

HALL, Joshua R., *Carthage at War: Punic Armies c. 814-146 BC*. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2023. 323pp. ISBN 9781473885387.

Historian Joshua R. Hall's *Carthage at War*, is a critical narrative of the Punic Military History. Between 814 and 146 BC, Carthage sought to establish economic and military dominance in the Ancient Mediterranean. Focusing on the military aspect, Hall takes us through the history of warfare in ancient Carthage analyzing the causes and courses of military campaigns, as well as detailing military strategies, organization, weapons, and tactics of the Carthaginian armies. Attempting to disembark from the bandwagon of works on Punic Wars, Hall significantly descends the valley tracing the origins of the Carthaginian military to conflicts with, first, the indigenous groups that surrounded them, before linking up with the Libyan cities and Atlantic Coast; and further ascending the central Mediterranean enclaves to examine the conflict climax that took place with the Greeks, and then the Romans.

Hall uses a combination of narrative and analytical style to explain how and why Carthage was able to rise to naval/military power for many centuries in Ancient Mediterranean until its eventual destruction in 146 BC. Also utilizing thematic and chronological approaches, Hall traces the evolution of Carthage to emigrant Phoenician (from where the name Punic is derived) settlers in North Africa. Overtime, the Punic settlers developed into economic and military power, ventured out to establish overseas colonies in the Mediterranean, and consequently sought to protect her acquisitions in the region. Taking particular interest in the military aspect of the Carthage, Hall combines ancient Greeks and Romans literature alongside contemporary interpretations from European scholars to argue that the war making capabilities of Carthaginians soldiers and generals were crucial to their rise, expansion and dominance in ancient Mediterranean.

Faced with the challenge of lack of Punic historical texts, and the often exaggerated accounts of Greeks and Roman writers (from whom the knowledge of Carthage primarily became known following, perhaps, the total destruction of Carthage by the Romans) who were known to inflate

the size of barbarian armies (9), Hall expertly presents a narrative that not only attempts to mirror objectivity but also ensures historical coherence. For example, in dealing with lack of Punic texts, Hall compares, cross-references, and critiques Greek and Roman writers like Diodorus Siculus, Polybius, Justin and Appian to reveal not only their strengths and shortcomings but also provide consistent and reliable evidence on the Punic wars. Although the challenge of lack of historical text on Carthage was partly solved by the expansive archaeological projects on Carthage in the 19th and 20th centuries, however, that source did not cover the aspect of Punic armies. In dealing with the challenge of exaggerated armies, the author did not only identify the number bias but also devised the method of simply reducing the original figures of the given armies to one-tenth after carefully comparing and evaluating their sources (32). Hall's approach of reducing exaggerated figures of the Punic armies as found in Greek and Roman accounts could further be seen in pages 32, 37, 40, 43, 55, 66, and so on.

While the introductory chapter explores the aims of the book and the sources utilized, chapter 2 looks at the foundation of Carthage and early conflicts with the indigenous peoples of North Africa. The next eight chapters focus on the Carthage military expeditions in the Mediterranean and warfare with the Greeks and the Romans in attempts to establish and maintain economic and political dominance in the region. Each of these chapters outlines the components of the Carthaginian armies and their campaigns in the Mediterranean. Warfare and war making capabilities of Carthage, Greeks, and Romans dominates the structure of the book. Throughout the book, readers will be entertained with accounts of small scales battles of scouting, raiding and pillaging to the large-scale warfare of pitched and naval battles. Any of the armies (Greeks, Carthaginians, and Romans) presents a formation that contained the Calvary, Infantry, Navy, Hoplites, Bowmen, Slingers, and Archers, Elephant troops and the Sacred Bands (for Carthage), while also engaging the services of mercenaries who were susceptible to defections. The mercenaries were notorious for switching sides depending on the military advantage of the belligerents at a given time. The work also pictures the deployment military tactics of scouting, flanking, encirclement, hurling missiles from roof tops, funneling walls, starvation, siege warfare, and use of fortifications, amongst others. Strategic and tactical geniuses and blunders of the military generals are also captured. Although, it was a norm for the law-making bodies of these empires to appoint and rotate their Military commanders from time to time,

however, there were cases of armies being led by tyrants as was the case of the Greeks. Siege engines and battering rams, spears, catapult, bows and arrows, among others are captured as commonly utilized weapons in the ancient Mediterranean warfare.

Hall's masterful deconstruction of earliest known sources on Carthaginian history and subsequent reconstruction and detailed analysis of its military history combining ancient and contemporary written records to expound on the pre-Punic Wars is indeed an important addition on Mediterranean history and warfare. Put differently, the lesser known pre-Punic Wars usually overlooked by authors and specialists in the Carthaginian history has enjoyed serious attention in this study. Richard Miles' (2010) *Carthage Must be Destroyed*, although captured some of the pre-Punic Wars, is not as detailed as that of Hall whose analysis of Carthaginian military history captures preparations, engagements and outcome of battles both before and during the Punic Wars. Duncan Head's (2015) *Armies of the Macedonian and Punic Wars*, gives a well-illustrated but sketchy account of armies of important empires and kingdoms of the Ancient Mediterranean world touching on their war tactics, dressing and equipment. This is unlike Hall's who specifically studied the Carthaginian army and also weaved a detailed narrative around their war making capabilities. Furthermore, Dexter Hoyos' (2015) *Mastering the West* clearly focused on the Roman/Carthaginian Wars with no reference to the pre-Punic period. Ultimately, Hall's book is one of the few works that devotes ample pages to research Carthaginian pre-Punic Wars. There is little doubt that Hall's detailed analysis of Carthaginian armies will combine with other works on ancient Mediterranean warfare to serve an important reference material on the subject.

Although the style of the book is clear- an engaging and critical narrative of the Carthaginian warfare, it must, however, be noted that the book, supposed by the author, to be written with the general reader in mind, may prove a little bit difficult for the lay audience to follow. It is rather technically crafted to bring fresh insights and deeper perspective, as much as provoke responses from professional historians especially in Ancient/Military history disciplines. As the author already noted, some places in the work might prove unfamiliar and difficult to understand (14). However, a key to understanding the entire work might be for readers to first read the places and stories they are familiar with before engaging the unfamiliar places/stories. For example, readers may want start with the Hannibalic war or The Second War with Rome in Chapter 8. Also, readers need to be

careful in noting the almost too similar and repeated names of Carthaginian generals or otherwise run the risk of being confused with them.

Addition of images, photographs, maps, and charts would have made the book a more appealing read for the casual audience. However, many readers who may think that the work is another cyclostyling of the Punic wars will be disappointed to note how purposeful the author is in swerving the attention from Punic Wars to reflect ‘all periods of Carthaginian (military) history” (2).

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