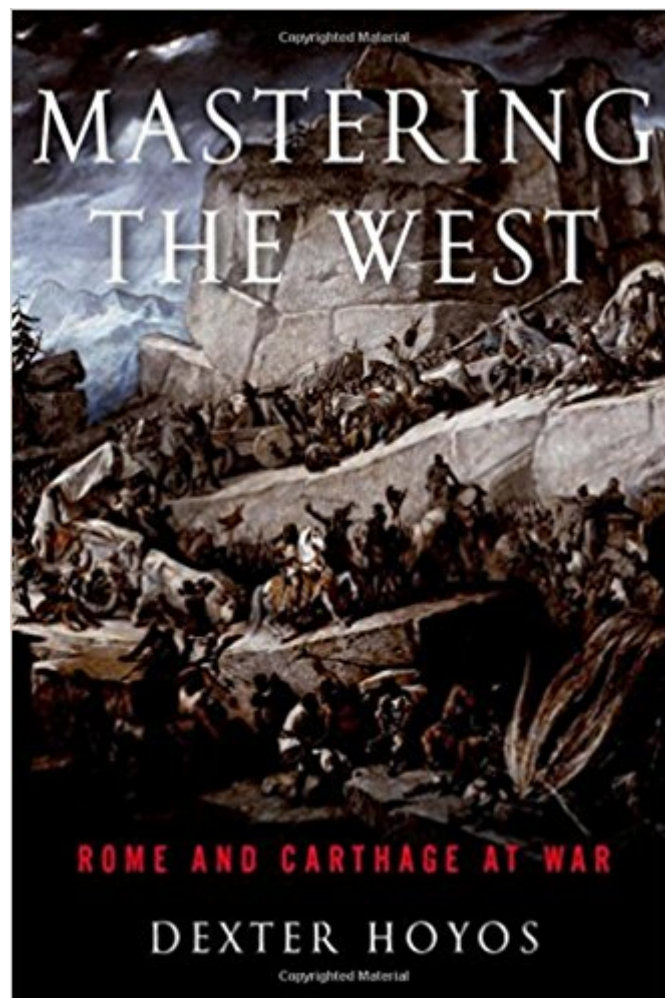




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Mastering The West: Rome And Carthage At War (Ancient Warfare And Civilization)



Synopsis

To say the Punic Wars (264-146 BC) were a turning point in world history is a vast understatement. This bloody and protracted conflict pitted two flourishing Mediterranean powers against one another, leaving one an unrivalled giant and the other a literal pile of ash. To later observers, a collision between these civilizations seemed inevitable and yet to the Romans and Carthaginians at the time hostilities first erupted seemingly out of nowhere, with what were expected to be inconsequential results. *Mastering the West* offers a thoroughly engrossing narrative of this century of battle in the western Mediterranean, while treating a full range of themes: the antagonists' military, naval, economic, and demographic resources; the political structures of both republics; and the postwar impact of the conflicts on the participants and victims. The narrative also investigates questions of leadership and the contributions and mistakes of leaders like Hannibal, Fabius the Delayer, Scipio Africanus, Masinissa, and Scipio Aemilianus. Dexter Hoyos, a leading expert of the period, treats the two great powers evenly, without neglecting the important roles played by Syracuse, Macedon, and especially Numidia. Written with verve in a clear, accessible style, with a range of illustrations and newly-commissioned maps, *Mastering the West* will be the most reliable and engaging narrative of this pivotal era in ancient history.

Book Information

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"This book, on Rome's three Punic Wars, is a welcome addition to the series, especially since the flow of the narrative (eminently accessible to undergraduate readers) is firmly grounded in the

primary and secondary literature, and in sound scholarly judgments." --R. T. Ingoglia, Caldwell University

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"Dexter Hoyos is the doyen among historians of the Punic Wars, and he is at the height of his powers here. This volume synthesizes a lifetime's study of Rome and Carthage to offer readers a masterful account of the dramatic events that transformed the ancient world." --Nathan Rosenstein, author of *Rome and the Mediterranean 290 to 146 BC*

"Dexter Hoyos combines a clear, scholarly, detailed storyline of these events with careful unpicking of the sources...Hoyos is very good on strategy...He is also adept at outlining the tactics of various parties, skilfully explaining how Hannibal's early brilliant victories meant nothing because Rome realised that guerrilla tactics would gradually wear him down... All in all, this account is a great success." -BBC History Magazine

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Dexter Hoyos is retired Associate Professor in Classics and Ancient History from the University of Sydney, Australia. His many books include, most recently, *Hannibal: Rome's Greatest Enemy*, *The Carthaginians*, and *A Companion to the Punic Wars*.

Another great book on military history between Rome and Carthage. Also recommend books: the author Adrian Goldsworthy (*Punic wars*) and Brian Todd Carey (*Hannibal's last battle*)

This book is currently the most recent and therefore the most up to date reference on the so-called Punic Wars. It is well supported by a good set of maps and sketches for the main battles. It also includes a useful glossary of key terms and a no less useful timeline at the end of the book. Finally, there is also a relatively short (ten pages) but good appendix that is a review and discussion of the main written sources and their limitations. All in all, the book provides a comprehensive overview and rather neat package for anyone looking for an overview of the Punic Wars which were, as its title emphasises so well, all about *Mastering the West*. I also found the narrative style to be very good to the extent that it strikes the right balance between scholarship, liveliness and entertainment. This is also a book that makes the reader think and wonder, even if, at times, it comes close to being speculative. However, it is neither written in the kind of "friendly prose" that many authors feel obliged to adopt in a (somewhat condescending?) effort to reach out to the so-called "general non-specialist reader", nor is it written in an over-scholarly, with masses of notes sprinkled across each and every page. Another merit of this book is to mention in passing, and, at times, present, most of the main historical debates and controversies while refraining from scholarly discussions. It also avoids given the impression that the author needs to make a point. You never really get the feeling that Dexter Hoyos is really trying to demonstrate his thesis and that his is attempting to convince you that his interpretations happen to be the correct ones. Of course, this is precisely what he does but it is done in such a skilful way that it never becomes tedious. It also appears convincing to the extent that some of the points made can even seem to be, at times, blindingly "obvious", although they are not. While not quite perfect I will pass on the "factual error" mentioned by another reviewer - the book does have some original strands that make it stand out when compared to the numerous other histories of the Punic Wars that are available. One is to show that there was far more to the Barcids than just Hannibal and his father, and that the family and its allies managed to dominate the political scene at Carthage for about half a century. A related point shown by the

author is that they could rely on what seems to have been a rather large faction and a network of allies that were sufficiently powerful and influential to assure their almost complete dominance even if absent from Carthage for decades. Another point made by the author and derived from his work on the Barcids (see his book titled *Hannibal's Dynasty*) is that Hamilcar, his son-in-law Hasdrubal the Fair, and his son Hannibal were not military dictators acting in a quasi-independent way from Carthage. Just as interesting and original, but perhaps a bit more controversial, is the author's analysis and take on the first two Punic Wars. A valuable (but controversial) point is to show that Rome was not at all bound to win these wars and that, in both instances, Carthage had the resources, both financial and human, to match its opponent. Another interesting point was to show to what extent the First and the Second Punic War were very different. The First was mostly fought in and around Sicily, apart from Rome's failed invasion of Africa, and fought on both land and sea. The Second saw fighting mostly on land, although there were some naval encounters also, but the fighting took place across most of the West and, at times, on three or four fronts simultaneously, with Spain and Italy becoming battlegrounds in addition to Sicily (for a time) and Africa (in the end). Further valuable insights are the rather huge collections of missed opportunities by both sides and during both long wars to take advantage of specific situations and crushing, but not quite decisive, victories. The author tends to overwhelmingly explain these squandered opportunities by the shortcomings and mistakes of the various generals or admirals, including numerous errors and failed gambles by Hannibal himself. This is where I was, at times, not entirely convinced by the author, especially when he tries to show that, following Hannibal's crushing victory at Cannae, his military genius seems to have declined. This is perhaps one of the most controversial, if only because there are multiple causes explaining how the Romans, little by little, managed to pin Hannibal down in Southern Italy and turn the tables on him by conquering Spain before invading Africa. It is also, however, one of the most original and interesting - aspects of the book. A number of the author's assertions can be disputed. Others, however, are quite striking, such as the fact that Hannibal's crossing of the Alps which has earned him undying fame, was in fact a near disaster that his otherwise much less competent younger brother and general would entirely avoid some ten years later. Another - related - limitation is that the author's explanations for what he presents as failures in generalship may be ascribed to other or to multiple factors with the typical (and puzzling) example of Hannibal's dual failure to march on Rome straight after his victories of Lac Trasimene and of Cannae, respectively, being the best known and most widely discussed examples. All in all, however, explaining how the Punic Wars

started, what the battle plans are likely to have been and how the various campaigns and battles played out by presenting the Roman and Punic viewpoints and the choices made by the various players in the field is certainly among the major qualities of this remarkable book. Four very strong stars.

Addendum on 22 April 2014: There are several additional points which I did not mention in the review, particularly in relation with the Second Punic War, above with these omissions possibly giving the misleading impression that the book is somewhat incomplete- One is that the author shows to what extent Hannibal's near disaster when crossing the Alps had far-reaching consequences, given the considerable losses that his army had to suffer during the crossing- A related point is that while these losses were initially replaced by Gauls, Hannibal's strategy to detach Rome's Italian allies from it ultimately failed and, even in the case of the cities that did rally to him, most of them seemed to have been a drag on his dwindling "human resources", hampered his mobility and obliged him to immobilise troops to defend or rush to their rescue when they were threatened- A third well-made point is to show that, apart from Hannibal himself, the other Carthaginian commanders seem to have been relatively mediocre while the Romans could align at least half a dozen of competent (although not excellent). One of the consequences was that Hannibal in Italy was forced to rush from one emergency to another and lost the initiative, with the Romans defeating his lieutenants and attacking the cities allied to him in his absence- A fourth omitted point well-presented and discussed by the author was to show that a number of strategic mistakes were made after Cannae, with Hannibal's army receiving reinforcements from Carthage only once while forces were sent to Spain and new fronts were opened up in Sicily and then in Liguria, after the loss of Spain. In particular, the author shows well to what extent these choices and deployments turned out to be wasteful because the various armies did not support themselves and could be dealt with in isolation by the Romans. However, and while very interesting, these considerations do smack of hindsight.- Perhaps a more contentious point, associated with the one above, is to claim that throughout the Second Punic War, it was Hannibal who was in overall command and control and he who was designing Carthage's "strategy" and taking the main decisions. This is perhaps questionable. I did not find this point entirely convincing because of the distances involved and the period of time (i.e. Antiquity). I did not quite see how a single commander, however talented, could exercise command and control efficiently over multiple fronts several hundreds of kilometers apart for some fifteen years (between 218 and 203 BC). This is one of the only parts of the book where I wondered to what extent the author's considerations were anachronistic.

The short book deals with the wars fought between Carthage and Rome, leading to Rome becoming the dominant power. The book arrived in the condition and date promised, thank you.

The book makes a complex subject much clearer for the average reader; and finally, Hannibal is put into perspective.

interesting reading of the Punic Wars, rich in detail

interesting insights

Another tale with an overwhelming amount of information.

This was an awesome review of an era of history that was completely new to me. I majored in Latin and read Livy in the original, but this history of the Punic Wars was all novel to me. Turns out Livy was a bit of a mess when it came to getting his facts straight, anyway. Professor Hoyos writes in Latinate periods and it requires a quiet corner with some uninterrupted hours to focus on the text properly. This book is not written at the sixth-grade level. But the author does a good job keeping the characters distinct and reminding you where you heard a name or passed over an event previously in the text. I really enjoyed it and stayed up late a couple of nights when the house was still. It really is a page-turner.

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