

### Fashioning Barbarian Women: Reading the *Other* in Silius Italicus' *Punica*

#### 1. Children Sacrifice (*Punica* 4.765-767)

*mos fuit in populis, quos condidit advena Dido  
poscere caede deos veniam ac flagrantibus aris,  
infandum dictu, parvos imponere natos.*

The people, whom Dido founded when she came to Africa, had the custom to ask the gods for mercy through sacrifice and to offer up their children upon fiery altars, **a custom horrible to tell.**<sup>1</sup>

#### 2. Ennius (fr.214 Skutsch)

*Poeni suos soliti dis sacrificare puellos*

The Carthaginians are accustomed to sacrificing their young boys to the gods.

#### 3. Hannibal's Rejection of the Carthaginian Custom (*Punica* 4.814-818)

*at puer armorum et belli servabitur heres.  
spes, o nate, meae Tyriarumque unica rerum  
Hesperia minitante salus, terraque fretoque  
certare Aeneadis, dum stabit vita, memento.  
perge (patent Alpes) nostroque incumbe labori.*

But the boy will be spared as the heir of arms and war. O my son, you are my hopes and the only safeguard of the Carthaginian affairs with Italy threatening [us]; remember to fight against the Aeneadae, both on land and in the sea as long as you live. Go forward (the Alps lie open) and exert yourself on our task.

#### 4. Imilce the Bacchant (*Punica* 4.774-777)

*asperat haec foedata genas lacerataque crines  
atque urbem complet maestis clamoris Imilce,  
Edonis ut Pangaea super trieteride mota  
it iuga et inclusum suspirat pectore Bacchum.*

Imilce aggravates the situation by disfiguring her cheeks and tearing her hair and fills the city with woeful cries. **As the woman of the Edoni**, maddened by the triennial festival, speeds over the ridges of Mt. Pangaeus and breathes Bacchus who is enclosed in her heart.

#### 5. Seneca's Andromache as *servatrix pueri* (*Troades* 672-677)

*qualis Argolicas ferox  
turmas Amazon stravit, aut qualis deo  
percussa Maenas entheo silvas gradu  
armata thyrsos terret atque expers sui  
vulnus dedit nec sensit, in medios ruam  
tumuloque cineris socia defenso cadam.*

Just as the fierce Amazon laid low the Greek squadrons, or as a **Maenad**, struck by the god and armed with the thyrsus terrifies the woodlands with her frenzied steps and, out of her mind, wounds without knowing it, so I shall rush into your midst and, wedded to ashes, fall in the defense of this mound.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Translation is mine unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Text and translation are taken from Fantham (1982).

6. Imilce's speech (*Punica* 4.779-802)

*io coniunx, quocumque in cardine mundi  
bella moves, huc signa refer. violentior hic est,  
hic hostis propior. tu nunc fortasse sub ipsis  
urbis Dardaniae muris vibrantia tela  
excipis intrepidus clipeo saevamque coruscans  
lampada Tarpeis infers incendia tectis.  
interea tibi prima domus atque unica proles  
heu gremio in patriae Stygias raptatur ad aras.  
i nunc, Ausonios ferro populare penates  
et vetitas molire vias. i, pacta resigna  
per cunctos iurata deos. sic praemia reddidit  
Carthago et tales iam nunc tibi solvit honores.*

*quae porro haec pietas delubra adspergere tabo  
heu primae scelerum causae mortalibus aegris,  
naturam nescire deum! iusta ite precatum  
ture pio caedumque feros avertite ritus.  
mite et cognatum est homini deus. hactenus, oro,  
sit satis ante aras caesos vidisse iuencos.  
aut si velle nefas superos fixumque sedetque,  
me, me, quae genui, vestris absumite votis.  
cur spoliare iuvat Libycas hac indole terras?  
an flendae magis Aegates et mersa profundo  
Punica regna forent, olim si sorte cruenta  
esset tanta mei virtus praerepta mariti?*

7. The Result (*Punica* 4.803-807)

*haec dubios vario divumque hominisque timore  
ad cauta illexere patres, ipsique relictum,  
abnueret sortem an superum pareret honori.  
tum vero trepidare sui vix compos Imilce  
magnanimi metuens immitia corda mariti.*

O my husband, in whatever frontier of the world you are now stirring up war, bring the standards back here. Here there is a more violent, a more pressing foe. Perhaps at this moment beneath the walls themselves of the Dardanian city, you, fearless, receive the hurtling missiles with your shield and bring fire to the Tarpeian houses by brandishing a dreadful torch. In the meantime, your offspring, the first and only one of your house, alas, is seized in the center of your country for an infernal sacrifice. Go now, ravage the household gods of the Romans with your sword and proceed in forbidden paths. Go, break the treaties witnessed by all gods. In this way Carthage returns you the rewards and pays you back now with so great honors.

Moreover, what sort of religiousness is this, to sprinkle the temples with gore? Alas, the primary cause of crime for wretched mortals is to ignore the nature of the gods! Go to pray for lawful things with pious incense and withdraw the savage rites of slaughter. God is gentle and akin to human beings. To this extent, I beg you, let it suffice to see slain cattle before the altars. Or, if it is established and settled that the gods like **impious deeds**, slay me, me, who gave birth [to this child], for [the fulfillment of] your vows. Why is it pleasing to deprive the land of Libya of this child's charismatic nature? Or would not the islands of the Aegates and the Punic kingdom, sunk beneath the water, have been more lamentable, if long ago such a virtue of my husband had been seized prematurely because of the bloody lot?

These words allured the senators, hesitating on account of various fears of the gods and the man, to a policy of prudence. And it was left to Hannibal himself to decide whether he would reject the lot or would obey the rite. Then indeed Imilce was at a loss, hardly in control of herself, because she was afraid of the inexorable heart of her high-minded husband.

8. The Omen (*Punica* 16.118-121)

*huic fesso, quos dura fuga et nox suaserat atra,  
carpentii somnos subitus rutilante coruscum  
vertice fulsit apex, crispamque involvere visa est  
mitis flamma comam atque hirta se spargere fronte.*

While [Masinissa], tired, was enjoying sleep, which the harsh flight and the dark night had brought, suddenly his head gleamed brightly with a reddening crest [of flame]. And the gentle flame was seen to envelop his curly hair and to spread itself on his hairy temple.

9. A mother's prophecy (*Punica* 16.124-134)

*at grandaeva deum praenoscens omina mater  
'sic, sic, caelicolae, portentaque vestra secundi  
condite' ait. 'duret capiti per saecula lumen.  
ne vero, ne, nate, deum tam laeta pavesce  
prodigia aut sacras metue inter tempora flammis.  
hic tibi Dardaniae promittit foedera gentis,  
hic tibi regna dabit regnis maiora paternis  
ignis et adiunget Latiis tua nomina fati.'  
sic vates, iuvenisque animum tam clara movebant  
monstra nec a Poenis ulli virtutis honores,  
Hannibal ipse etiam iam iamque modestior armis.*

**But his aged mother, foreknowing the omens of the gods**, said: 'In this way, in this way, o inhabitants of heaven, ratify prosperously your portents. Let the light of the head last for all ages. **Do not**, my son, **do not fear** so favorable **signs** of the gods; do not be afraid of the sacred flames on your temples. This fire promises you the treaties of the Dardanian people, this fire will provide you with a kingdom greater than your paternal kingdom and will add your name to the fate of Latium.' **Thus spoke the prophetess**, and such portents were urging the heart of the young man, not any honors for courage from the Carthaginians. And even Hannibal himself was little by little becoming more restrained in war.

10. Pomponia Admonishes Scipio in the Underworld (*Punica* 13.634-636)

*verum age, nate, tuos ortus, ne bella pavescas  
ulla nec in caelum dubites te attollere factis,  
quando aperire datur nobis, nunc denique disce.*

However, my son, come on and learn at last now your birth, inasmuch as it is given to us to disclose [the future], so that **you shall not fear any wars** or doubt that you shall raise yourself to heaven through your deeds.

11. Scipio to his Mother Pomponia (*Punica* 13.623-625)

*sic iuvenis prior: 'o magni mihi numinis instar,  
cara parens, quam, te ut nobis vidisse liceret,  
optassem Stygias vel leto intrare tenebras.*

Thus the young man spoke first: 'O dear parent, **for me equal to a mighty goddess**, how much would I have liked to enter the Stygian darkness even through death, so that it would be allowed me to see you!

12. Masinissa's Address to Scipio (*Punica* 16.140-145)

*caelestum monita et sacrae responsa parentis  
disque tua, o Rutulum rector, gratissima virtus  
avulsum Tyriis huc me duxere volentem.  
Si tibi non segnes tua contra fulmina saepe  
visi stare sumus, dignam te, nate Tonantis,  
afferimus dextram.*

The warnings of the gods, **the interpretation of my sacred mother**, and your virtue most pleasing to the gods, leader of the Rutulians, have led me here of my own accord leaving behind the Tyrians. If we often seemed to you to have withstood against your thunderbolts bravely, **son of the Thunder-God**, we offer an alliance worthy of your acceptance.

13. The Arrival of the Magna Mater (*Punica* 17.1-4)

*Hostis ut Ausoniis decederet advena terris,  
fatidicae fuerant oracula prisca Sibyllae  
caelicolum Phrygia genetricem sede petitam  
Laomedontae sacrandam moenibus urbis;*

**So that the foreign enemy departs from Italian soil**, the ancient oracles of Sibylla the prophetess had it that the mother of the gods, sought from her Phrygian seat, had to be worshiped within the walls of the Laomedontian city;

14. New worship (*Punica* 17.18-22)

*circum arguta cavis tinnitibus aera, simulque  
certabant rauco resonantia tympana pulsu  
semivirique chori, gemino qui Dindyma monte  
casta colunt, qui Dictaeo bacchantur in antro,  
quique Idaea iuga et lucos novere silentes.*

All round the cymbals made a noise with their hollow tinklings, and at the same time the drums vied with the cymbals resounding with their hoarse note. And the choruses of the half-men, who worship the sacred cult in the twin peaks of Dindyma, who **revel** in the cave of Dicte, and who have known the ridges of Ide and the silent groves.

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