

# Roman sea power

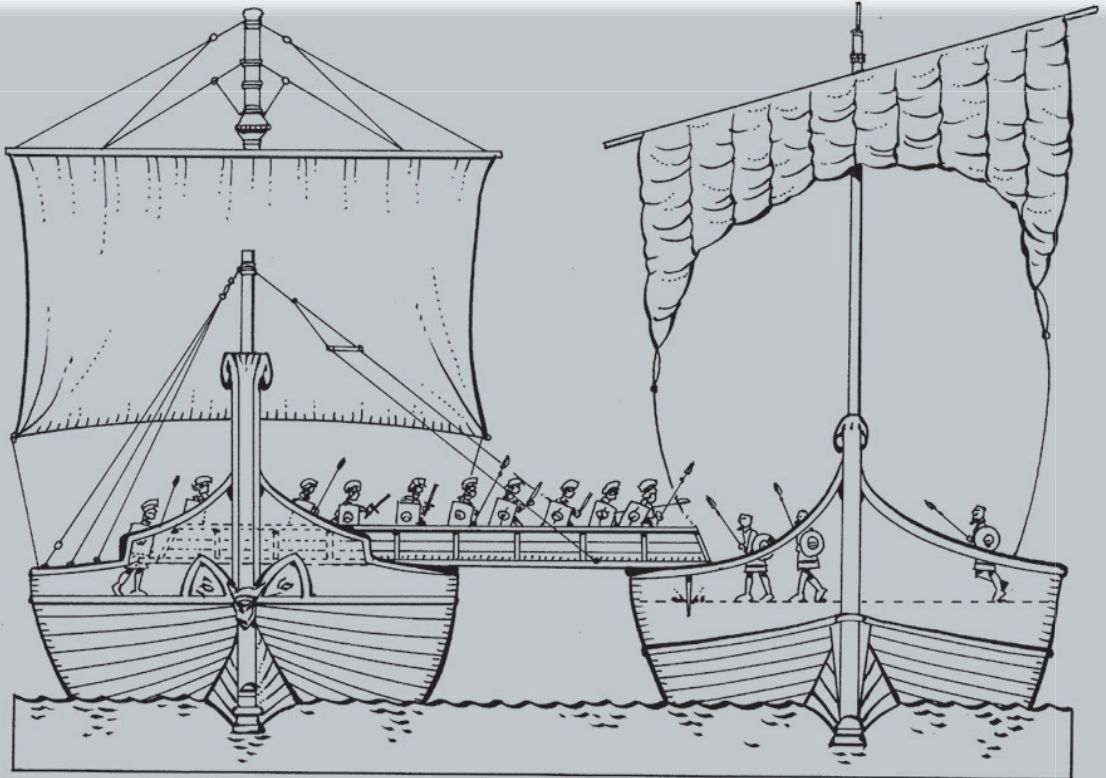
**Rome, 241 BC**

Rome has won a decisive sea battle against the powerful north African city of Carthage, ending the long and bitterly fought First Punic War. Carthage fought hard to defend the strong trading empire it had built up in the Mediterranean.

Rome's naval power is a fairly recent development. In fact, it did not have a navy to speak of when war broke out with Carthage 23 years ago. However, once it worked out how to build warships, its fleet grew rapidly.

The underwater battering ram built

at the front of the hull was a fearsome weapon. But it was Rome's clever invention of the corvus that inflicted most damage during the earlier stages of the war. The corvus provided an instant bridge between ships, allowing Roman troops to quickly board Carthaginian vessels. Once a Roman ship was alongside an enemy craft, the corvus was lowered until the iron spike on the end of it pierced the deck of the opposing vessel. This held the corvus in place.



*Roman soldiers storm a Carthaginian vessel using their warship's spiked corvus.*

**Use the information above and any reference below to answer the following questions:**

- Why do you think the Carthaginians needed such a strong fleet of ships in the first place?  
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- What stroke of good luck was the turning point for Rome in developing its own navy?  
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- Imagine you are a Roman general briefing some new soldiers who haven't ventured to sea yet. Write some instructions that clearly describe how they should operate the corvus during battle.  
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- Why was the island of Sicily so valuable to the Roman Empire during the First Punic War (264-241 BC)?  
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