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A Few Notes on Hannibal in Silius Italicus's *Punica*

Abstract: The article is an attempt at studying the image of Hannibal as presented in *Punica*. The aim of the paper is to sketch a portrait of the Carthaginian in *Punica* (with the image preserved both in historiography and in poetic epithets in mind), which would be a literary realisation of historiographic matter, with *variatio* typical for poetry, which was extended, shortened and mixed by Silius. The following review also looks at the topic of cruelty, which was a feature attributed to Hannibal himself as well as to Carthaginians in general, and that of death – demonstrated by such actions as (not) burying the bodies of Roman consuls or utilising bodies of the dead to build a bridge.

Key words: Hannibal, Silius Italicus, *Punica*, Punic, Carthaginian

Among the many images of Hannibal in ancient literature the one presented by Silius Italicus is unique. It stands out because the ancient writer in creating his image of the Second Punic War employs *licentia poetica* as well as historical facts.¹ It enabled him to develop, diminish, or even mix together certain historical facts.²

¹ See: R.B. Steele: "Interrelation of the Latin Poets under Domitian." *CP* 1930, Vol. 25, p. 331; A. Klotz: "Die Stellung des Silius Italicus unter den Quellen zur Geschichte des zweiten punischen Krieges." *RhM* 1933, Vol. 82, pp. 1–34; J. Nicol: *The Historical and Geographical Sources Used by Silius Italicus*. Oxford 1936; H.-G. Nesselrath: "Zu den Quellen des Silius Italicus." *Hermes* 1986, Vol. 114, pp. 203–230; C.M. Lucarini: "Le fonti storiche di Silio Italico." *Athenaeum* 2004, Vol. 92, pp. 103–126.

² See also: E. Kennedy Klaassen: "Imitation and the Hero." In: *Brill's Companion to Silius Italicus*. Ed. A. Augoustakis. Leiden–Boston 2010, pp. 99–126; B. Tipping: *Exemplary Epic*.

The image of Hannibal is based on three concepts: Hannibal as a Punic, as an enemy, and as a soldier. Each of these concepts is based on different features. Hannibal the leader is described as *prudens* and *callidus* – simply a great leader. As an enemy he was characterised as cruel and dreadful (*crudelis, immanis, cruentus, dirus*). The third concept is the broadest of the three and because of its complexity I would like to say a few words on this subject matter. How did the Romans really perceive the Punic? How was he characterised? Before I can answer these questions I would like to explain two things. In my opinion one cannot differentiate between the nouns “Punic” and “enemy,” because very often they were used synonymously. That is why the cruelty of Hannibal as an enemy becomes one of the innate characteristics of the Punics as a nation. The second remark has to do with the term “Punic” and the way it functions. There are, however, two terms that are not synonymous. *Poenus* is an ethnic tag, derived from the Greek φοῖνιξ, and meant a member of Phoenicians – who lived in Phoenicia, and also those who dwelt in the western colonies. *Carthaginiensis*, in turn, is a civic term for an inhabitant of Carthage.³

George F. Franko in his article “The Use of Poenus and Carthaginiensis in early Latin Literature” noticed that the usage of the term *Poenus* has often negative connotations, whereas the term *Carthaginiensis* is neutral or may have positive connotations. The adjective *Punic* is used to describe various objects or techniques of manufacturing,⁴ adopted from Carthaginians and used in Mediterranean culture. This adjective describes also botanic and zoological⁵ as well as culinary terms.⁶ This was observed by Professor Jerzy Kolendo, who noticed that the adjective Punic (*punicus, punicanus*) in some contexts was a synonym of good quality or even of luxury.⁷ On the other hand, the adjective acquires negative meaning when paired with some nouns; in this case it even contradicts their meaning, for example: *fides Punica (perfidia)* is the opposite of *fides*. In this context, we may also enumerate: *Punica religio, perfidia plus quam Punica, fraus Punica, Punica ars, Punicae versutiae*. Franko concludes his argument: “*Poenus* is the term of choice for negative stereotyping, the term of choice for anti-Punic discourse.”⁸

Silius Italicus’ “*Punica*.” Oxford 2010, pp. 51–106; C. Stocks: *The Roman Hannibal. Remembering the Enemy in Silius Italicus*’ “*Punica*.” Liverpool 2014, pp. 80–102.

³ G.F. Franko: “The Use of Poenus and Carthaginiensis in early Latin Literature.” *CP* 1994, Vol. 89, p. 153.

⁴ For example: *pavimenta, fenestra, lutum, coagmenta, lecti, lanterna, corium, poenicum, cera, plostellum, spongea, fossa*.

⁵ *Alium, malus/arbor, cicer, umbra*.

⁶ *Puls* and *punicum*.

⁷ J. Kolendo: “L’influence de Carthage sur la civilisation materielle de Rome.” *Archeologia* 1970, Vol. 21, p. 20.

⁸ G.F. Franko: “The Use of Poenus and Carthaginiensis”..., p. 152.

However, to make a clear distinction between the concepts *Poenus* and *Carthaginiensis* one has to consider not only the geographical context but also the historical one. The majority of literature describing the Second Punic War was written after the Carthage was already rebuilt in the 40s of the 1st century BC. It was a Roman city but it regained its former significance and became the capital of province of *Africa*. So maybe for some authors the difference between a Carthaginian and a Punic was really a difference between an inhabitant of the African metropolis contemporary to the author and a dweller of the city before it was destroyed in 146 BC.

The ancient authors are also not consistent in this scope. In their texts they use both terms interchangeably.⁹ Only Florus consistently uses the term *Poenus* throughout his entire work. In the works by the Christian authors – Orosius and St. Augustine – one can come across the expression *bellum Carthaginiense* for the Second Punic War, that is nowhere else to be found. In Greek language this war is referred to as a Hannibalic war.

The epithet *Poenus* was frequently used to describe Hannibal (*Hannibal Poenus*), which shows him on the one hand as a typical representative of his nation, and on the other as “the Other.” Did Scipio need the epithet *Romanus* next to his name?

The typical Punic features are the opposites of the typical Roman virtues (such as *fides*, *virtus*, *clementia*, *mos maiorum*, *humanitas* etc.), there are in fact the anti-virtues. This is a generalisation, and each generalisation is of course false. It might have been as well that Roman-Carthaginian contrast was in fact a kind of mirror¹⁰ which reflected for some Romans the glorious Republican past. It is evident in the works of ancient historians who often quoted features and behaviours perceived as typically Punic frequently overinterpreting or exaggerating them in order to create the image of Carthaginian. It must be noted, however, that the meaning of the topoi used by them might have been more archaic and they extended their meaning to later centuries. The example illustrating this phenomenon is *fides Punica* which eventually evolved into *fides Iberica*.¹¹

When it comes to poetry the matter is more complicated because of the metrics. *Carthaginiensis* is metrically quite a complicated word and does not appear in *Punica*, whereas *Poenus* in different forms appears over 170 times. Apart from these two, there are also other expressions used for describing Carthaginian and Punic. I will come back to it. The word Hannibal itself as it was shown in a detail analy-

⁹ See also: V. Rosenberger: *Bella et expeditiones. Die antike Terminologie der Kriege Roms*. Stuttgart 1992, pp. 15–28.

¹⁰ R. Kapuściński: “Wykłady wiedeńskie I.” In: Idem: *Ten Inny*. Kraków 2007, p. 14. Cf. F. Hartog: *The Mirror of Herodotus. The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*. Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1988.

¹¹ F. Rodríguez Adrados: “La «Fides» Iberica.” *Emerita* 1946, t. 14, pp. 128–209.

sis made by Herbert Myśliwiec¹² is a dactyl (*Hánnibāl*), or a cretic (*Hánnibāl*)¹³ which was noticed by Aulus Gellius, who quoted the grammarian Probus and the poet Ennius.¹⁴ In another grammatical cases Hannibal becomes metrically choriambus.¹⁵ Very often it is replaced by the word barbarous, which metrically is also a dactyl.¹⁶

The answer to the question “who is a Punic” can be found already in one of the Plautus’s comedies. When describing the main hero Hannon – a Carthaginian looking for his daughter, Plautus writes:

Ita docte atque astu filias quaerit suas.
Et is omnis linguas scit; sed dissimulat sciens
se scire: Poenus plane est. Quid verbis opust?¹⁷

Thus craftily and cunningly he seeks his daughters.
And he knows all languages; but though knowing he fakes that
He doesn’t know. He’s thoroughly Punic. What need of words?¹⁸

Plautus also quotes other features such is *astutia* (cunning), *simulatio* (pretending) and *dissimulatio* (lying). They all eventually become a trademark of Hannibal. The example of that is one of Hannibal’s deceit, when he tried to deceive the Celts by changing wigs and clothes.¹⁹ The way in which Hannibal conducted war was also based on the mentioned features. Livy describes this as: [...] *non bello aperto sed suis artibus, fraude et insidiis*²⁰ and contrasts it with *Romanis artibus, virtute opere armis*.²¹ Later in the text he specifies: *minime arte Romana, fraude ac dolo*.²²

The Punics were also said to be cruel, which is illustrated by Cato’s question: *Qui sunt, qui crudelissime bellum gesserunt?* To which he answers: *Carthaginienses*.²³ Their other characteristic is *perfidia*.²⁴ *Perfidus Hannibal* or *perfidus Poe-*

¹² H. Myśliwiec: “Zur Prosodie des punischen Namens ‘Hannibal’ im Latein.” *Eos* 1990, Vol. 78, pp. 315–324.

¹³ Enn. *Var.* 13; Varro *Menn.* 213.

¹⁴ Aul. Gell. *NA* 4, 7, 1–5: [...] *Is* (sc. Valerius Probus) ‘*Hannibalem*’ et ‘*Hasdrubalem*’ et ‘*Hamilcarem*’ ita pronuntiabat, ut *paenultimam circumflecteret* [...].

¹⁵ Hor. 2, 12, 2; 3, 6, 36; 4, 8, 6.

¹⁶ Mart. 4, 14, 2; 13, 73, 2; Stat. 4, 6, 106. See also Liv. 22, 59, 14: *barbaro ac Poeno*.

¹⁷ Plaut. *Poen.* 111–113.

¹⁸ Translation: G.F. Franko in: G.F. Franko: “The Characterization of Hanno in Plautus’ *Poenulus*.” *AJPh* 1996, Vol. 117, p. 429.

¹⁹ Liv. 22, 1, 4; Polyb. 3, 78; App. *Ann.* 21–22.

²⁰ Liv. 21, 34, 1.

²¹ Liv. 5, 27, 8.

²² Liv. 1, 53, 4.

²³ Cato *fr.* 195b.

²⁴ M. Dubuisson: “L’Image du Carthaginois dans la littérature latine.” In: *Studia Phoenicia*. Vol. I–II. Eds. E. Gubel, E. Lipiński, B. Servais-Soyez. Leuven 1983, pp. 159–167.

nus is a topos, found very often in poetry, especially of Augustan period. Ovid (*perfide Poene*),²⁵ Horace and also Ausonius (*perfidus Hannibal*)²⁶ use this topos. The ancient authors wrote also that Carthaginians excelled others in *avaritia*, however, *avaritia* and *astutia* may have simply been Phoenician heritage linked with their mercantile abilities. A fact that is confirmed in the works of Wathélet and Capomacchia.²⁷

The author of *Punica* employs a whole range of ethnographic and mythological epithets. When writing about Carthaginians he uses such adjectives as: *Agenorei*, *Cadmei*, *Elissei*, *Phoenici*, *Pygmaliones*, *Sarrani*, *Sidonii* and *Tyrrii*. Hannibal, in turn, is called *Libys*, *Barcaeus* and *Bellides*. The Romans are referred to as *Troii*, *Dardanii*, *Tyrrheni*.

At the very beginning of *Punica* there is a longer description of Hannibal:

Ingenio motus avidus fideique sinister
Is fuit, exsuperans astu, sed devius aequi.
Armato nullus divum pudor; improba virtus
Et pacis despectus honos; penitusque medullis
Sanguinis humani flagrat sitis.²⁸

By nature he was eager for action and faithless to his plighted word, a past master in cunning but a strayer from justice. Once armed, he had no respect for heaven; he was brave for evil and despised the glory of peace; and thirst for human blood burned in his inmost heart.²⁹

This corresponds with the description of Hannibal given by Livy, in book 21, where the historian summarising what he has already said about Hannibal, reiterates so to speak the complete set of his *vitia*, which since then becomes the canon and among those *inhumana crudelitas*³⁰ occupies the top position (followed by: *perfidia plus quam Punica, nihil veri, nihil sancti, nullus deum metus, nullum ius iurandum, nulla religio*).

It is worth noting that in Silius's presentation of Hannibal his cruelty seems to be a prevailing feature.³¹ The idea of cruelty expressed through adjectives con-

²⁵ Ovid. *Fasti* 3, 148; 6, 241.

²⁶ Hor. 4, 4, 49; Ausonius *Epist.* 36, 54.

²⁷ P. Wathélet: "Les Phéniciens et la tradition Homérique." In: *Studia Phoenicia*. Vol. I–II. Eds. E. Gubel, E. Lipiński, B. Servais-Soyez. Leuven 1983, p. 241; A.M.G. Capomacchia: "L'avidità dei Fenici." In: *Atti del II Congresso Internazionale di Studi Fenici e Punici, Roma, 9–14 Novembre 1987*. Vol. I. Roma 1991, pp. 267–269.

²⁸ *Pun.* 1, 56–69.

²⁹ Translation J.D. Duff: Silius Italicus: *Punica*. Ed. J.D. Duff, Vol. 1. London–Cambridge 1934.

³⁰ Liv. 21, 4, 9.

³¹ *Pun.* 9, 655.

nected with blood is quite frequent and according to François Spaltenstein,³² the author of the only commentary to *Punica*, although it appears to be traditionally attributed to Hannibal (Hamilcar: *Pun.* 1, 147–148: *asper amore sanguinis*), it was developed by Silius in such expressions as: *penitusque medullis sanguinis humani flagrat sitis*,³³ *sanguineus*,³⁴ *cruentus*,³⁵ and *sanguine laetum humano*.³⁶

It goes without saying that these make up an extremely evocative vision of Hannibal. Cruelty is a feature shared by an enemy and the Punic. The motif of blood not only shows the efficiency of Hannibal's actions, but also, indicating his cruelty by means of this hyperbole, simply builds up the atmosphere of terror. It can be seen in Livy, who describes the Punic army as “a thousand times bathed in Roman blood” *perfusum miliens cruore Romano*.³⁷

Other authors, when writing about fear, used the adjective *dirus*, which occurs only a few times in *Punica* (Horace: *Hannibalemque dirum*³⁸; *dirus Afer*³⁹; Juvenal: *dirus Hannibal*⁴⁰; Sidonius: *dirum Hannibalem*⁴¹). *Dirus* as well as Greek words φοβερός and δεινός present Hannibal as a terrifying individual. One that brings fear or even terror. *Dirus* is a synonym of Greek δεινός.

Coming back to *crudelitas*, in a scene from book 8 Silius describes how after the battle of Cannae Hannibal ordered that a bridge is built out of dead bodies: *pons ecce cadentum / corporibus struitur [...]*.⁴² It is a very interesting fragment due to the fact that the event is also mentioned briefly in just one sentence by Livius,⁴³ Valerius Maximus,⁴⁴ and also later by Florus⁴⁵ and Appian.⁴⁶ It is also extremely interesting that this idea was used by Caesar in Munda in 46 BC, who used dead bodies to build a fortification (*agger*).⁴⁷ It is even more interesting to note that this event is described by all the aforementioned authors with an exception of Silius,

³² F. Spaltenstein: *Commentaire des Punica de Silius Italicus*. T. 1 (liv. 1–8). Geneve 1986, p. 13.

³³ *Pun.* 1, 59–60.

³⁴ *Pun.* 1, 40; See also: M. Fucecchi: “Empieta e titanismo nella rappresentazione Siliana di Annibale.” *Orpheus* 1990, Vol. 11, p. 22.

³⁵ *Pun.* 10, 265–266; 12, 168. Also: Lucan. *Phars.* 4, 788–800.

³⁶ *Pun.* 11, 250–251.

³⁷ Liv. 30, 28, 5.

³⁸ Hor. 3, 6, 30.

³⁹ Hor. 4, 4, 42.

⁴⁰ Iuv. 7, 161.

⁴¹ Sid. Apoll. 7, 129–130.

⁴² *Pun.* 8, 668–670.

⁴³ Liv. 23, 5, 12: [...] *pontibus ac molibus ex humanorum corporum strue faciendis [...]*.

⁴⁴ Val. Max. 9, 2 ext., 2: *Eorum dux Hannibal, cuius maiore ex parte virtus saevitia constabat, in flumine (Vergello) corporibus Romanis ponte facto exercitum transduxit [...]*.

⁴⁵ Flor. 1, 22, 18: *Documenta cladis cruentus aliquamdiu Aufidus, pons de cadaveribus iussu ducis factus in torrente Vergelli [...]*.

⁴⁶ App. *Annib.* 121.

⁴⁷ Flor. 2, 13.

and obviously Livy, whose description of the battle of Munda was part of book 115 and did not survive. Another interesting thing is that Valerius Maximus includes the description of the fortification raising in the part called *de necessitate*, while the construction of the bridge is described in the part called *de crudelitate*. In this way, the same situation, utilising corpses of the opponents as a building material is once considered a necessity, and another time it is seen as cruelty. Despite its gruesomeness it may have a somewhat positive overtone – showing the determination and the resourcefulness of the leader (provided he is not Hannibal). It might have also been some kind of a general topos, which can be proven by the fact of Arrian quoting Ptolemaios⁴⁸ in the description of Alexander's army crossing a ravine over dead bodies lying there.

What should be noted is that *crudelitas* is also a topos used to characterise bad emperors (among them Domitian; it was during his reign that *Punica* was created. The very same Domitian – according to Suetonius⁴⁹ – killed a man because he named his slaves Mago and Hannibal). Whereas the good ones were characterised by traditional Roman virtues,⁵⁰ among which we can find *clementia*.

Historians studying *Punica* believe that Silius presents actions of Hannibal as a result of *ira*, *furor*, and *odium*⁵¹ – the emotions that contrast the stoic nature of Romans, but explaining perfectly the gloomy nature of Hannibal portrayed in *Punica*.

There can also be pointed that the occasional discrepancies do not change the said image of Hannibal. Neither the order *parce ferro* which is not consistent with the typical image, present in Florus⁵² and Augustin,⁵³ nor *clementia* or *humanitas*⁵⁴ of Hannibal shown also by Silius – for example in the scene of Marcellus's⁵⁵ – or Paulus's funeral influenced the change of the way Hannibal is perceived because they were additional elements in this typified image, and as such they were usually omitted and forgotten.

The author of *Punica* preserved the stereotypical image of Hannibal but the completion of this image is original. The text of *Punica* includes all the historical facts but they are expended with the adjectives and the constant oppositions to

⁴⁸ Arrianus *Hist.* 2, 11, 8.

⁴⁹ Suet. *Dom.* 10.

⁵⁰ I. Lewandowski: *Historiografia rzymska*. Poznań 2007, p. 409.

⁵¹ M.A. Vinchesi: "Introduzione." In: Silius Italicus: *Le guerre puniche*. Ed. M.A. Vinchesi, Vol. 1. Milano 2004, p. 41. See also *Pun.* 7, 578.

⁵² Flor. 1, 22, 17.

⁵³ Aug. *Civ. Dei* 3, 19: *De Cannensi autem mirabiliter horrendo malo quid dicam, ubi Hannibal, cum esset crudelissimus, tamen tanta inimicorum atrocissimorum caede satiatius parci iussisse perhibetur?*

⁵⁴ Val. Max. 5, 1, ext. 6.

⁵⁵ M. Caltabiano: "La morte del console Marcello nella tradizione storiografica." In: *Storiografia e propaganda*. Ed. M. Sordi. Milano 1975, pp. 65–81; G. Brizzi: "Riflessioni sulla morte di un console." In: Idem: *Studi di storia Annibalica*. Faenza 1984, pp. 33–43.

the Romans and *Romanitas*. Owing to all that, *Punica* accomplishes its goal – the struggle of the Romans with the Carthaginians is presented in an epic form, which helps to immortalise the glory and achievements of the great old Rome. The struggle ends with victory that is repeated again and again with each new reading of *Punica*.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ See: R. Marks: *From Republic to Empire. Scipio Africanus in the Punica of Silius Italicus*. Frankfurt am Main 2005.