

Senate of the Roman Empire:

First Punic War



A small unit of Carthaginian soldiers in northern Sicily

I. Committee Background

The Roman Senate was established in 753 BC along with the Roman Kingdom and the City of Rome itself, as the 'Senate of the Roman Kingdom' (SRK). The SRK generally acted more as an advisory council to the King of Rome, and the only direct power they held was to elect a new king to the throne. The SRK lasted up until 509 BC where Lucius Junius Brutus led a coup d'état and founded the Roman Republic, which then led to the establishment of the 'Senate of the Roman Republic' (SRR). As the transition from monarchical rule to constitutional rule was likely gradual, it took generations for the SRR to assert its political power. The SRR was eventually able to assert its power over the Roman Magistrates, and by the time of the Middle Republic (which is when this topic takes place), the SRR approached and met its peak in power. While the Consuls and Roman assemblies held many powers, the SRR's control of the Republic's money, administration, and aspects of foreign policy gave it the most control over day-to-day life during the Middle Republic. Given that the SRR lasted up until 27 BC, the 'Senate of the Roman Empire' (SRE) didn't exist during the time of this topic. But for the sake of consistency, this committee is still named the Senate of the Roman Empire.



Cicero Denounces Catiline in the Roman Senate by Cesare Maccari

II. Introduction to the Topic

The Plea of the Mamertines

In 288 BC, a group of Italian mercenaries known as the Mamertines were dismissed by the new Tyrant of Syracuse. Rather than returning home, the Mamertines occupied and took over the city of Messana (Messina), just across the Strait of Messana (Strait of Messina) from the Roman Republic. The Mamertines then turned Messana into a raiding base, and conducted raids on nearby settlements. This included raids along the coast of Syracuse, prompting the current Tyrant of Syracuse, Hiero II, to raise an army and fight back against the Mamertines.



Map of the Tyrrhenian Sea and surrounding areas circa 264 BC

Facing pressure from the Syracusans, the Mamertines sent out a plea for help to both the Roman and Carthaginian Senates in 265 BC. With hopes to fully consolidate control over the strategic island of Sicily, the Carthaginians have already answered the Mamertines' plea for help by garrisoning Messana, and pressuring Hiero II of Sicily into standing down. Although, the plea for help sent to the Roman Senate still stands, as some within the Mamertines' ranks have been displeased by Carthaginian occupation. This raises the question, should the Roman Republic aid the Mamertines and establish a foothold on the island of Sicily, while running the risk of starting a war with Carthage?

Rome vs Carthage

As of 264 BC, Rome and Carthage are very different nations. While both nations are relatively close, and are both semi-democratic republics, they differ in society, economy, military, and more.



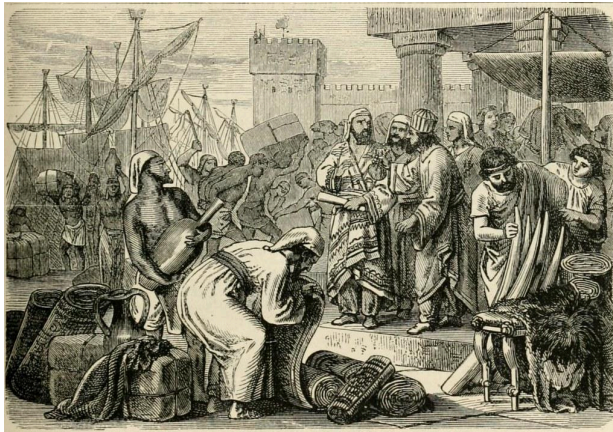
Legion of Roman legionaries



A small unit of Carthaginian soldiers

Similarities between Rome and Carthage mainly surround their governments and interests. Both Rome and Carthage are semi-democratic republics, with both having a senate and judiciary. Although, the Carthaginian public holds much more sway over their government compared to Rome. Additionally, both Rome and Carthage are powers of the Western Mediterranean, with strong interests in consolidating control over the region. However, while Rome is a strong regional power, Carthage is considered a Mediterranean superpower.

While they share some similarities, Rome and Carthage share many more stark differences, including in society, in economy, and in military. For instance, Rome is a heavily agrarian society with a hierarchy largely ruled by the patricians, followed by the plebeians. Meanwhile Carthage has a largely cosmopolitan society with strong influences from various different cultures. This mixing of cultures was caused by Carthage's trade and commerce based economy, with a strong reliance on their maritime trade routes. Meanwhile, Rome's economy is largely centred around agriculture, often supported by new lands and slaves acquired from various Roman conquests. These acquisitions and conquests arose from Rome's aggressive expansion across the Italian peninsula, which is often justified as a defensive act. Because of this aggressive expansion, Rome's legionaries and army as a whole have become well experienced, and are renowned for their excellence in close-ranged hand-to-hand combat on land. Meanwhile, Carthage's interests in developing and protecting their trade routes have led to the development of a strong Carthaginian navy. On top of their naval power, Carthage uses diverse mercenary forces from various regions, providing them with a versatile and specialised army, without the need to entirely rely on the conscription of their own people.



Carthaginian traders and merchants at a port



Roman plebeians at a marketplace

III. Essential Questions for the Senate

With a topic that could bring about dire consequences upon the Roman Republic if the wrong decisions are made, there are some essential questions that the Senate of the Roman Republic should consider. These questions are as follows:

Should Rome Answer the Mamertines' Plea for Help?

This is the core question that the Senate of the Roman Republic is facing in regards to this topic. Intervening in the situation that is unfolding in Sicily could help Rome establish a foothold, or potentially full control over the strategic island. On the other hand, aiding the Mamertines at all will likely jeopardise Rome's stable relations with Carthage, and runs the high risk of sparking an all out war with the Carthaginians.

What Would the Consequences of Intervention Be?

This question is closely linked to the core question. Intervening in the situation in Sicily could have a lot of consequences, both good and bad. Intervening could allow Rome to greatly project her strength and power throughout the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, intervening could start a war with Carthage, a major power, that Rome may not be ready to take on.

What Would the Consequences of Rejection Be?

This question is also closely linked to the core question. While intervening in the situation in Sicily may carry many consequences, rejecting the Mamertines' plea for help could carry just as many consequences. Rejecting the Mamertines' plea for help could help preserve Rome and Carthage's stable relations, and allow Rome to recuperate after conquering the whole Italian peninsula. Meanwhile, not intervening in the situation could allow Carthage to consolidate control over the strategic island of Sicily, threatening both Roman interests and security.

Would it Be Immoral to Aid the Mamertines?

The Mamertines seized Messina through force and trickery, and have acted as mercenaries. It could be argued that aiding the Mamertines would go against Roman values and justice. On the other hand, it could be argued that as fellow Italians, Rome has the obligation to defend the Italian Mamertines from the Greek Syracusans and Phoenician Carthaginians.

Can Rome Afford a War Against the Carthaginians?

Assuming that Roman intervention in the situation in Sicily sparks a war between Rome and Carthage, can Rome afford such a war? While winning a war against Carthage could be feasible, the costs of a war against Carthage could be high, especially if the conflict lasts longer than expected and/or if a war would lead to more wars over the island in the future. Although, the value of Sicily both strategically and economically could prove to be worth it Rome were to win.

Is Rome Physically Capable of Fighting Carthage?

Assuming that Roman intervention in the situation in Sicily sparks a war between Rome and Carthage, can Rome physically put up a fight in a war against Carthage? Carthage's massive navy could prove to be a dire challenge in a war against Carthage, especially against Rome's minimal navy. Although, Rome's weaknesses in naval power could be made up for with Rome's renowned legionaries in land based combat.

Could Intervention Allow Rome to Expand Even Further?

While Roman intervention in the situation in Sicily would obviously provide Rome with the opportunity of expanding into Sicily, could it also mark the beginning of Roman expansion beyond the Italian Peninsula and Sicily? Could Rome seize Sardinia and Corsica from Carthage? Could Rome expand north of the River Arno? Could Rome one day expand into Illyria and Africa?

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Senator/Delegation List of the
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1. Senator Appius Claudius Caudex

A consul in **264 BCE**, he led the first Roman military intervention in Sicily, marking the start of the **First Punic War**. His attack on **Messina** brought Rome into direct conflict with Carthage.

2. Senator Gaius Duilius

A Roman consul in **260 BCE**, he commanded the fleet at the **Battle of Mylae**, Rome's **first major naval victory** over Carthage. He introduced the **corvus (boarding device)**, giving Rome an edge in naval warfare.

3. Senator Lucius Caecilius Metellus

Consul in **251 BCE**, he won the **Battle of Panormus**, capturing numerous Carthaginian war elephants. His victory solidified Roman control over western **Sicily**.

4. Senator Gaius Lutatius Catulus

A naval commander who decisively defeated Carthage at the **Battle of the Aegates Islands (241 BCE)**, forcing them to sue for peace and ending the **First Punic War**.

5. Senator Marcus Atilius Regulus

A famed **Roman general and consul** in **256 BCE**, he invaded **North Africa** but was later defeated and captured by Carthage. His supposed heroic refusal to negotiate Rome's surrender made him a legend.

6. Senator Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Asina

A **naval commander and consul** in 260 BCE, he was **captured early** in the war due to inexperience at sea. Despite this, his family (the **Scipios**) remained influential in Roman military campaigns.

7. Senator Publius Claudius Pulcher

A consul in **249 BCE**, he suffered a **disastrous naval defeat at the Battle of Drepana** after ignoring religious omens (famously throwing sacred chickens into the sea). His arrogance led to one of Rome's worst losses.

8. Senator Quintus Lutatius Cerco

The brother of **Gaius Lutatius Catulus**, he played a role in peace negotiations after Rome's naval victories, helping draft the treaty that ended the First Punic War.

9. Senator Manius Valerius Maximus Corvinus Messalla

A respected senator who advised on military strategy and logistics, particularly regarding **reinforcements and supplies to Sicily** during the war.

10. Senator Lucius Junius Pullus

A **naval commander and consul in 249 BCE**, he was responsible for transporting supplies to Roman forces in Sicily. His fleet was lost in a **storm**, contributing to a series of setbacks for Rome.

11. Senator Quintus Fabius Maximus Gurgus

A senior senator from the powerful **Fabius** family, he was a key figure in Senate debates about continuing the war and **securing funding for naval expansion**.

12. Senator Aulus Atilius Calatinus

Served as **consul multiple times** during the war and was notable for leading **successful land campaigns** in Sicily, particularly against Carthaginian strongholds.

13. Senator Spurius Carvilius Maximus Ruga

A Roman **censor and senator**, he played a significant role in organizing military recruitment and ensuring the Roman navy remained strong during the prolonged conflict.

14. Senator Tiberius Coruncanius

A leading **legal expert and consul**, he was one of the first **plebeians** to hold the title of **Pontifex Maximus**. He advised the Senate on legal matters, including **war declarations and treaty negotiations**.

15. Senator Servius Fulvius Paetinus Nobilior

A prominent senator and consul, he supported **naval warfare innovations** and the development of **shipbuilding** programs to strengthen Rome's fleet.

16. Senator Marcus Valerius Laevinus

A strong advocate for continued **naval expansion**, he influenced Senate policies on war taxation and conscription to keep the war effort going.

17. Senator Numerius Fabius Buteo

A political figure involved in **Senate discussions on financing the war**, ensuring Rome could fund its navy and armies without exhausting resources.

18. Senator Gaius Atilius Regulus

A political ally of **Marcus Atilius Regulus**, he supported Rome's **North African campaigns**, arguing for an aggressive approach against Carthage.

19. Senator Decimus Junius Pera

A senator who advised on **Sicilian military strategies**, advocating for more **fortifications** and supply lines to maintain control over key territories.

20. Senator Publius Servilius Geminus

An influential senator who played a role in the **Senate's decisions regarding Rome's shipbuilding expansion**, helping secure the resources needed to construct a **superior fleet**.