

## Roman Senate's Expansionist Policy towards Carthage and Numidia

Mohammed Toumi<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>University of Eloued, Toumi-mohammed@Univ-eloued.dz

### Abstract

*The Romans' interest in ancient Maghreb was early, aiming to subjugate it, initially fighting wars against Carthage known as the three Punic Wars (264-146 BC). As a result, they annexed Carthage into their vital area, which gave them the advantage of indirect intervention in the affairs of neighboring kingdoms like Numidia, which had sided with the Romans in their war against Carthage. Rome adopted a special policy in this kingdom, which involved creating divisions among the local princes by directing internal events towards crisis, thereby justifying the partition of the kingdom's rule among several princes. This policy became evident when Rome discovered signs of unification in the ancient Maghreb region and worked to eliminate them to avoid competition.*

**Keywords:** Rome, Carthage, Masinissa, Hannibal, Zama, Syphax

### Introduction

In its expansionist policy, Rome sought to annex all Mediterranean coastal states and make them its own Roman provinces. This policy has deep roots in Roman history, dating back to the 5th century BC. Although this expansionist movement began slowly and gradually, it accelerated over time and magnified its colonial impact. It can be metaphorically compared to a slow process of swallowing neighboring territories in Italy, which then increased rapidly, leading to significant regional gains for the Romans both within and outside the Italian Peninsula, with the aim of controlling the peoples of the Mediterranean. Rome pursued an expansionist policy against Carthage through three Punic Wars from 264 to 146 BC and adopted a policy of indirect intervention in Numidian affairs.

This study relies on several sources and references, including the book *Histoire Romaine* by historian Titius Livius. Due to the difficulty of interpreting and understanding the events described by the historian, I have also benefited from modern studies on the topic, such as: *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord Ancienne* by Stéphane Gsell, translated by Mohamed El-Tazi Saoud in most parts, as well as *L'Occupation Romaine de l'Afrique du Nord* by Mohamed El-Bachir Schniti, and *Carthage: Civilisation et Histoire* by François Décrée, translated by Youssef Chaleb El-Sham.

The scientific material of this article leads us to the following problem: How did the Roman Senate's expansionist policy emerge in Carthage and Numidia? To address this question, the following plan is proposed: First, the nature of the Roman relationship with Carthage and Numidia will be discussed as a prelude. Then, the focus will be on Carthage, covering the motivations behind the Roman Senate's expansionist policy and the three Punic Wars, including the destruction of Carthage. Second, the focus will shift to Numidia, discussing the Roman political motivations for expansion and Rome's involvement in Numidian succession issues.

### Nature of Roman Relations with Carthage and Numidia Before Expansion

The proximity and interaction between states are fundamental to progress and development. Despite differences in principles, social values, and political objectives between states, and regardless of the strength or weakness of any state, proximity is key to communication and dialogue that serve each state's interests. Historically, bridges of foreign relations have been established to understand others and exchange interests in various fields. Both Carthage and Rome sought to control maritime trade routes and gain more influence on the western Mediterranean coast, leading to the establishment of relations between the two, with Numidia also benefiting from its position on the Mediterranean, fostering relations between it and Rome.

### Roman-Carthaginian Relations

Initially, the relationship between Rome and Carthage was not marked by hostility. Rome, a land-based state with an economy based on agriculture, conducted its external activities in the agricultural sector, while Carthage, a maritime state, relied on trade, extending its influence through the sea. There was no conflict of interest between the two states, and therefore no reason for confrontation. Consequently, in the year following the establishment of the Roman aristocratic republic, a treaty was signed between Rome and Carthage in 508 BC (Mehran, 1990, p. 255). One of its main terms was that Rome would have sovereignty over the shore of (Laitum) on the condition that its ships would not sail in the Mediterranean west of Carthage or dock in Sardinia except for brief periods for repairs and supplies (Sarhan, 2013). This was followed by a second treaty in 378 BC to regulate trade between them and to prevent Carthage from interfering in

the affairs of Greek-subjugated Latin cities. This treaty was followed by treaties in 348 and 279 BC, which included clauses prohibiting Romans from trading in Sardinia and Africa or building ships there, allowing them only to rest and repair their vessels (Décrée, 1994, p. 92). Romans could engage in trade and other activities in Carthaginian Sicily and Carthage itself under the same conditions as Carthaginian citizens, and Carthaginians enjoyed similar rights in Rome, with restrictions on attacking independent Latin cities or destroying them if Carthage took them over. Carthage controlled the western Mediterranean and the Atlantic coasts of the Iberian Peninsula, aiding Rome in controlling Greek colonies during their rebellion. This last clause increased Rome's power.

Thus, the relationship between the Romans and Carthaginians followed the terms of these treaties, which both parties signed to define borders and spheres of influence, as both sought to expand their territories and control the western Mediterranean basin (Décrée, 1994, p. 93).

### **Roman-Numidian Relations**

Initially, the relationship between Numidian kings and Rome was based on mutual interests, blending peace and war due to the conflict between Carthage and Rome.

The Romans exploited the existing conflict among the Numidian kingdoms and Carthage by establishing relations between Scipio and King Syphax (Touiret, *Les Relations Numides-Romaines entre Souveraineté et Dépendance* (203-46 BC), 2013/2014, p. 43). The Roman army assisted in the war against Carthage in exchange for land, and Syphax acted as an intermediary through the 206 BC conference of Siga (Camps, 1980, pp. 169-170), which aimed to resolve the issue but was rejected by the Roman consul, as the Senate was the authority for such decisions.

After the death of King Gaia of the Massylii and issues regarding the legitimate heir (Ferhati, 2007, p. 64), Carthage intervened by assisting Syphax, who became their ally in seizing land from the Massylii kingdom, prompting Masinissa to ally with the Romans to regain his throne after fighting alongside the Carthaginian army in Spain (Ferhati, 2007, p. 65).

In the context of Rome's project to control North Africa, especially after the failed campaigns of Agathocles (310 BC) and Regulus (256 BC), Rome, led by Scipio, realized that the success of its mission depended on gaining African support and approaching Numidian kings. The failure of the initial campaigns was attributed to the lack of local support (Décrée, 1981, p. 90).

Rome successfully gained Masinissa as an ally, who not only assisted in defeating Carthage but also provided military support in Eastern wars. During the war against Philip of Macedon in 200 BC, Roman deputies requested help from Masinissa, who provided 1,000 cavalry (Titelive, 1941, pp. 10-11), and also sent 200 cavalry and 10 elephants in 198 BC. He continued to support Rome in its wars against the Ligurians in 193 BC and in Iberia in 153 BC. Masinissa's support was not limited to military aid but also included economic support.

Masinissa engaged in various trade agreements, some of which were aid for Roman armies fighting outside Roman territory and others for the city of Rome itself (Gsell, 2007, pp. 163-164). Grain became a leading export, but other products like oils, wines, elephants, and horses also supported Roman military campaigns (Harsh, *Histoire du Maghreb Ancien: Politique et Culture depuis les Temps Anciens jusqu'à la Conquête Islamique*, 2014, p. 114). During Masinissa's reign, peace and cooperation prevailed in Roman-Numidian relations, as demonstrated by the military and economic support he provided. This cordial relationship continued until Masinissa's death, when he entrusted the consul Scipio Aemilianus with organizing Numidia after his death. Following Masinissa's death, Scipio decided to divide Numidia's authority among his three sons: Micipsa as the administrative authority, Gulussa as the military leader, and Mastanabal as the judicial authority. The Roman commander aimed to sow discord among the brothers to enable Rome to intervene in Numidian affairs (Ferhati, 2007, p. 142). Micipsa ruled alone after the death of his brothers Gulussa and Mastanabal in 139 BC (Ghanem, 1998, pp. 2-14) and maintained the good relations his father Masinissa had established with Rome. He continued to support Rome through various forms of aid, including during the Iberian Peninsula campaigns and the Numantine War, where he sent military personnel led by his grandson Jugurtha and supplied the Roman army fighting in Sardinia in 126 BC (Harsh, *Political and Economic Development in Numidia from Masinissa to the Death of Juba I* (203-46 BC), 1985, pp. 45-46).

Micipsa's focus on economic aspects and stability over expansionism ensured peaceful relations with Rome during his reign. However, upon his death in 118 BC, he divided the kingdom among his three sons: Adherbal, Hiempsal, and Jugurtha, leading to shifts in relations with Rome as Jugurtha sought to unify the kingdom (Gsell, 2007, p. 112).

## **I. Carthage**

### **A) Motivations and Reasons Behind the Roman Senate's Expansionist Policy:**

Rome needed to secure its maritime state and expand its economic resources by relying on trade to meet the needs of its citizens, transitioning from an agrarian-based economy. Additionally, it was crucial for Rome to secure its vital areas by controlling the seas, especially since the situation in the Tyrrhenian Sea was unfavorable due to Carthage's capture of the islands of Corsica and Sardinia. As a result, Carthage had established a near-continuous naval blockade along Rome's southern and western coasts. Five hundred quinquereme ships were stationed off the coast to repel attackers from

Carthaginian colonies, markets, and trade routes, effectively closing the western Mediterranean to Roman maritime trade. This was Rome's first significant challenge to expanding its influence, leading to a prolonged and fierce conflict known as the Punic Wars, which lasted nearly a hundred years.

### **B) The Punic Wars (264-146 BCE):**

These wars brought the Romans and Carthaginians into direct conflict, resulting in the outbreak of the First Punic War in 264 BCE. The war saw a seesaw struggle between the two sides, with Carthage initially maintaining its coastal positions in western Sicily due to its naval superiority. Meanwhile, Roman land forces controlled the eastern part of the island and captured the city of Lilybaeum, realizing the necessity of a naval fleet to challenge Carthage's western cities. In the spring of 260 BCE, Rome built its naval fleet, leading to a new phase in the war marked by Roman superiority. Consul Gaius Duilius defeated the Carthaginian fleet at the Battle of Mylae and continued to advance in Sicily and Africa. The Carthaginians eventually sought peace, turning to Spartan commander Xanthippus, which intensified the conflict.

The war reached its final stage in 247 BCE with a Roman victory at the Battle of the Aegates Islands. Following this defeat, Carthage was forced to sign a peace treaty on March 10, 241 BCE, ceding Sicily and the islands between it and Italy and agreeing to pay an annual indemnity of 3,200 talents over ten years. The Carthaginian leadership in Spain appointed Hannibal, the eldest son of Hamilcar, to avenge Rome. Hannibal's capture of Saguntum directly led to the Second Punic War, which spanned three regions: Italy, Spain (Hannibal's base), and Africa. The war concluded in 201 BCE with the Battle of Zama, where Carthage was defeated and forced to sign a treaty stipulating:

- The surrender of its war fleet and elephants.
- Complete withdrawal from the Iberian Peninsula, Italian islands, and Gaul.
- A prohibition on waging war inside or outside Africa without Roman permission.
- Allowing Masinissa, an ally of Rome, to reclaim his ancestral lands.

When Carthage faced its rival Masinissa, Rome accused it of violating the treaty, leading to the Third Punic War (149-146 BCE). Rome, determined to end Carthage's existence, besieged and destroyed the city in 146 BCE, ending its seven-century rule over North Africa. The city was burned, its inhabitants enslaved, and it fell under Roman control.

### **C) The Destruction of Carthage:**

The Roman Senate decided to demolish Carthage and ordered its evacuation, allowing inhabitants to settle anywhere as long as it was 15 km from the sea. The Carthaginians resisted and fought to stay in their city, enduring a long siege and making significant efforts to save it from destruction. However, by 146 BCE, the end of the Carthaginian Empire was imminent. Rome captured the city, burned it to the ground, and enslaved some of its people, completely destroying it and placing it under Roman control.

## **II. Numidia**

### **A) Motivations and Reasons Behind the Roman Senate's Expansionist Policy:**

When considering the Roman conquest of North Africa, particularly Numidia, it is clear that it was driven by general motives for conquest. According to Professor Ahmed Andisha, Rome's goal in occupying North Africa was to eliminate its primary enemy, the Carthaginians and their territories. He asserts that the Romans did not come to North Africa willingly but were compelled by their determination to defeat their rival Carthage. He cites the phrase from Cato, "Carthage must be destroyed," as evidence of this view. At the same time, the Romans did not invest economically in North Africa; instead, it was a military burden, and their main concern was to eradicate local powers in the region. Professor Bashir Shniti emphasizes that economic factors were also significant, although secondary. Ancient Morocco was important commercially and agriculturally to wealthy Roman elites seeking wealth. An example of Africa's economic importance is that a shortage of imports from the region led to a rise in wheat prices in Rome in 122 BCE, as noted by the historian Livy. Trade across the desert since the Phoenician times encouraged the Romans to colonize Numidia, prompting Roman decision-makers to advocate for its occupation and exploitation to provide food for the Roman populace. Social factors were also crucial, not less so than political and economic ones. The Roman colonization of the region was influenced by the social conditions during the civil wars, where military leaders promised their soldiers agricultural land in return for their victories, as Marius did with his troops. Caesar encouraged many of his soldiers to migrate to and settle in Africa, leading to several revolts against the Romans.

### **B) Rome's Role in the Succession of the Numidian Throne:**

On his deathbed in 148 BCE, Masinissa entrusted Consul Scipio Aemilianus with organizing Numidia after his death. The Roman leader traveled to the kingdom's capital to oversee the succession arrangements. He decided to divide the power in Numidia among Masinissa's three sons: Micipsa was given administrative power, Gulussa military authority, and Mastanabal judicial authority. The Roman leader's goal in this division was to incite discord among the brothers,

enabling Rome to intervene in Numidian affairs. Roman intervention became more prominent after the establishment of the province of Africa, placing the Romans close to Numidia. This proximity allowed the Romans to closely monitor the kingdom's political developments and influence them according to Roman interests. The Roman involvement in Numidia became evident following the death of Micipsa in 118 BCE, as Rome directly intervened in the kingdom's affairs. Micipsa had bequeathed the kingdom to his two sons, Adherbal and Hiempsal, and his adopted son Jugurtha. The heirs quickly showed disagreements in visions and ideas, leading to a conflict over the succession between Jugurtha on one side and Adherbal and Hiempsal on the other.

### Conclusion:

#### This article highlights several key findings:

- **Political Realignment:** Roman expansion altered the political landscape of ancient Morocco, with the Romans viewing the Mediterranean basin as an extension of their territory. They achieved this by annexing and destroying Carthage through three Punic Wars.
- **Elimination of Carthaginian Presence:** Rome eradicated Carthage's presence in the western Mediterranean by 146 BCE, securing the region as a Roman dominion and removing the Carthaginian threat.
- **Strategic and Economic Integration of Numidia:** With the collapse of Carthage, Numidia became a strategic buffer zone for Rome, leading to a direct Roman influence in the region. Rome's flexible approach in dealing with Numidia facilitated its integration into the Roman sphere, preparing the ground for its future governance.

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