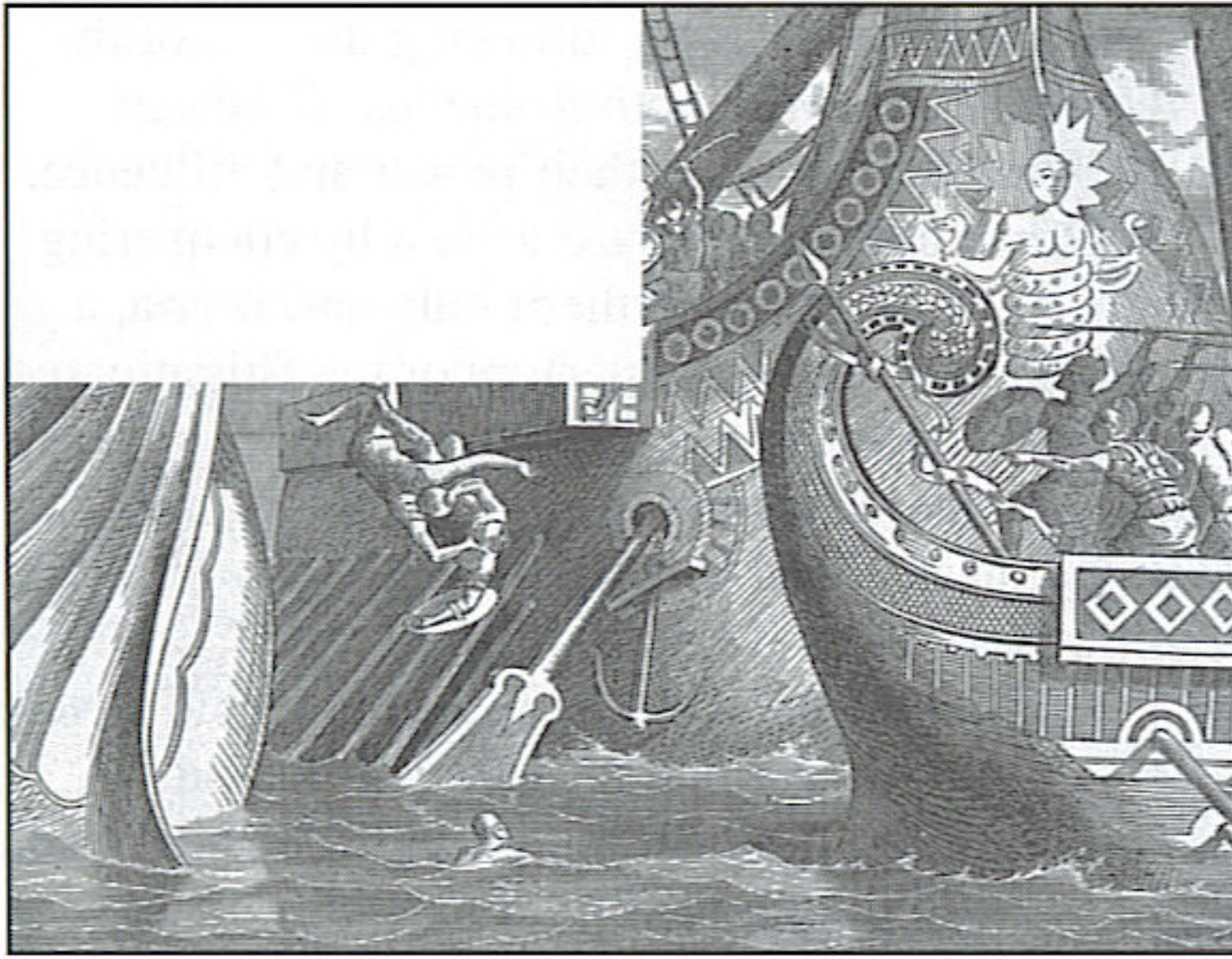


Event B: The First Punic War



As Carthage's power in the Mediterranean grew, Rome began to look for ways to limit its rival's expansion. Eventually, competition for control over the western Mediterranean between the two powers erupted into the First Punic War in 264 B.C.E. The incident that sparked the fighting took place in Sicily, when a group of rebellious Sicilian soldiers, called the *Mamertines* (pronounced MAM-er-teenz), seized the town of Messina. Messina was located next to a narrow channel, or *strait*, between the "toe" of the Italian peninsula and Sicily. At first

the Mamertines turned to a local Carthaginian fleet to help them secure control of Messina. However, when it appeared the Carthaginians might use their involvement as an opportunity to conquer all of Sicily, the Mamertines appealed to the Romans for help.

The request from the Mamertines presented an excellent opportunity for the Romans to stop Carthaginian expansion. The Romans believed that by assisting the Mamertines, the Carthaginians had broken a treaty signed by the two nations in the sixth century B.C.E. In the treaty, Carthage and Rome had agreed to stay out of each other's territories. According to this treaty, Italy belonged to the Romans, while the western Mediterranean belonged to the Carthaginians—Sicily was considered territory for both Roman and Carthaginian merchants. Roman leaders accused Carthage of violating this agreement and declared war in 264 B.C.E.

After declaring war, Roman leaders recognized that they faced serious challenges in a conflict with Carthage. Carthage had a strong navy that provided supplies to its army in Sicily. Carthage could also use its navy to blockade Sicilian ports, and thus prevent food and equipment from reaching Roman soldiers. In contrast, the Romans did not have a strong navy and did not know how to build warships. Moreover, they had no experience with training sailors. However, despite these disadvantages, the Romans did have armies of well-trained men who were dependable in battle.

What happened next? What tactics do you think the Romans used to defeat the Carthaginians in the First Punic War?

Notes about the outcome of the event: