stress and crisis, and facilitated deeper mobilization of domestic resources for warfare. The best-documented model for republican bellicosity is Rome during the Middle Republic (Harris 1979; Hölkeskamp 1993; Taylor 2020), although the democracy in Classical Athens generated a similar if less sustainable dynamic (Pritchard 2020). Carthaginian imperialism had a substantial impact upon the history of the Hellenistic Mediterranean (Whittaker 1978). Examining the relationship between Carthage's republican constitution and its well-documented military endeavours therefore contributes to a broader understanding of both ancient war and imperialism, and provides a comparative foil for understanding the ultimate success of Roman expansionism. The argument laid out below is as follows: 1) the stark separation of the military power of the *rabbim* (RBM: 'generals'[2]) from the civil executives, the *shofetim* (ŠPṬM: 'judges'), was an idiosyncratic aspect of the Carthaginian constitution, as most imperial republics in the ancient world unified civil and military power to a significant degree; 2) anxieties about *rabbim* operating in the periphery with considerable autonomy manifested in a savage accountability regime for perceived incompetence or disloyalty; 3) exogamous marriages by *rabbim* further established them as extramural figures who connected the city to foreign sources of military manpower; 4) The peculiar constitutional position of *rabbim* diluted the bellicosity of the city, especially compared with its main peer rival, Rome.

Sources

The best evidence for Carthaginian imperialism is provided by the military narratives in Greek and Roman literary sources. The extent to which these present a reliable picture is often doubted,

for fear that they are tainted by anti-Carthaginian or anti-Punic bias, and at best tell a victor's history (Bonnet 2005; de Lisle 2019; Pilkington 2019, 25–53; Prag 2010). Carthage was often cast as a second-string barbarian Other, a portrayal already apparent in Pindar (*Pythian Odes* 1.71–80) and Herodotus (7.166). Our sources for the Punic Wars, however, included at least some Carthaginian inputs, even if Carthage was still framed as an insidious foreign enemy (Isaac 2004, 324–35; Matusiak 2022). Polybius himself was a witness to the destruction of Carthage in the Third Punic War, and reported conversations with several participants in the Second, including Gaius Laelius (10.3.2) and Masinissa (9.25.4–5). Polybius also sought out Carthaginian sources directly. He had read the intercepted treaty between Hannibal and Philip V (7.9), as well as the inscription set up by Hannibal enumerating his armies on the Lacanian Promontory (3.33.18). He spoke to individuals involved in the Alps crossing (3.48.12), possibly prisoners of war who were by the 160s elderly slaves or freedmen in Rome, and also claimed Carthaginian informants for the character of Hannibal (9.25.2). Polybius himself noted the pro-Carthaginian bias of Philinus, one of his sources for the First Punic War (1.14.3), and was also aware of the pro-Carthaginian Sosylus, a historian in Hannibal's entourage (3.20.5; Nepos, *Hannibal,* 13.3). Later historians, particularly Livy and Appian, relied heavily on Polybius, although each with their own additional sources and interpretive lens (Levene 2010 for Livy). Greek sources often looked at the Carthaginian constitution favorably (Aristotle *Politics,* 2.1272.b; Strabo 1.4.6, quoting Eratosthenes), but imposed Greek and specifically Spartan templates onto the city's institutions (Isocrates 3.24). Punic epigraphy provides a limited emic window into the city's officeholders (Ruiz Cabrero 2008). Given that much of our knowledge of Carthage comes from military narratives, we are ultimately far better informed about the *rabbim* who fought Greek and Roman opponents than the *shofetim* who stayed put in the city.

Carthage at war

Any comparison to Rome inevitably raises the question of whether Roman society was exceptionally bellicose and imperialistic. William Harris (1979) argued that the political dividends for successful military commands paid to the Roman elite, and the broader economic benefits enjoyed by both mass and elite in the form of land and loot, made the Romans pathologically warlike. Arthur Eckstein (2006), drawing heavily on Realist International Relations theory, countered that the bellicosity Harris assigned as uniquely Roman was instead widespread across the Mediterranean, a common and necessary cultural response to the anarchic geopolitical environment. Carthage was very much included in his assessment, as Eckstein (2006, 158–80) suggested that the city was warlike and expansionary from the fifth century onward. It is difficult to qualify Carthaginian bellicosity, given that outside of the Punic Wars we lack a year-by-year campaign record that might be viewed synoptically with the Roman habit of seemingly compulsive annual campaigns. Our limited knowledge of Carthaginian culture means we do not know if there were analogous practices to the Roman triumph or aristocratic funeral, although some *ad hoc* victory celebrations in the city are attested (Polybius 1.36.1, 88.6). Aristotle (*Pol.,* 1324b) notes that Carthaginian men wore rings or armbands to denote each campaign served; this factoid is nested in a discussion of other exceptionally militant peoples, including Sparta and Macedon. It is possible that child sacrifice presents a grisly if controversial metric: Josephine Quinn (2018) has argued that dedications in the so-called Tophet accelerated in the fourth century, corresponding with Carthage's escalating military commitments against Greek rivals in Sicily (see also Xella *et al.* 2013). While possibly exaggerated, the mass sacrifice of aristocratic children reported in Carthage after the defeats inflicted by Agathocles in 310/09 would have been a powerful mechanism for establishing and communicating elite commitment and solidarity in a time of military crisis (Diodorus 20.14). Less extreme religious responses to military defeat are also attested, including the adoption of the Greek cults of Demeter and Kore, also following setbacks suffered against Syracuse (Diodorus 14.77.5).

Carthage was undoubtedly a tenacious opponent on the defensive. During the First Punic War, Carthage suffered major defeats at Messana, Mylae, Ecnomus, Agrigentum and Panormus and still continued the war, before the crushing defeat at the Aegates Islands destroyed its last fleet and isolated its main army in Sicily. Similarly, during the Hannibalic War, the Carthaginians suffered devastating defeats at New Carthage, Baecula, Metaurus River, Ilipa, the Burning of the Camps and Great Plains before suing for peace, and then reneged when Hannibal's army returned for the final showdown at Zama. The underlying source of this resiliency in defeat was political: Carthage was a republic, and the deep legitimacy of republican government allowed setbacks to be processed politically, sometimes with the execution of a failed commander as a scapegoat (see below). Indeed, the republican response to defeat can be seen in progress during the meeting of the Carthaginian senate following Zama: speakers rallied to fight on, and Hannibal was forced to throw a senator off the speaking platform in a dramatic effort to persuade them that the situation was truly hopeless (Polybius 15.19).

Yet, other aspects of Carthaginian war-making appear dilatory. Carthage's inability to defeat Syracuse decisively across various conflicts between 410 and 275 is in stark contrast to the alacrity with which Rome compelled Syracuse's surrender in 263 and the grim determination of the siege and sack of 213/2. Even as it matched Roman resources on land and sea, Carthage often seemed to lack a killer instinct when the tide turned in its favour. After the Roman disasters in 255, including the destruction of a consular army and two fleets, the best the Carthaginians could do was a raid on Agrigentum the next year, which they burned and then withdrew. The Carthaginians dry-docked their fleet after smashing the Romans at Drepana in 249; while the bankrupt Romans themselves did not return to sea for seven years, when they did they caught the Carthaginian fleet utterly unprepared and thus ended the war.

Bret Devereaux (2019) has argued that the Carthaginian quiescence following major naval victories was in part due to prudent fiscal strategy and past expectations. Carthage had recently seen Pyrrhus briefly get the upper hand in Sicily and then withdraw when his resources and interest faltered, leaving the Carthaginians to reclaim lost territories and influence in Sicily at their leisure. Carthage had outlasted, rather than outfought, Syracusan threats from Dionysius to Timoleon to Agathocles. Devereaux is certainly correct that it was not unreasonable for Carthaginian policymakers to think the Romans after Drepana might behave like Pyrrhus, and therefore drydocking fleets and disbanding expensive crews made good fiscal sense. The policy was at once reasonable, even defensible, but also the least aggressive posture in a strong military position.

The failure of the Carthaginian system to drive relentlessly towards a *coup de grâce* is also apparent during the Second Punic War. With Hannibal ascendant after Cannae, only a single reinforcement to his victorious army was made from Africa (a second was proposed but diverted). Hannibal subsequently arranged two overland reinforcements from his own dynastic force with the invasions of his brothers Hasdrubal in 207 and Mago in 203, neither successful. This stands in sharp contrast to the brisk dispatch of *supplementa* to Roman armies overseas, usually accompanying freshly elected magistrates. As a result,

Hannibal languished in Southern Italy as the tide of war tilted back towards Rome. Meanwhile, non-Barcid endeavours in Sicily, Sardinia and Southern Italy were poorly resourced, badly executed and handily defeated.

Lack of aggression at sea was also apparent during the Second Punic War. The seeming lack of initiative of the Carthaginian fleet, which had a strength of over 100 warships and yet limited itself to modest raids, has been excused on several accounts. Boris Rankov (1996) suggested that lack of suitable bases hindered effective operations, although defections in Sicily, Sardinia and Southern Italy potentially opened coastlines for the Carthaginian fleet to utilize. Crista Steinby (2004) has posited that Carthage instead waged a competent campaign of access denial, maintaining what British naval theorist Julian Corbett (1918, 211) called a 'fleet in being' while threatening Roman positions and pinning down Roman resources. Again, this may well have been a reasoned and even prudent naval strategy. But there does not seem to have been the same sort of structural incentives for an admiral like Bomilcar, who notably avoided a battle in 213 against Claudius Marcellus off the coast of Sicily, to pursue a more aggressive, 'Mahanian' strategy to confront and destroy the Roman fleet in a grand decisive battle (Livy 25.31.2–12).

Threads of both Roman aggression and Carthaginian caution are readily detectable in the tactical assumptions made by the two most canny generals of the conflict. Hannibal's tactics repeatedly assumed that hyper-aggressive Roman commanders would rush forward into the subtle traps he laid for them, and he was not disappointed: Tiberius Sempronius Longus plunged his troops headlong through the freezing Trebia river, Gaius Flaminius marched with too much haste and too little security through Etruria, and finally both consuls launched a frontal assault at Cannae (Linke 2022 on the politics of Roman aggression). Hannibal may have laid a similar trap for Scipio with his third echelon at Zama as well, forcing Scipio to recall his eagerly advancing *hastati* and expand his lines at the last minute (Taylor 2019). Conversely, Scipio's tactics at Baecula and Ilipa assumed that his complacent Carthaginian rivals would prefer to hold their positions in front of their camps, allowing him to seize the initiative unexpectedly with sudden assaults. Both generals acted on their respective assessments of the opposition's institutional culture: Roman aggressiveness to the point of recklessness, and Carthaginian circumspection to the point of passivity. There were of course exceptions: Hannibal's daring assault across the Alps caught the Romans by surprise in part because it deviated so boldly from Carthage's typical strategic posture, while Rome reluctantly adopted a Fabian strategy after massive casualties. Overall, the Carthaginian political system proved quite resilient in defeat, but seemingly lacked mechanisms that promoted aggressiveness and ruthless pursuit of victory, in particular the sort of incentive system that propelled the exceptional bellicosity of Roman magistrates.

Constitution and command

Literary sources paint a relatively consistent, if at times frustratingly vague, picture of the Carthaginian constitution.[3] The highest offices were the two annually elected *shofetim* (Verhelst 2021), beneath which were various lesser magistrates. What the Greeks called the *gerousia* (and Romans the 'senate') interlocked with another aristocratic council (*boule/synkletos*) and both were supplemented by smaller boards and commissions.[4] Popular assemblies were assigned considerable initiative by Aristotle (*Politics* 1273a), passing laws and electing magistrates, including the generals who commanded the city's armies and fleets (Hoyos 1994). Epigraphic sources suggest two colleagues elected in annual rotation (Pilkington 2019, 130), although iterative service was a possibility, and in one instance a *rab* may have served for three terms (*CIS* I 6012). The literary sources often suggest a pair of generals operating in tandem (see Table 1 for summary). Polybius (1.18.8) explicitly refers to the Hanno who reinforced Hannibal at Agrigentum in 260 as 'the other general' (τὸν ἕτερον στρατηγόν), implying a college of two forward deployed to the island. When defending the homeland against the mercenaries, Hamilcar Barca always had a colleague: first Hanno, who was dismissed (see below), then Hannibal, who was captured and executed by the rebels, and then Hanno again, suggesting that he shared a joint billet. By the Third Punic War, there was a general for the city (τῆς πόλεως) and one for the countryside (κατὰ τὴν χώραν), with the city command seemingly more prestigious (Appian *Punica* 111, cf. *Punica* 93, which parses the same commands as ἐντὸς δὲ τειχῶν 'inside the walls' and τῶν μὲν ἔξω πράξεων 'external operations').

However, the literary sources also describe election to extended commands, often for years and without a discernible colleague or the need for annual re-election, with the Barcids providing the best-attested examples. In times of crisis, more than two generals are attested as operating in Africa. This discrepancy might be resolved by postulating that there were three related institutions of generalship in Carthage: 1) two annually elected militia officers; 2) extraordinary generals elected for specific long-term expeditionary assignments; and 3) generals appointed under emergency circumstances as supplemental commanders. A contemporary Roman analogy would be the annually elected consuls and praetors, the prorogued proconsuls and propraetors, and the extended proconsular commands in Spain *sine magistratu* during the Second Punic War (Vervaet 2014; Drogula 2015; Bellomo 2019). All three types of Carthaginian generals were apparent

Table 1. Pairs of *rabbim*

Pair	Year	Theatre	Source
Hannibal/Himilco	406	Sicily	Diod. Sic. 13.85.5/*CIS* I 5510
Hasdrubal/Hamilcar	340	Sicily	Plut. *Tim.* 25.1
Hanno/Bomilcar	309	Africa	Diod. Sic. 20.10.1
Hannibal/Hanno	260	Sicily	Polyb. 1.18.7–8.
Hasdrubal/Bostar	255	Africa	Polyb. 1.30.1–2.
Hamilcar Barca/Hanno	240	Africa	Polyb. 1.81.1/1.87.6
Hamilcar Barca/Hannibal	240	Africa	Polyb.1.82.12
Hannibal/Hanno (?)	202	Africa	App. *Pun.* 24, 31
Hasdrubal/Hasdrubal	148	city/country	App. *Pun.* 93, 111

during the Roman invasion of 255 (Polybius 1.30.1–2): the Carthaginians elected two generals, Hasdrubal son of Hanno and Bostar, seemingly as the annual pair; they then recalled Hamilcar to Africa from Sicily, where he already had an expeditionary command; he was recommissioned explicitly as a third general (κατασταθεὶς στρατηγὸς τρίτος). It is possible that the appointment of three generals was in fact a standard response to an invasion of North Africa, as during Agathocles' invasion in 308 the Carthaginian senate had dispatched three armies to different areas of operations: the coast, the midlands and the highlands, commanded by three generals, Hanno, Himilco and Atarbas (i.e. Adherbal; Diodorus 20.59–60).

Rabbim seem to have needed a new vote to shift their command from one area of operations to another. As noted above, Hamilcar, when recalled from his overseas command in Sicily, required fresh election to his new command as 'third general' in North Africa. Appian (*Punica* 31) reports that Hannibal was elected (Καρχηδόνιοι … αἱροῦνται στρατηγὸν) to the command in North Africa in 203, after he was recalled from his long-term posting overseas. It is possible he technically shared the command with his nephew Hanno, who had previously been appointed to the North African command (Appian *Punica* 24, 31).

On several occasions, the soldiers themselves voted to elect commanders in the theatre of operations. Hasdrubal the Fair was elected to succeed Hamilcar Barca after his death in 228 (Diodorus 25.12.1). Hannibal was elected in turn by the soldiers in Spain after the death of Hasdrubal the Fair in 221, and only afterwards had his command confirmed by popular vote in Carthage (Polybius 3.13.3–4). Here, the soldiers' vote was a simple field expedient rather than a more ominous exercise in stratocracy: with the commander unexpectedly killed, it was necessary to elect a temporary leader while the news was sent to Carthage and a formal election held (see Livy 22.53.1–4, 25.37.5–6 for similar elections by Roman troops). In both elections the soldiers' vote rested upon the obvious successor in the aristocratic line and the choice was reaffirmed by a civic vote in Carthage. An additional soldiers' vote is probable, if not explicitly attested: after the capture and execution of Hamilcar by the Syracusans in 309, 'the Carthaginians' selected the second-in-command to lead the army in Sicily; given the circumstances, the voters here are probably the soldiers themselves (Diodorus 20.31.2). More curious was the soldiers' vote to settle a dispute between generals during the Mercenary War, when Hamilcar Barca and Hanno failed to work together. Here, the government in Carthage authorized the vote in the ranks to recall one of the two, perhaps as a means of overriding a parallel political impasse within the city (Polybius 1.82.5–12).

Carthaginian generals enjoyed wide powers in their area of operations to raise local troops, to obtain money through fiscal impositions on subject peoples, to conduct diplomacy and to make military decisions with grand strategic implications, as did their Roman counterparts (Eckstein 1987). They freely delegated command within their theatres of operation, as Hannibal did to his brothers in Spain and elsewhere. To what extent were Carthaginian generals supervised by the home government, namely the senate and popular assembly? Several mechanisms are detectable.

First, *rabbim* communicated directly with the city's government, either to coordinate military operations or simply keep them apprised of operations. As noted, during the siege of Agrigentum, the *rab* Hannibal fired off messages to Carthage, and 'those in Carthage' dispatched the general Hanno with reinforcements (Polybius 1.18.7–8). Hannibal asked for instructions prior to attacking Saguntum in 219, clearly aware of the momentous step he was about to take (Polybius 3.15.8).

Second, in 215 the Carthaginian senate issued what Livy (23.27.9–12) presents as a direct order to Hasdrubal (who held a command delegated by his brother) to move his army from Spain to Italy. Hasdrubal disputed the order, insisting that the situation first required the dispatch of a replacement commander and army, which the senate in Carthage in turn sent; Roman military successes subsequently prevented his compliance. Indeed, the dispatch of new generals and armies was the most fundamental grand strategic intervention available to the city's governing institutions. They could also sack poor performers, for example, the two generals in Sicily who were recalled for a mediocre showing against Timoleon (ἀγεννῶς τὸν πόλεμον διοικοῦντας; Diodorus 16.72.3).

Third, the city government could exert public oversight and moral suasion on the *rabbim*. In the face of a major Roman invasion in 255, the mercenary officer Xanthippus made loud critiques of Carthaginian operations, which supposedly reached the ears of both τὰ πλήθη καὶ τοὺς στρατηγούς; τὰ πλήθη is presumably the *demos* at Carthage. Xanthippus was summoned by οἱ προεστῶτες, 'those in charge', and made his case to τοῖς ἄρχουσι 'the magistrates' (the *shofetim*?). Nonetheless, the result of Xanthippus' interview in Carthage was merely that the *rabbim* agreed to consult with him on military matters, although it seems by the Battle of Tunis they had virtually delegated command of the army to him as a result of the public pressure. Similarly, Hamilcar Barca and Hanno were reconciled during the Mercenary War by a delegation of thirty Carthaginian senators (Polybius 1.87.3).

Carthaginian senators also accompanied Carthaginian armies overseas: a number were captured by Scipio at New Carthage (Polybius 10.18.1). The treaty between Hannibal and Philip V listed after Hannibal and his senior officers πάντες γερουσιασταὶ Καρχηδονίων οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ 'all the Carthaginian senators with him' (Polybius 7.9.1, 3). It is unclear if these senators should be seen as delegations explicitly representing the Carthaginian government and providing guidance and oversight, crudely analogous to the Roman *decem legati*, or if they were simply supporters and allies of Hannibal handpicked to accompany him, more akin to the legates and *consilium* of a Roman general.

Ultimately, Carthaginian generals retained tremendous discretion and autonomy, potentially a source of considerable anxiety within the city. A notable aspect of Carthaginian command arrangements was the capital penalties meted out to failed Carthaginian commanders, sometimes inflicted extrajudicially by the soldiers themselves.

Time on the cross

The earliest attested executions of Carthaginian generals were technically for treason charges (see Table 2), supposedly for attempted coups that took place after the general suffered a major defeat (Diodorus 20.10.3–4 for the structural links between the accountability regime and coups). The mythical Malchus, whose legend may have nonetheless embodied later aspects of Carthaginian political culture, was supposedly exiled after a major defeat in Sardinia. He then returned to Africa, crucified his own son, briefly captured the city, only to be overthrown and executed in turn (Justin 18.7). More historically, the *rab* Bomilcar was crucified in 308 after attempting a military coup; he hatched his plans following a crushing defeat at the hand of Agathocles of Syracuse, which may have discredited or endangered him to the point he felt compelled to more desperate actions (Diodorus 20.44; Huss 1985, 195; Hoyos 2010, 138).

In the third century, Carthaginian generals posed less constitutional threat, but remained vulnerable in defeat. In 264,

Table 2. Condemnation and execution of Carthaginian generals

General	Year	Notes	Sources (select)
Malchus	550s?	Crucified in city after defeat and failed coup	Justin 18.7
Mago	342	Crucified posthumously after suicide	Plut. *Tim.* 22.8
Hamilcar	314	Secretly condemned for treason	Justin 22.3
Bomilcar	308	Crucified in city after defeat and failed coup	Justin 22.7; Diod. Sic. 20.43–44
Hanno	264	Crucified by army after defeat	Polyb. 1.11.5; Zonar. 8.9
Hannibal Gisco	258	Crucified by fleet after defeat	Polyb. 1.24.6; Livy *Per.* 17.6
Hasdrubal	250	Crucified in city after defeat	Zonar. 8.14; Oros. 3.9.15
Hanno	241	Crucified in city after defeat	Zonar. 8.17
Hasdrubal Gisco	203	Condemned after defeat/reprieved	App. *Pun.* 24
Hasdrubal	151	Condemned after defeat/reprieved	App. *Pun.* 74
Hasdrubal	147	Lynched in city for treason	Livy *Per.* 50.10; App. *Pun.* 111

Hanno, the commander holding the citadel at Messana, was crucified after he withdrew his garrison before the Romans, possibly in a last-ditch attempt to avoid a war between the two longstanding allies (Polybius 1.11.5; Dio Cassius 11.43.8; Zonaras 8.9.4). The admiral Hannibal Gisco, blockaded in Sardinia by Roman ships, was crucified by his own sailors after a failed breakout in 258 (Polybius 1.24.6; Livy *Periochae* 17.6). The general Hasdrubal, who failed to retake Panormus in 250, was condemned by the city *in absentia* after he fled to Lilybaeum and was crucified when he returned to Carthage (Zonarus 8.14; Orosius 3.9.15). The admiral Hanno, who lost the Battle of the Aegates Islands, was also crucified in the city (Zonarus 8.17). Hasdrubal Gisco, according to Appian (*Punica* 24), was condemned to death *in absentia* following Scipio's incendiary assault on his camps, but rallied an army of survivors and negotiated a pardon, only later to commit suicide to avoid being lynched by a mob in the city following his subsequent defeat at the Great Plains.

In 151, Hasdrubal the Boetharch lost the Battle of Onoscopa and was condemned by the Carthaginians (Appian, *Punica* 74); he survived as a renegade warlord (Diodorus 32.6.2) before he was recalled to command against the Romans (Appian *Punica* 93). Finally, the execution of Hasdrubal, the grandson of Masinissa, admittedly for trumped-up treason charges and not incompetence, nonetheless adds to the list of *rabbim* executed in a moment of military crisis (Livy, *Periochae* 50.10; Epitome Oxyrhynchus 50.122–23; Appian, *Punica* 111; Orosius 4.22.8).

Hasdrubal Gisco was not the only defeated general to commit suicide following a military debacle: Himilco, one of the victors at Agrigentum in 406, later supposedly killed himself after his army in Sicily was ravaged by plague (Diodorus 14.76.4). The Mago who retreated before Timoleon also killed himself, but his corpse was then crucified in the city, suggesting he would have been executed had he not taken matters into his own hands (Plutarch *Timoleon* 22.8).

This stands in stark contrast to Rome, where defeated generals seldom faced serious punishments. Indeed, as Nathan Rosenstein (1991) has argued, most Roman generals who suffered defeats in the field were able to pursue political careers with roughly the same success rate as undefeated commanders. Only two Roman generals suffered prosecution for failures during the Punic Wars: Publius Claudius Pulcher after Drepanna, who was fined, and the praetor Gnaeus Fulvius Flaccus after the battle of Second Herdonia, who suffered exile (Rosenstein 1991, 12).

In its brutal consequences for failed commanders, Carthage perhaps most closely resembled democratic Athens, where failed *strategoi* were routinely prosecuted, fined and even exiled or executed for misconduct in the field and defeat (Hamel 2018, 122–57). Yet even here a key difference stands out. Only one Carthaginian general was punished for a lack of aggression: Hanno for withdrawing from Messana. Most were punished for fighting but losing. The Athenians meanwhile, while inflicting punishments for a wide range of perceived failures by *strategoi*, pointedly punished lack of aggression and initiative. The commanders of the first Sicilian expedition were tried for inadequate accomplishment despite winning a number of modest victories (Thucydides 4.65.3–4), while Nicias feared prosecution if he failed to press home assault during the second expedition, even as he was aware of the looming catastrophe (Thucydides 7.48.3–4; Plutarch *Nicias* 22.2–3). Thucydides himself was exiled for lack of haste.

Here we might consider whether or not the forgiving attitude of the Roman political class, in contrast to the grim accountability meted out to Carthaginian generals, was in fact an advantage to Rome. Martin Waller (2011) has noted that while few Roman generals even suffered political consequences for defeats, commanders who won major victories enjoyed outsized political success. Roman generals were therefore highly incentivized towards taking risks that might decisively end a war, in particular through pitched battle. Furthermore, the structure of the *cursus honorum* allowed that even a consul, the top executive in the Roman system, could still hope for a censorship, and a second consulship beyond that. Scipio Africanus obtained both electoral prizes after his stunning victory at Zama, as did his adopted grandson Scipio Aemilianus after the destruction of Carthage. For Carthaginian generals, the opposite set of incentives applied. A Carthaginian general had no immediate prospect for political promotion, given *rabbim* seldom obtained the office of *shofet* (and notably, Hannibal after a defeat).[5] As *rab* he was already at the pinnacle of his career. A victory offered no obvious pathway for political advancement, whereas a defeat put them at risk for execution.

One final note is the concern that *rabbim* might launch a coup. At least three of the *rabbim* above are reported as primarily executed for treason, rather than simply for military incompetence: the mythical Malchus, Bomilcar and finally Hasdrubal, the grandson of Masinissa. Other coup attempts by *rabbim*, real or imagined, are attested: the Carthaginians supposedly condemned the *rab* Hamilcar for treason in secret around 314, but he died before the verdict could be unsealed (Justin 22.3.1–7). Fabius Pictor described how Hasdrubal the Fair, while detached back to Africa, plotted to establish himself as a king, only to accept the command in Spain instead (Polybius 3.8.2–3). Pictor channels

a paranoid and hostile tradition, but one rooted in Carthaginian concerns over the power and loyalty of their *rabbim*. The heyday for attempted coups was the fourth century, including the attempted coup by one Hanno, not a *rab* but rather a *princeps*, 'leading citizen' (Justin 21.4; Aristotle *Politics* 5.1307.4). This phenomenon may well be the product of peer polity interaction and (attempted) institutional isomorphism with Syracuse and its fluctuations between democratic and tyrannical rule. In Carthage the coups invariably failed, and this itself points to structural weaknesses in the military position of *rabbim*, as extramural figures who lacked political clout in the city itself even when backed by a cadre of loyal soldiers. The spectre of the military coup in Carthage may have further weakened the office of *rab*, making it more likely that *rabbim* would be viewed with suspicion, left under-resourced, and subject to harsh violence for both military failure and perceived disloyalty. The closest Carthage came to military rule was at the bitter end, when Appian (*Punica* 118) reports that the *rab* Hasdrubal the Boetharch, who had connived at the death of his colleague, himself 'came to act more like a tyrant than a general' (ἐς τυραννίδα μᾶλλον ἢ στρατηγίαν περιῆλθεν) and executed several senators. Hasdrubal was assigned a new colleague, the *rab* Diogenes (Appian, *Punica* 126), so it does not appear that he completely overthrew the constitution of the doomed city.

The exogamous general

Carthaginian generals were unusual in engaging in both civic endogamy with co-elites, as well as establishing foreign alliances on behalf of the city with exogamous marriages (Manfredi 2003, 401). These alliances were particularly important given the degree to which the Carthaginians relied on external military manpower (Ameling 1993, 210–221; Fariselli 2002). This stands in contrast to Athens, where Pericles' citizenship law of 451 required endogamous marriages for the production of legitimate citizen children, as well as Rome, where senators were limited in their marriage options to either citizen women or a narrow and curated pool of Italian communities with *conubium* (Roselaar 2013). In both instances, endogamy was closely linked to the cohesion of the civic elite.

Yet exogamy for *rabbim* was a feature of Carthaginian imperialism from an early point: the Hamilcar killed at Himera in 480 was the son of a Carthaginian general (Hanno) and a Syracusan mother (Herodotus 7.167) (see Table 3). The marriages of Hamilcar Barca's children are perhaps the best documented in

our sources: first, there were two endogamous unions with other aristocratic families:

1) unnamed daughter married to Bomilcar the *Shofet*, which produced a son named Hanno (Appian *Hannibalica* 20; Polybius 3.42.6; Geus 1994, 18–19)
2) unnamed daughter married to Hasdrubal the Fair (Livy 21.1).

Both marriages mediated military office: Hasdrubal the Fair succeeded his father-in-law Hamilcar Barca to the command in Spain in 229, while Bomilcar the *Shofet*'s son Hanno served under his uncle Hannibal.

Two of Hamilcar Barca's children married exogamously:

3) unnamed daughter – Flaubert's Salammbo – betrothed to Naravas, although the consummation of the union is not confirmed (Polybius 1.78.8–9)
4) Hannibal married Imilce, a woman from Castulo in Spain (Livy 26.41.7; her name is only attested in Silius Italicus *Punica* 3.97).

Hasdrubal the Fair, presumably following the unmentioned death of his previous wife (Hamilcar Barca's daughter), subsequently married the unnamed daughter of an Iberian dynast (Diodorus 25.12). Hannibal's niece, the daughter of one of his anonymous sisters, was herself first married to the Massylian Oezalces and subsequently to Mazaetullus, the regent of Lacumazes (Livy 29.29.12; Hoyos 2003, 153 assigns considerable agency to Hannibal himself in arranging the marriage). Perhaps the most storied exogamous marriage was that of Sophoniba, the daughter of Hasdrubal Gisco, to Syphax, the king of the Masaesyli Numidians. Other factors beyond the marriage no doubt influenced Syphax's decision to renounce his old loyalty to Rome and throw his lot in with Carthage, including geopolitical retriangulation as Rome rapidly achieved the upper hand by 206. Still, the marriage itself was the linchpin of the alliance, a fact that doomed Sophoniba after her capture, when Masinissa spooked Scipio by marrying her himself, although she may have previously been betrothed to him (Thompson 1981, 125). Scipio's vehemence against the marriage, which led to Sophoniba's forced suicide, reveals the existential threat this union posed to Roman interests. Following the Second Punic War, a member of the Carthaginian nobility married a daughter of Masinissa: the son born of this union, Hasdrubal, served as *rab*, but, as noted above, was lynched during the Third Punic War on the pretext of his Numidian kinship (Livy, *Periochae* 50.10; Appian *Punica* 111).

The preponderance of exogamous connections with Numidia points specifically to how the city-state relied on the cavalry resources of the African steppe. Walter Scheidel (2019, 259–306), in his comparative examination of empires in world history, argues that most Old World empires have formed in proximity to the steppe, which allowed imperial states access to horses, equestrian knowledge and mounted troops. While Scheidel largely seeks to explicate the phenomenon of serial imperiogenesis emerging from the interplay between China and the Eurasian steppe, he notes that a similar dynamic can be seen along the more modest steppe in North Africa during the Middle Ages: the Almoravids, Ayyubids, Fatimids, etc. This analysis is certainly relevant to Carthage as well. Carthage's army was a far more equestrian-centred force compared with Rome. Polybius (6.52.3) grudgingly conceded that the Carthaginians in the third century continued to train and maintain their civic cavalry, even if the citizen infantry muster was neglected; he elsewhere (1.32–33, 76) provides a positive view of citizen cavalry in action during the First Punic War and subsequent mercenary revolt (cf.

Table 3. Exogamous marriages and Carthaginian *rabbim* and their families

Carthaginian partner	Foreign partner	Source
Hanno, father of Hamilcar	Syracusan woman	Hdt. 7.167
Daughter of Hamilcar Barca	Naravas	Polyb. 1.78.8
Niece of Hannibal	Oezalces	Livy 29.29.12.
	Mazaetullus	
Hasdrubal the Fair	Iberian princess	Diod. Sic. 25.2.
Hannibal	Imilce of Castulo	Livy. 26.41.7; Sil. *Pun.* 3.97
Sophoniba	Syphax	Livy 29.23; 30.12
	Masinissa	Livy 30.13; Diod. Sic. 21.7.1; Zon. 9.11.
Father of Hasdrubal the *Rab*	Daughter of Masinissa	Livy *Per.* 50.10; App. *Pun.* 111

Ameling 1993, 227–235). Carthaginian military tactics emphasized cavalry double envelopment, already evident at Tunis in 255, although Hannibal was the undisputed master of the stratagem. During the Third Punic War, Appian (*Punica* 100) noted the hardiness of African ponies and their utility in Carthaginian hit and run raids. The Carthaginians were deeply dependent on external riders as well; by the late fifth century Carthage was recruiting steppe peoples for their campaigns in Sicily (Diodorus 13.80.3), and the trend escalated to the point that Numidian dynastic politics played a decisive role in the final phase of the Second Punic War (Taylor 2020, 71–72). Indeed, the rise of more centralized Numidian kingdoms apparent by the late third century can be seen as an aspect of the phenomenon of steppe 'shadow empires' that often arose in parallel to adjacent sedentary imperial societies (Barfield 2001). Successful interface with the Numidian steppe was central to the Carthaginian imperial project, and shaped Carthaginian attitudes towards recruitment, command and diplomacy (Rawlings 2018). Early access to Numidian combat power negated the need to pursue other strategies for military mobilization, such as intensive recruitment of citizen troops, or closer political incorporation of the Libyan hinterland. Interface with the steppe probably drove the pattern of exogamy, given the military rewards of integrating into Numidian lineages, although marriage alliance proved useful in a variety of imperial scenarios, from Sicily to Iberia.

Constitution and warfare

Carthage was a bellicose state, although idiosyncrasies in its constitution and demographics made its approach to warfare different compared with Rome. From at least 367, the eponymous consuls were primarily generals, thus defining the ambitions and horizons of the political class and aligning military activity with other civic and religious policies. Indeed, it is worth summarizing the structural aspects that motivated Roman consuls as they carried out the most important military commands of the Roman state. Like his Carthaginian counterpart, each Roman consul enjoyed the political capital resulting from election, and the right to levy either fresh legions or reinforcements to ensure his operations were adequately resourced. Unlike the Carthaginian *rab*, who had only a small cadre of citizen-soldiers, the consul commanded a critical mass of citizen troops, roughly half his army, who represented a sizeable pool of future constituents (e.g. Plutarch *Aemilius* 3.6; Cicero, *Pro Murena.* 38). Unlike the extended commands of some Carthaginian *rabbim*, the Roman general's time in command was typically short, officially less than a year, and prorogation required some military progress to justify it. With a narrow window in which to obtain military glory and distribution of spoils, the Roman general had every incentive to violently confront the enemy, knowing that he faced few legal or political consequences if he suffered a defeat or setback. The rewards of a major victory, however, were substantial. Military glory, especially if sufficiently violent to warrant a triumph, could be mobilized for future political campaigns for either the general himself or his descendants. Loot could be distributed to citizen troops or invested in the projects that generated long-term social capital, particularly temple-building (Padilla-Peralta 2020). The brisk rotation of office also ensured that a critical mass of the Roman political elite could hope to hold military commands as praetors or consuls, and thus gave the aristocratic class as a whole the incentive to pursue bellicose strategies that provided a series of wars to a succession of commanders.

The situation in Carthage was different. The schism between the civic authority of *shofetim* and the military command of *rabbim*, each derived independently from a popular vote, had some

obvious advantages for governance. *Shofetim* were present to administer affairs in the city throughout the year, unlike the consuls, who quickly left the city after their inauguration to campaign in their provinces, leaving the city to be administered by a hodgepodge of subordinate magistrates (Pina Polo 2011). Extended commands kept talented generals such as Hamilcar Barca and Hannibal in the field, as opposed to the constant churn of inexperienced Roman commanders (Taylor 2022). Keeping *rabbim* physically and even socially on the periphery of Carthaginian civic politics helped insulate the city against military coup and tyranny. To the extent that a state suffering military defeats needed mechanisms for maintaining its legitimacy, *rabbim* could offer up a useful scapegoat, all the more disposable because of their liminal social position.

But this institutional arrangement nonetheless impacted the culture of command. Thanks to extended commands, expeditionary *rabbim* did not operate under the pressure of a ticking clock. The occasional execution of failed generals incentivized caution, as the personal cost to the *rab* of risking battle outweighed the benefits of winning one. In the event of success, the distribution of loot or other spoils to armies of mostly foreign soldiers might be good for morale, but it brought little political reward in terms of placing profit in the hands of voters back in the metropole. This dynamic alone might explain why *rabbim* by and large did not achieve subsequent election as *shofet*. With a long time-horizon for overseas commands, *rabbim* sometimes conducted diplomatic marriages to manage diplomacy on the periphery and facilitate the recruitment of foreign troops. Exogamy provided different emotional connections and even gentilineal attitudes towards the Carthaginian periphery compared with endogamous Roman generals, who exploited their provinces for wealth and military glory on behalf of lineages firmly centred in the Central Italian core (Terrenato 2019).

Carthaginian constitutional structures created potential for an empowered 'proconsul' such as Hannibal, who sometimes seemed less the servant of the city than an aligned but semi-autonomous dynast (Hoyos 2003). Certainly the enormous resources of Spain in terms of money and manpower gave Barcid *rabbim* exceptional agency. Dexter Hoyos (1994, 256) has suggested that the Barcid generals effectively acted as 'director of the state'. But I would suggest the opposite: while Carthaginian generals were highly empowered within their spheres, the diffusion of military decision-making into the imperial periphery instead dramatically diluted Carthaginian bellicosity. True, Hannibal effectively set Carthaginian grand strategy in 218, as he allotted his manpower resources between Spain, the North African core and his Italian invasion (Polybius 3.33.5–16). But from 215-203 Hannibal reverted to a much more typical *rab*: stuck in his province with a dwindling army and diminished initiative, less director of the state than its under-empowered agent.

Notes

1 All dates are BC.
2 The word *rab* generically means 'chief' or 'leader', and so in Carthage there were other *rabbim*, including a *rab kohanim* (*RB KHNM*; chief priest), as well as presidents of various boards. In this article I use the term *rab* to refer strictly to the generals, who had the specific title of *rab mahanet*, 'chief of the army' or 'leader of the camp', a term later used in neo-Punic inscriptions to describe the Roman office of consul.
3 For recent overviews of the Carthaginian constitution, see Huss 1985, 458–66; Amadasi Guzzo 2007; Hoyos 2010, 20–38; Pilkington 2019, 125–129. Drews 1979 and Pezzoli 2022 for the Greek lens of Carthaginian institutions. Huss 1985 and Lancel 1995 provide general histories of Carthage. It is not impossible that some constitutional change had taken place in the fifth century to produce the system known to Aristotle and Polybius (Sanders 1988), although this reform would probably have been affected by institutional isomorphism with the *poleis* of Magna Graeca.

4 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.1272b, provides two aristocratic councils: the *gerousia* and *boule* of 104; Polybius (10.18.1; 36.4.6) describes a *gerousia* and *synkletos*; Livy a *senatus* (e.g. 21.3.2) and an *ordo iudicum,* who held lifetime appointments (33.46.1–6). Gsell (1920, 202–25) synthesises the literary evidence for these various bodies.

5 In the fifth century, Diodorus (13.43.5) reports that a Hannibal was elected *rab* while κατὰ νόμους τότε βασιλεύοντα, which may suggest he was serving as *shofet* when assigned his command; if so, this was also exceptional, although Verhelst (2021, 63–65) postulates this may have happened occasionally in the fourth and early third centuries; see also Hoyos 2010, 32.

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