**First Punic War**, also called **First Carthaginian War**, (264–241 BCE) first of three wars between the [Roman Republic](https://www.britannica.com/place/Roman-Republic) and the Carthaginian (Punic) empire that resulted in the destruction of [Carthage](https://www.britannica.com/place/Carthage-ancient-city-Tunisia).

The First Punic War was fought to establish control over the strategic islands of [Corsica](https://www.britannica.com/place/Corsica) and [Sicily](https://www.britannica.com/place/Sicily). In 264 the Carthaginians intervened in a [dispute](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/dispute) between the two principal cities on the Sicilian east coast, [Messana](https://www.britannica.com/place/Messina) and [Syracuse](https://www.britannica.com/place/Syracuse-Italy), and so established a presence on the island. Rome, responding to this challenge, attacked Messana and forced the Carthaginians to withdraw. In 260 a Roman fleet failed to gain complete control of Sicily but opened the way to Corsica, from which the Carthaginians were expelled. A second Roman fleet sailed in 256 and established a beachhead on the African continent. Carthage was prepared to surrender, but the terms offered by Rome were too severe, and in 255 Carthage attacked with a new army built around cavalry and elephants and drove the invaders to the sea.

The battle for Sicily resumed in 254 but was largely stalemated until 241, when a [fleet](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/fleet) of 200 warships gave the Romans undisputed control of the sea-lanes and assured the collapse of the Punic stronghold in Sicily. One year later Carthage surrendered, ceding Sicily and the [Lipari Islands](https://www.britannica.com/place/Eolie-Islands) to Rome and agreeing to pay an indemnity.