HISTORICAL OUTLINE of CARTHAGE (Northern Africa)

Hanno (5th cent.)
rivalry of leading families

Hamilcar (Barcas)
defeated in 480 B.C.

Hannibal (grandson)
406 B.C.
Rome challenged her in Punic Wars
3rd cent. B.C.

conflict between Carthaginians + Barbarians

1st war: 264-241 B.C., she lost Sicily
she depended on mercenaries who rose against her
Hamilcar Barca put down

2nd war: revolt
218-201 B.C. under
Hannibal, she was defeated

3rd war: Carthage sued for peace,
defeated by Roman
Cato the Elder.

Today Carthage is a religious shrine

A Plan to Restore the Ruins of Carthage

TUNIS, July 24 (Reuters).—The ruins of Carthage, once the greatest rival of imperial Rome, are to be restored to something of their former grandeur.

For centuries its monuments have mouldered. They are difficult to recognize among the scattered stones and dried up plots where Tunisian peasants scratch a living amid the relics of the city of Hannibal.

Now a worldwide campaign has been launched, under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, to restore the monuments as much as possible and to undertake a complete archaeological study of the site.

Announcing the campaign, René Maheu, director general of UNESCO, said: "What is at stake today is the preservation of the global patrimony of mankind in its twin aspects of culture and environment. The fate of Carthage depends on the world's conscience."

Restoration of the ancient city, 10 miles north of Tunis, is expected to spread over about 15 years and cost more than $20 million.

Shared Costs

The costs will be shared equally between Tunisia and UNESCO.

The plans envisage a systematic archaeological and architectural study such as has never before been undertaken here. Expert advice will be sought on the best ways of restoring the buildings and monuments to something approaching their original state.

Eventually, visitors to Carthage will be able to see the city much as it looked from its founding by Phoenicians from the Eastern Mediterranean in 814 BC to its destruction by the might of Rome in 146 BC.

Its early history was one of repeated battles with the Greeks over possession of the island of Sicily.

But it was during the three Punic wars against Rome that the great military leaders of Carthage arose—Hamilcar, Hasdrubal and Hannibal.

Carthage ruled the greater part of Spain and it was from Spain that Hannibal led a daring expedition across Southern Gaul (France) and over the Alps into Italy to attack Rome.

Sacked by Rome

But even Hannibal's strategy and his use of elephants in battle, could not defeat the Roman Empire. The third Punic war lasted three years, and after a heroic defense Carthage was sacked and burned by Roman soldiers in 146 BC.

The entire area was dedicated to the gods of the underworld and men were forbidden to build new homes amid the ruins.

Later a Roman colonial township was built on the site, which fell into Vandal hands in the 5th century and became a pirate stronghold. What remained of Carthage was finally removed from the map in AD 698 by the Arab leader Hasan Ibn Noman.

The Arab city of Tunis flourished nearby, and it is now the modern republic of Tunisia, which will benefit from the restoration of the ruins by attracting tourists and archaeologists from all over the world.

The ruins of Carthage, once the greatest rival of imperial Rome (sic—Carthage was destroyed before the Roman Empire began), are to be restored to something of their former grandeur.

—Reuters dispatch in the IHT, July 25, 1972.

At Least the Romans Left Carthage Its Ruins

WAVERLEY ROOT

PARIS (IHT).—I was driving casually along the shoreline near Tunis, noting as I passed them the names of the towns inscribed on the modern standardized white-letters-on-blue panels whose style North Africa has inherited from France, when suddenly one swung into view bearing a word which hit me like a blow on the solar plexus. CARTHAGE! To come unsuspectingly on that glorious name, so unpretentiously, so matter-of-factly displayed, does something to you—at least when you know that it is identifying not one of the 11 Carthages of the United States, but the real Carthage, the Carthage Cato persuaded the Roman Senate to destroy because of its dangerous propinquity when, like an antique Sen. Joseph McCarthy, he frightened them by brandishing a fig he said had been picked in Carthage only two days before. The wind, maritime or oratorical, must have been favorable. *"Delenda est Carthago!"* Cato thundered: "Carthage must be destroyed!" And destroyed it was. UNESCO is now proposing to complete the consummation of Cato's curse. The Romans left Carthage its ruins. UNESCO now plans to destroy the ruins.

It is true that UNESCO is misled by the illusion that it is going to "restore" Carthage. "Eventually," said Reuters, reporting the agency's intentions, "visitors to Carthage will be able to see the city as it looked from its founding by Phoenicians from the Eastern Mediterranean in 814 BC to its destruction by the might of Rome in 146 BC." This is impossible to believe, just as it would be impossible to believe that a New York laid low by an earthquake could be rebuilt in a fashion that would permit it to be seen simultaneously as it looked from the time when its name was New Amsterdam to that of the completion of the Empire State Building.

I do not suppose that UNESCO means to build a series of Carthages set up on a turntable which could be revolved for the benefit of tourists every half-hour. It thus becomes necessary for it to decide which Carthage is to be rebuilt. That of 850 BC, Dido's Carthage, a minor settlement (which, note, antedates the official date of the city's foundation)? The Carthage of 509 BC, the year when, promoted to mastery of the seas by the destruction of Tyre, it signed its first treaty with Rome, establishing their respective zones of influence? The Carthage of 268 BC, when the First Punic War began, and Carthage equaled Rome in population (only three cities of antiquity ever passed the million mark, Rome, Carthage and Alexandria), and was no doubt disfigured by jerry-built municipal housing?

I would suppose that it is this last Carthage UNESCO would prefer to rebuild, for after that it slid downhill rapidly, finished by the Second Punic War, so that Cato's Third was unnecessary, the simple delivery of the coup de grâce. Thus, on the pretext of restoring history, UNESCO, if we accept the impossible description of its objective proffered by Reuters, would really be preserving only some 550 years of Carthaginian history and annihilating the 2,200 which followed—for history did not stop because Carthage did, and ruins have their annals too. To be more accurate than Reuters concerning what is possible, UNESCO would be preserving some 50 years of history, and canceling out 3,000, before and after; for when cement, masquerading as Punic stone, is spread over the site of ancient Carthage, archaeologists will be frustrated, as archaeologists burning to explore the only important Visigothic necropolis in France were frustrated when the city of Beziers sealed it tight by building a post office over it.

If a debate were opened about which Carthage, if any, should be frozen at its own particular moment in time, a good argument could be made for preserving it as of the most important date in its history—146 BC, when the Romans destroyed it. That is the Carthage we have now.

The ruins of Carthage as they exist today are the most magnificent monument to its memory which it is possible to conceive. Wandering among their awe-inspiring twisted tormented mighty blocks of stone, the remnants of baths, of temples and of the Punic cemetery with its pathetic graves of children, you can conjure up in your mind all the different ancient Carthages which in the end culminated in this field of rocks. True, to visit Carthage today puts the imagination to work; true, many people do not want to put their imagination to work. They have been spoiled by the cultural promoters who spell everything out for them, saving mental effort and provoking mental atrophy.

I have no doubt that more tourists would visit a fake rebuilt Carthage than the real ruined one, but is it a function of UNESCO to contribute to the debasement of taste for the profit of the tourist industry? Is it worth $20 million to turn the ruins of Carthage into a Punic Disneyland? If it is, I suggest that UNESCO do it somewhere else and leave the hoary ruins of Carthage alone.

Time does a better job of ennobling ancient monuments than man, who has less leisure for it. It has bestowed impressiveness on the ruins of Carthage and sublime dignity on the ruins of Greece. Does UNESCO envisage repainting the Parthenon with the screaming reds and blues and greens which once covered it? Wind and rain have eroded from this splendid building the bad taste of Greek coloring and left only the good taste of Greek proportions.

If UNESCO is interested in the preservation of great monuments of the past, I would suggest that it turn to saving from desecration those which still stand in their original splendor. Let me name just one out of many—the Pont du Gard. When I first visited it, in 1927, the tranquil harmony of its arches rose alone from a barren wilderness. I spent a blissful carefree sunny afternoon simply crossing and recrossing it, walking up and down the banks of the small stream it crosses, catching now and then unexpected wholly satisfying glimpses of it from auspicious angles. It was a place and time of serenity.

I passed there again a few years ago. The road was lined with souvenir shops selling tasteless gimcracks imported from Japan. The quiet stream and its banks had disappeared beneath the human and material debris of a tourist camp. Blaring transistors, tuned to every post in Europe, shredded the air. The nose was assaulted by the nauseous odors of badly tended public toilets.

The camp is there, I assume, because the Pont du Gard is a name. It is a name about which they know nothing except that they have seen it frequently repeated. The mob today, bored to death by the anonymous mediocrity of its lives, seeks desperately to attach itself to something, anything, that is *happening*. It flocks to any scene connected with any name famous from frequent repetition by newspapers, radio and television—whether the name is that of a tone-deaf singer incapable of uttering an audible sound without a microphone clamped to his tonsils, or of a lard-faced actress renowned for public churlishness, or of a criminal who has earned public admiration for having murdered more people more mercilessly than anybody else—or even of a much pictured architectural monument.

What does the name of Carthage evoke now? A fabulous city, a cultural center which produced the remarkable mosaics, already visible, without benefit of UNESCO, in the Bardo museum of Tunis; a mighty power which came within an ace of gaining the mastery of the world. What will it evoke if UNESCO has its way? A place where tourists can have their pictures taken against a spurious background, as in the United States they have themselves photographed in a "restored" (i.e., falsified) ghost city, seated between a plastic Indian wrapped in a blanket and a sheriff overweighted by his star on a bench appliqued to the front of a Far West saloon.

I think it is time for the one-time adversaries of the Punic Wars to forget their differences and unite in a common cause. May the ancient Phoenicians (there may still be some on the island of Formentara) and the ancient Romans (there may still be some in Friuli) join forces to save Carthage and the Pont du Gard from the acronymic Barbarians!