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**Richard Miles, *Carthage Must Be Destroyed: The Rise and Fall of an Ancient Civilization*  
Penguin, 2012**

Reviewed by Mariana Tepfenhart

Richard Miles is a professor of history at the University of Sydney and a Fellow Commoner of Trinity Hall, at the University of Cambridge. He has extensive knowledge of the ancient world. He wrote about the Punic wars, the Romans, the Vandals of North Africa and hosted on BBC a television series – Ancient Worlds. He also directed archeological excavations in Carthage and Rome.

The title was inspired by the famous statement of the Roman senator, Cato the Elder, “Delenda est Carthago” – “Carthage must be destroyed” - which sealed the fate of that Mediterranean city. The book provides a sweeping yet vivid narrative of about ten centuries of developments that led to the destruction of Carthage, after three Punic Wars. The book is a comprehensive history of Carthage, from its origins to its demise. The purpose of the book is to recreate the lost world of the great North African metropolis and to “reassess some of the comfortable historical certainties that underpin many of the modern West’s assumptions about its own cultural and intellectual heritage.”(22). Miles wants to prove that Western civilization is not founded exclusively on Roman and Greek cultures but is indebted to other cultures and people as well. The author uses primary sources, secondary sources and the latest archeological discoveries. However, he points out that the Greek and Roman sources are negative and clichéd. They promote the image of cruel, unmerciful people, untrustworthy, cheaters who practiced child sacrifice to appease their gods. It was this version of the history of Carthage that was adopted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Western Europe.

Miles commences his story with the roots of the Carthaginians in Phoenicia – the land of the color purple. The Phoenicians’ prosperity was the result of their outstanding mastery of the sea. They created a network for trade with merchants stationed in foreign ports as royal agents who were treated more like ambassadors. By the eighth century they established colonies in Sardinia and southern Spain where they found a large supply of silver and iron. Carthage was a Phoenician colony and became a major manufacturer of terracotta, ivory items, and jewelry. Although it was the Phoenicians that discovered the silver mines in Spain, Carthaginians exploited the mines, which became the source of the city’s wealth. They gained control of part of what is today Tunisia and became a maritime and trading power.

Richard Miles makes a great effort to introduce the reader to the Mediterranean world of that period and to describe the relations between very diverse people, both competitive and cooperative. A reasonable consequence of this interaction is the exchange of the ideas in every field. One aspect is the religion. Highly important for the Romans and the

Carthaginians is Heracles, the son of Zeus and a human mother, who is used for propagandistic reasons by both people, to show that the gods were on their side.

Miles also comments on the ritual of child sacrifice to honor their god, Baal. By analyzing the latest archeological discoveries in Tunisia, the author states that this was not as widespread as was described in the written sources. It was a practice known in Middle East as “molk,” which the Carthaginians, like the Phoenicians before them, did resort to as a ritual in times of crisis for the benefit of the whole community. Evidence suggests that the children offered for sacrifice were from the elite families. Sometimes animals and birds were substituted for humans.

The study continues with the reasons for the conflict. Miles stated that Carthage and Rome were competing for resources but also started to fear each other. He presents in great detail the battle for Sicily, a territory that both the Romans and the Carthaginians claimed. This set the stage for the first Punic War (264-241 BC) that the Romans won.

The impact of the war was devastating. The Carthaginians were expected to pay huge war reparations to Rome and also had to pay the mercenaries who made up their army. They realized they needed resources, materials and manpower. The focus of the book moves to Spain where the Barcid clan, prominent in Carthage, established a protectorate and took hold of the silver mines.

Next, Miles introduces Hannibal, using the work of the Roman historian Livy. He emphasizes Hannibal’s tactical ability, bravery and endurance but also “his all-consuming ambition” (Livy, 231). Hannibal used propagandistic extensively to portray himself as a favorite of the gods and a savior of Hellas from a tyrannical Rome. This propagandistic was central to the success of the Carthaginians.

The author depicts the journey of Hannibal’s army across the Alps, the hardship, exertion and loss of people not to enemies but to cold, hunger and steep precipices. Despite all these obstacles, the Carthaginians inflicted a terrible defeat on the Roman army.

Hannibal was a skillful general who turned his army into a formidable machine that defeated the Romans. However, he had a poor understanding of the Roman mentality. Instead of striking at the time when the Romans were weak, he allowed them to re-group and attack later. There are different interpretations to explain the hesitation of Hannibal in front of the gates of Rome, but Miles attributes it to an account of Heracles’ sojourn in Rome, found in a history written by Silenus. Hannibal, according to this account, wanted to present himself as a new Heracles, who came to free the people of the region.

The tables turned for the Romans when a new general was appointed commander of the Roman Army. He was Publius Cornelius Scipio. The ancient sources reveal that he borrowed and improved on “many of the strategies that Hannibal himself had deployed

to such great effect” (299). Miles also explains how Scipio used the propaganda machine to show his people that he was the favorite of the gods. He defeated the Carthaginians in the Iberian Peninsula, and thus destroyed their power base. The book continues with the campaign launched by Scipio against Carthage, which ended with a decisive victory for the Romans, at the Zama.

Despite the military defeat, the Carthaginians managed to prosper economically. Marcus Porcius Cato, a Roman senator, famed for his ascetic life, led an embassy to Carthage and was alarmed by what he found. He started to lobby for the total destruction of the city. He argued that once the Carthaginians paid the indemnity, it would become again a challenge to Rome. He emphasized the suffering of Rome and used all available stereotypes to persuade his fellow senators of the necessity to eliminate totally this threat. The Roman historian Livy presents the Carthaginians’ defeat as “divine retribution” (361) for their vices, which are contrasted with the Roman virtues. It was a needless, unjust and savage conflict that ended in 146 BC. The world of the Western Mediterranean was Roman.

In concluding, Richard Miles argues that the debt that Rome owed to Carthage is difficult to assess not because of lack of achievements but because the Greeks were better at claiming ownership of all the advances. The Romans benefitted from the economic and political infrastructure put in place by the Carthaginians in the territories they inhabited. Rome destroyed a strong rival. The sacking of the city was a profitable business. They took the wealth of the city, the works of art and the people and shipped them to Rome. This huge wealth would eventually lead to the decline of Rome, fuelled by the greed and ambition of the elite.

Miles challenges the stereotypes and myths that characterize traditional understanding of the Punic Wars. Featuring an extensive array of selections from major Roman and Greek sources, combined with the latest archeological discoveries, the book offers an insight into the political, social, religious, cultural and economic aspects of the Roman and Carthaginian civilizations. It is vividly written and accessible and provides fascinating observations about a vanished world.