LOHENSTEIN'S *SOPHONISBE*:

A Vindication of the Heroine

By Ritchie Robertson

Lohenstein's Sophonisbe *(1680) stands out for the exoticism with which the racial and, above all, cultural difference of Carthage is displayed, with the help of Lohenstein's copious and erudite notes. The heroine has been much criticized for her desperate measures, particularly her readiness to sacrifice one of her sons to propitiate the gods. However, Lohenstein represents this as voluntary and heroic self-sacrifice. All Sophonisbe's actions, though sometimes seemingly inconsistent, are explained by her patriotism. Her final suicide is a heroic act by the standards of such Roman exemplars as Cato the Younger.*

Of Daniel Casper von Lohenstein (1635-83) it has been said: "Both the power of his language and the sweep of his characterisation make Lohenstein the best dramatist in German before Schiller."[1] Yet even in Germany he is probably read only by specialists in seventeenth-century literature. His tragedies fall into three groups: the Turkish plays, *Ibrahim Bassa* (performed in 1650 or 1651, published in 1653) and *Ibrahim Sultan* (published in 1673), set at the Ottoman court; the Roman plays, *Agrippina* and *Epicharis* (both published in 1665); and the African plays, the first of which, *Cleopatra*, was first published in 1661 and in a revised version in 1680, while *Sophonisbe* was performed in May 1669 and published, probably with little revision, in 1680. It was probably written between 1666 and 1669.

Four of Lohenstein's plays are named after the women who are their central characters. The prominence of these women enables the dramatist to display and investigate their characters in great detail and – I would argue – with both subtlety and sympathy. These women are neither saints nor monsters. Two of them, Cleopatra and Sophonisbe, are trying desperately to preserve the respective domains from Roman imperialism and to avoid the personal humiliation of being taken to Rome and displayed in a triumph. Another, Agrippina, is trying to avoid being murdered by her son Nero, whom

[1] Watanabe-O'Kelly 1997, 134.

she has forced into an incestuous relationship. The fourth, Epicharis, an ex-slave, takes the lead in an unsuccessful conspiracy against Nero and continues to defy her tyrannical opponents under torture. All these dramatic figures demand close analysis. They all exercise agency and autonomy: even Epicharis has voluntarily chosen to suffer martyrdom, unlike, for example, the Christian martyr heroine in Gryphius' *Catharina von Georgien* (written 1647, published 1657). Their complexity is not captured by such incautious general claims as: "the period after the Thirty Years War either depicts larger-than-life transgressive monsters or heroic viragos".[2]

In the present article I can make the case only on behalf of Sophonisbe. As a resistance leader, she resorts to a variety of Machiavellian ruses which would make her conduct appear highly reprehensible unless one acknowledges that her driving force is the patriotic desire to preserve her country's freedom. Even her notorious participation in an act of human sacrifice is palliated, firstly, because Lohenstein makes the victim a voluntary participant, and hence an agent, in a well-authenticated national custom, and secondly because Lohenstein, as we shall see presently, draws on comparative ethnography to depict Carthage as an exotic society which is not necessarily to be judged by either Roman or Christian standards.

A few words introducing Lohenstein and his theatre may be useful. The predicate "von Lohenstein" was acquired in 1670 by Johann Casper and bequeathed to his son, the dramatist Daniel Casper (1635-83). Daniel Casper – henceforth to be called Lohenstein – was not only the leading figure, alongside Andreas Gryphius, in the Silesian school of tragedy, but also a scholar and a man of affairs. Born in Breslau (now Wrocław), he studied law at Leipzig and Tübingen, then travelled, probably as companion to a nobleman, through Germany to Switzerland and the Netherlands. As a citizen of the Habsburg Empire, he also travelled in Austria and Hungary as far as the Ottoman frontier. The Ottoman Empire was still a major threat: in the year of Lohenstein's death it would lay siege to Vienna and very nearly conquer the city. Having seen the world, Lohenstein married and settled down as a lawyer in Breslau, where he wrote most of his tragedies in the 1660s; they were performed on special occasions by schoolboys in the local *Gymnasium*. After holding several prominent administrative positions in Breslau, he went to Vienna in 1675 to represent his city in negotiations over taxation with the Imperial court. Here he made such a good impression that the Emperor, Leopold I, bestowed on him the title of Imperial Councillor.

German Baroque drama, and especially that of Lohenstein, comes from a world that now seems strange and remote. That is partly because the dramatic

[2] Watanabe-O'Kelly 2010, 6.

conventions are unfamiliar. The dialogue is stylized and non-naturalistic. Like contemporary French tragedy, it is in alexandrines (the blank verse familiar on the English stage entered German drama only with Wieland's *Lady Johanna Gray* (1758), appropriately on an English subject). There are long stretches of stichomythia: one such exchange in *Cleopatra* covers over 100 lines (III 416-522 in the 1661 version, III 698-806 in that of 1680).[3] The language is extravagantly inventive, with imagery taken from natural history and the classics; the effect is sometimes dizzying. A particularly striking example occurs in *Sophonisbe*, where Masanissa denounces the cruelty of the Roman general Scipio, who has told him he must end his relationship with the Carthaginian queen Sophonisbe, as follows:

> Steinharter Scipio! den ein Hircanisch Tyger /
> Ein Arimaspisch Wolf / ein Basilißk' am Niger
> Mit Gift und Blutt gesäugt! der Zembl- und Caspisch Eiß
> Im kalten Hertzen nehrt (IV 369-72)
>
> Stone-hearted Scipio! whom a Hyrcanian tiger, an Arimaspian wolf, a basilisk from the Niger, suckled on poison and blood! whose cold heart contains the ice of Novaya Zemlya and the Caspian Sea […][4]

This far-fetched imagery, often thought typically baroque, immediately recalls Shakespeare:

> Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
> The arm'd rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger,
> Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
> Shall never tremble.[5]

Such language evidently thrilled Lohenstein's contemporaries but helped to cause the eclipse of his reputation in the early eighteenth century, when he was accused of writing bombast ("Schwulst"). By then, public taste was moving away from heroic rhetoric and towards the lifelike expression of emotions to which middle-class audiences could relate. The German stage witnessed "the transformation of a theatre of cruelty into a theatre of sympathy".[6] Lohenstein's reputation would not recover till the revival of interest in Baroque literature in the early twentieth century, and then only among a small academic constituency.[7]

The basic action and the constellation of characters in Lohenstein's *Sophonisbe* are familiar from other dramas on this theme. We have the

[3] Quotations from Lohenstein's plays are identified in the text by Act and line number.
[4] This and all subsequent translations are my own.
[5] *Macbeth*, III.iv.100-03, in Shakespeare, 1951, 1014.
[6] Richter 2005, 442.
[7] Gillespie 1965, 14-25; Meyer-Kalkus 1986, 21-25; Martino 1975.

Carthaginian queen, wife of the Numidian king Syphax, faced with the Roman advance into North Africa; the Roman general, Scipio, who appears only in the fourth Act and establishes himself as a figure of authority and exemplar of Stoic self-mastery; and between them another Numidian king, Masanissa (or Masinissa: Lohenstein spells his name both ways), who falls uncontrollably in love with Sophonisbe, even marries her, but is compelled by Scipio to abandon her and return to his allegiance to Rome.

Sophonisbe has another striking feature, absent from the many other plays about this fascinating heroine: exoticism.[8] In set-piece scenes and speeches which provide relief from the headlong dramatic action, the erudite Lohenstein explores in rich antiquarian detail the distinctive character of Carthaginian culture. Masanissa describes its history and achievements to the Roman officer Laelius:

> Wir sind Phœnicier; Tsor unser Vaterland/
> Vom grossen Chna gezeugt; durch Sud und Ost bekant.
> Wie weit der Schatten reicht/ der Erdkreiß Sternen schauet/
> Hat unser Mast gefahrn/ und unsre Hand gebauet.
> Wir gaben die Gesetz" und Bau-Kunst aller Welt.
> Wir haben euch gelehrt/ wie man das Kriegs-Volk stellt/
> Wie man die Hand zur Zung/ und's Auge macht zu Ohren/
> Durch die erfundne Schrifft; die Weißheit ist gebohren
> Bey uns/ und nach Athen und Memphis überbracht.
> Die ersten Schiffe sind von unser Axt gemacht/
> Die Rechen-Kunst entsprang aus unserem Gehirne/
> Wir segelten zu erst nach Leitung der Gestirne/
> Die Seulen Hercules/ wo er geruhet hat/
> War'n in der Erde Ring ins grosse Meer ein Pfad
> Bis in das rothe Meer umb Africa zu schiffen
> Bis in der Sonnen Bett' in eine neue Welt/
> Die Kaccabe noch itzt für ein Geheimnis hält. (III 173-90)
>
> We are Phoenicians; our fatherland is Tyre; we were born of the great Chna and are known throughout the South and East. Our ships have

[8] Nathaniel Lee's *Sophonisba* (1675) has a scene set in "Bellona's Temple", including a human sacrifice, conjuration of spirits, and a character called Cumana, suggesting the Cumaean Sibyl, who falls into prophetic fury, but there is no attempt at ethnographic authenticity. We do not learn how a temple to Bellona, the Roman goddess of war, comes to be on Carthaginian territory. Emanuel Geibel's *Sophonisbe* (1868) transfers Sophonisbe's exotic ceremonial role to her friend the priestess Thamar, who finally sets fire to the temple at Cirta and plunges into the flames; the central action is a typically nineteenth-century love-triangle of Sophonisbe, the weak Massanissa, and the awe-inspiring and magnanimous Scipio; local colour is provided by many references to the North African landscape (the Atlas mountains, the simoom or desert wind) and fauna (Sophonisbe hunts ostriches and kills a panther).

> sailed and our hands have built as far as the shadow stretches and the earth beholds the stars. We gave laws and architecture to the whole world. We taught you how to deploy an army and how the invention of writing makes the hand into a tongue and the eye into ears; wisdom was born among us and taken thence to Athens and Memphis. The first ships were made by our axes. Mathematics sprang from our brains. We were the first to navigate by the stars. Within the circle of the earth, the Pillars of Hercules, where he rested, were a path into the great ocean, so that we sailed all round Africa as far as the Red Sea and followed the declining sun into a new world which Kaccabe [Carthage] still keeps secret.[9]

The exploration of Carthage's history and customs is not just a gratuitous addition to the story of Sophonisbe, resulting from Lohenstein's antiquarian curiosity. It establishes Sophonisbe's racial and cultural difference from the Romans. She herself identifies emphatically as an African: "Ich Mohrin" (I a Moor, II 92). Racial difference is often mentioned: the Carthaginians are "edle Mohren" (noble Moors, III 229); "braun" (brown, III 337). More important, however, is cultural difference, for it provides an explanatory context for some of Sophonisbe's actions which have been condemned by many commentators. Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, despite acknowledging her "undoubted courage and determination", thinks that her wearing men's clothes and being prepared to sacrifice her children shows that "this woman is so unnatural that she is not human at all".[10] Such a conclusion may seem convincing when one is drawing up a moral balance-sheet in one's study, but in the theatre, or (since *Sophonisbe* has seldom if ever been staged since the seventeenth century) in an immersive reading experience, Sophonisbe's adventures in the fast-moving action call forth engagement and considerable sympathy, without which the play would make little sense.

Sophonisbe's cultural difference helps us make sense of her first patriotic act – a human sacrifice. According to the historian Diodorus Siculus (1st century BCE), followed by many other authorities whom Lohenstein cites in his extensive notes, the Carthaginians, in times of national emergency, were in the habit of sacrificing their children to the god Moloch. Lohenstein has Sophonisbe invoking the goddess Baaltis. We are to imagine a statue of the goddess with outstretched arms; the victim is to roll down one of the arms into a fiery pit hidden in the statue's belly.[11] Shocking though this doubtless

[9] "Chna" is a shortened form of "Chanaan" (Canaan), the son of Ham (Gen. 9:18), as Lohenstein explains in one of his many notes (Lohenstein 2013, 664). In the play, Carthage is also called by its Greek names Kaccabe, Carchedon and Chaedreanech.

[10] Watanabe-O'Kelly 2010, 195, 198.

[11] Lohenstein 2013, 592. Lohenstein draws on many ancient sources, the less accessible of which he finds in modern mythographic compilations such as John Selden's *De diis Syris*

is, Lohenstein does take some steps, not to condone this act of sacrifice, but at least to make it intelligible. Most writers who evoke these Carthaginian ceremonies imagine infants being torn from their mother's arms by priests, as in Christian Dietrich Grabbe's play *Hannibal* (1835). Here, however, Sophonisbe's two children are not infants, but boys old enough to understand what they are doing and to be willing agents instead of passive victims. When Sophonisbe tells them to draw lots to see which of them will be sacrificed, they both clamour for the honour. Adherbal says that as the elder he ought to die for his country, and expresses a sentiment which in many other contexts would be considered admirable: "Wie seelig / der für's Heil des Vaterland's verschmachtet!" (How happy is he who dies for the deliverance of his fatherland! I 400) With a writer so familiar with the classics as Lohenstein, the echo of Horace – "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" (The glorious and the decent way of dying | Is for one's country)[12] – cannot be accidental. The lot falls to the younger boy, Hierba, who is delighted at the prospect of performing this heroic deed, exclaiming "Glück zu!" (Hurrah! I 412). Sophonisbe is not ruthless or indifferent to her son's fate; she regrets having to perform the sacrifice herself (I 414) and feels upset, but agrees that the good of their country comes first:

> Nimm diesen Kuß noch hin. Erschrecklich Hertzens-Stos!
> Jedoch nur fort! Das Heil des Reiches geht für Kinder (I 430-1).
>
> Take this last kiss. What a dreadful blow to my heart! But carry on! The salvation of our kingdom is more important than children.

Besides humanizing the sacrifice in this way, Lohenstein introduces into both the text and the notes detailed reminders of the frequency of human sacrifice in the ancient world. Sophonisbe cites examples from Phoenicia, Egypt, the Druids, Crete, and Sparta. Lohenstein's notes recall how Abraham very nearly sacrificed his son Isaac, how Jephthah sacrificed his daughter in fulfilment of a rash vow, and mention also the sacrifice of Iphigenie by her father. They also go into some detail about the human sacrifices performed by the Aztecs in honour of their gods, for Lohenstein knew the theory of the contemporary historian Georg Horn that America had first been peopled by Carthaginian refugees, who of course brought their religious customs with them.[13] The horror of the ceremony (which is anyway interrupted before it

(1668), Athanasius Kircher's *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652-54), and Samuel Bochart's *Geographia sacra* (1646-51). Much can be learned about the intellectual world Lohenstein inhabited from Evans 1979, esp. 435-440. On the (strong) evidence for child sacrifice, see Miles 2010, 68-73; Stavrakopoulou 2010.

[12] Horace 1967, 145 (*Odes* III, 2).

[13] Lohenstein 2013, 670; Béhar 1988, 174.

can be completed) is counter-balanced by the philological and ethnographic interest of this information, and human sacrifice, especially with its biblical and classical precedents, ceases to be a uniquely Carthaginian practice and becomes a widespread custom throughout the pre-Christian world. Indeed, in its Carthaginian form it is represented here not as an atrocity but as a heroic self-sacrifice, comparable to death in battle (which down the ages has often been glorified by the language of sacrifice). Moreover, Lohenstein, who shows only a formal allegiance to Christianity, occasionally interprets Carthaginian behaviour in Christian terms: Gerald Gillespie notes how the Carthaginian priest Bogudes accepts martyrdom, using the Christian image of the cross (III 317), thereby suggesting that Lohenstein's "cold examination of belief and action as *historical facts*" implies a position above and beyond any particular religion.[14]

Near the end of the play, in order to learn what her chances of survival are, Sophonisbe summons up the ghost of Dido, the legendary founder of Carthage. The necessary ritual is described in considerable detail; Lohenstein's notes cite a great variety of sources and mention also the incident in the Old Testament when Saul summoned up the ghost of the prophet Samuel (see I Samuel 28). Lohenstein takes care to distance this Dido from the unfortunate queen who, in Virgil's *Aeneid*, burns herself on a pyre when her lover Aeneas abandons her. In the notes, as Jane O. Newman has pointed out, Lohenstein dismisses Virgil's narrative as a fiction, claiming on the authority of both ancient and modern historians that Dido really immolated herself in order to avoid an unwelcome marriage to her neighbour King Hiarbas.[15] Instead of the *Aeneid*, Lohenstein draws on a number of less-known sources, specified in his notes, which represent Dido as a strong leader calling for resistance to Roman conquest.[16] Even as a ghost, she retains her manly heart ("Ihr männlich Hertz", V 82). She foretells that although Rome will triumph over Carthage, in the long term Rome will become corrupt and its empire will be overwhelmed by Germanic tribes, while the Arabs will overrun North Africa and Spain; Ferdinand (king of Aragon, who married Isabella of Castile and united the kingdoms, 1469), however, will ultimately expel the Arabs from Granada, their last stronghold, and Charles V will conquer parts of North Africa, preparing the way for future conquests to be undertaken by Leopold I, the Habsburg Emperor at the time when Lohenstein was writing. By the seventeenth century, the Habsburgs will rule an empire on which the sun never sets.[17] She is, then, an honourable ancestor for

[14] Gillespie 1965, 123.
[15] Newman 2000, 66-67.
[16] Lohenstein 2013, 728-734; Newman 2000, 60-67.
[17] Lohenstein 2013, 778.

Sophonisbe, whose courage (gendered as a male quality) is symbolized by her twice dressing as a soldier (II 78, 322).

Sophonisbe's actions may well take one aback. Not only is she prepared to support the self-sacrifice of one of her children in order to gain the assistance of the Carthaginian gods (though she is prevented from going through with this act), but her marriage to Masanissa is bigamous since she is already married to the rival king Syphax. Dedicating the play to a nobleman, the Freiherr von Nesselrode, Lohenstein described the mis-adventures of Sophonisbe and Masanissa as illustrating the dangers of love and ambition. He mentioned particularly Sophonisbe's willingness to sacrifice one of her children in a ceremony in which she dresses as a man and another son puts on women's clothing.[18] In his notes, Lohenstein documents the practice of cross-dressing from a variety of classical and Hebrew sources, making it seem fascinating as well as reprehensible.

The play's official message, set out unequivocally in the dedication and the "Reyen" (a kind of allegorical pageant inserted between the acts), is not the same thing as its total impact on the spectator or reader. Condemning human sacrifice and bigamy, moreover, does not explain why Sophonisbe does these things. Some commentators have seen her as illustrating Walter Benjamin's remark about "a constantly shifting emotional storm in which the figures of Lohenstein sway about like torn and flapping banners".[19] Others have interpreted her as a single-minded Machiavellian intriguer, the female embodiment of reason of state.[20]

One can make sense of Sophonisbe's conduct in dramatic (as opposed to allegorical) terms by seeing her as motivated throughout by patriotism, which requires her to become, like Cleopatra in Lohenstein's other African play, a past mistress in dissimulation. She not only wants to save Carthage from Roman conquest but, again like Cleopatra, to save herself from being taken to Rome and displayed in a triumph. Like the great Hannibal, she belongs to the Barca family, who have fought most bitterly against the Romans. Her husband Syphax was previously allied to the Romans, but at Sophonisbe's urging he has broken off this alliance. We hear at the very beginning of the play that Sophonisbe's father Hasdrubal and Syphax have been defeated by another Numidian king, Masanissa, who has remained loyal to Rome and who is on the point of capturing Syphax's city of Cyrtha. The play begins with Masanissa reproaching his captive Syphax for being led into disloyalty by his wife. Sophonisbe's role in provoking the rebellion against Rome is confirmed in Act IV, when Syphax, confronting the Roman general Scipio, blames his

[18] Lohenstein 2013, 398.
[19] Benjamin 1977, 71.
[20] Newald 1951, 328.

wife for constantly urging him to break with Rome, and says it was insane folly of him to marry a woman from the Barca family.

When we first meet Sophonisbe, she is in her apartment, surrounded by her intimates, and has no reason to dissimulate. So we can believe her when she says she would rather suffer any torture than become subject to the Romans. From a succession of messengers, she learns, first, that Syphax has been defeated by Masanissa, second, that Masanissa has given her three hours in which to surrender the city, and if she refuses, Syphax will be beheaded. This choice plunges Sophonisbe into indecision. At one moment she says that even if her adversary has Syphax flayed, such atrocities will never cause the city to surrender; at the next, she says she will surrender to Rome and be shown in triumph so long as her husband is safe. Her companions remonstrate with her for not showing the spirit of her father Hasdrubal, and eventually the reflection that Syphax has not asked for his life to be saved carries the day. Sophonisbe assumes warlike determination, putting on armour and a helmet, and is hailed as Africa's counterpart to the Amazon queen Penthesilea (I 365).

Sophonisbe's conduct in the next few Acts would seem wildly inconsistent unless we remember that behind it lies her determination to save her people and herself from subjection to Rome at any cost. Thanks to treachery, the city of Cyrtha falls to Masanissa. Sophonisbe throws herself at Masanissa's feet, begging for mercy for herself and her sons. This has the desired effect on Masanissa. Having initially failed to recognize her in her male attire, he is astonished and moved, addressing her respectfully as "Mein Licht" (My light – II 134) and "Durchlauchste" (Your Highness –156), and ordering that she and her sons be carefully looked after. Left alone, he declares himself helplessly in love with her combination of beauty and courage, and resolves to kill his prisoner Syphax so that he can take the latter's place. Sophonisbe meanwhile enters Syphax's prison, still wearing male clothes, and tells him to change clothes with her and escape, leaving her in his place. Alone, she indicates that her plan is to exploit Masanissa's love for her; she regrets the injustice she will do to Syphax by abandoning him for Masanissa, but the stars demand it – "Jedoch / was widerstehn wir leitenden Gestirnen?" (But how can we resist the guidance of the stars? – II 299). The plan works: Masanissa enters the prison intending to kill Syphax, is surprised to find Sophonisbe there instead, declares his love for her, and insists that they shall be married forthwith. Sophonisbe, at the cost of bigamy, will thus be able to turn Masanissa against Rome.

Act III, which begins with Masanissa's associates remonstrating against the impending marriage, shows that her scheme is working, for Masanissa strongly implies that he is considering breaking his alliance with Rome and supporting the still powerful Carthage. The wedding then takes place, but is

interrupted by the arrival of a Roman officer, Laelius, who declares that Masanissa's marriage to Sophonisbe, a member of the Barca family, itself signals a breach with Rome. Eventually Laelius agrees to wait and accept the judgement of his commander Scipio, who is soon to arrive, but he is further incensed on learning that Sophonisbe, prevented by Syphax from sacrificing her son, has instead sacrificed two Roman captives. Laelius insists that in retaliation three Carthaginian captives, who are conveniently to hand, must be sacrificed (thereby annulling any ethical superiority the Romans might have claimed). The priest who has just married Sophonisbe and Masanissa steadfastly refuses to sacrifice his fellow-countrymen, preferring martyrdom to sacrilege (an indication that it is not only Christians who can accept martyrdom). In this impasse, Sophonisbe offers to perform the sacrifice herself, in order to confirm that she and Masanissa want to remain on friendly terms with Rome – an act of dissimulation necessitated by the circumstances.

However, Sophonisbe's determination is thwarted by her humanity. She recoils on discovering that one of the prisoners is her husband Syphax in disguise. Sophonisbe is not in fact capable of anything. Reproached for her duplicity, she tells Syphax that she still loves him but was compelled by an emergency ("Noth") to marry Masanissa for the sake of her deliverance ("Heil") (III 373-5). She must be sincere, since an out-and-out Machiavellian could have sacrificed Syphax to gain favour with the Romans.[21] She urges Syphax to see reason ("Vernunft", III 390), since a conflict between Syphax and Masanissa would achieve nothing, and by voluntarily handing her over to Masanissa he, Syphax, will be able to restore the good relations with Rome that he lost by changing sides. Her plan would seem to be this: previously she persuaded Syphax to switch sides, but he was defeated by the more powerful and effective Masanissa; she has used her sexuality to attract Masanissa, and intends him to be outwardly loyal to Rome (and he must of course seem so when a Roman officer is present), but Sophonisbe will persuade him in turn to break with Rome and support Carthage. But her plan fails, because Syphax understandably refuses to be replaced by Masanissa. Her plan could only have worked if she had the hardihood to kill Syphax, who would then have caused no more trouble. Had she been the monster that some commentators consider her, she would have disposed of Syphax when she got the chance. But her human emotions, which have already made it difficult (though not impossible) for her to follow the Carthaginian custom of sacrificing one's son, also prevent her from cold-bloodedly murdering her husband, and thus her humanity frustrates her Machiavellianism and seals her downfall.

[21] Gillespie 1965, 125.

The fourth Act is dominated by the long-awaited figure of Scipio. Scipio shrewdly interrogates Syphax and Masanissa separately; he has no contact with Sophonisbe at all (and there is here no question of a love-triangle, as in other some versions). First, Laelius reports to him how Masanissa defeated Syphax and captured Cyrtha, not mentioning that the victory was actually due to treachery. Scipio rebukes Syphax for breaking faith with the Romans, whereupon Syphax puts all the blame on Sophonisbe, abusing her in her absence as a destructive force like fire and plague, a worm, a viper, a scorpion, and an evil woman comparable to Medea and Circe. He claims that he was bewitched ("behext", IV 140). These denunciations say little about Sophonisbe herself, but a great deal about Syphax's wounded feelings and about his wish to exonerate himself from blame in the sight of the Romans. He gets little sympathy from Scipio, who judges that his emotions have carried him away ("Ich glaube Syphax schwermt von Unmuth/ Angst und Schmertzen", IV 110) and asserts that a man who marries such a pestilential woman has only himself to blame. Syphax is sent off to confinement.

Then Masanissa appears. Masanissa oscillates throughout between calculation and passion. In allying himself with Rome, he has prudently supported the side most likely to win. Passion for Sophonisbe, however, has overcome his prudence. He tries for a while to resist his passion by projecting its unacceptable character onto Sophonisbe, condemning her (as Syphax will do later) as a viper, a Medea, and so forth; but he presently admits that what has enchanted him is Sophonisbe's combination of beauty and spirit, the heart of Hercules in a woman's breast. When he confronts Scipio in Act IV, Masanissa is at a disadvantage. Scipio begins by congratulating him at length on his conquest of Cyrtha and promising to work on his behalf in Rome so that he will acquire additional kingdoms. The grateful Masanissa calls down blessings on Rome and Scipio. But Scipio has already found out from Syphax about Masanissa's infatuation with Sophonisbe. So, as Masanissa is about to leave the room, relieved to have got through his interview so well, Scipio – using a trick known to every police inspector – casually calls him back: "Jedoch halt! Masaniß'. Es fällt uns noch was ein." (Stop a minute, Masanissa, there was something else I wanted to say to you. IV 203) He asks about Sophonisbe, indicating that she is required in Rome as a trophy in his triumph. Masanissa soon crumbles, confessing his helpless devotion to Sophonisbe. In the course of a long stichomythic exchange, Scipio tells him that marriage to Sophonisbe is incompatible with his duty towards Rome.

This scene requires a somewhat critical look at Scipio. He is presented as the play's figure of authority. Everyone waits for his judgement. And, as a successful general, and the representative of Rome which is steadily enlarging its power over the known world, his authority is strengthened by

sheer military success. In the previous scene, however, we have had a glimpse of the basis on which his successes rest. When Syphax denounced Sophonisbe as a viper, Scipio replied that no woman could be trusted:

> Ein kluger Herrscher pfleget
> Für Weibern seinen Rath und Ohr zu schlüssen ein
> Wie Schlangen / die umbkreißt von dem Beschwerer sein. (IV 86-88)
>
> A sensible ruler keeps his counsel and his ear from women, who are like snakes circling round their conjurer.

This distrust of women reappears in Act IV, enlarged into a general aversion from sexual feeling which equates love with lust and sensuality:

> Von allen grossen Gaben
> Weiß ich mich sonsten arm / in der rühm' ich mich reich:
> Daß meinem Hertzen ist der Liebe Trieb zu weich /
> Die Wollust ist mir Gift / und Geilheit schmeckt mir herbe.
> (IV 274-77)
>
> I know myself to be lacking in great gifts, but I consider myself rich in this: that the impulse of love is too soft for my heart, that for me sensual pleasure is poison and lechery tastes bitter.

This makes Lohenstein's Scipio sharply different from his counterpart in Nathaniel Lee's *Sophonisba* (1675), who admits that he has known and overcome passion: "My vertue all the storms of Passion knows, / Has try"d its calms, its wondrous ebbs and flows."[22] For Lohenstein's Scipio, the highest virtue is reason ("Vernunft", IV 235) made manifest as prudence. He tells Masanissa to consult his own intelligence ("Verstand", IV 343) and his self-interested prudence: "Du bist dir selber klug" (You are prudent enough to consult your own interest, IV 344). When Masanissa objects that, as an African, he cannot help being a slave to his sensual passion, Scipio pooh-poohs this excuse by pointing to Hannibal, who is cold when drinking wine and icy when offered love: Hannibal is prudent ("klug", IV 317). What Scipio preaches is therefore virtue only in the Stoic sense of prudence, an ideal to which the senses are to be subordinated. It has been aptly said of him that "Scipio may appear to be moral, but in fact he is only puritanical for the sake of more effective involvement in history".[23] Scipio is, both in his actual dealings with people and in his general principles, a Machiavellian for whom amoral calculation is the high road to power.

In terms of the allegory that frames the play, in which Scipio is leading Masanissa back to virtue, his methods do not matter, but in terms of the

[22] Lee 1954-55, I, 95.

[23] Gillespie 1965, 128.

dramatic action we can see that Scipio is exercising a skilful combination of flattery and coercion which will ensure Masanissa's future obedience to Rome. "Machiavellian Scipio", as Gerald Gillespie calls him, thus corresponds to Sophonisbe, another Machiavellian, who will stop at almost nothing – as we have seen, she does draw the line at slaughtering her husband – in order to secure the state, Carthage, to which she is attached.[24] Masanissa falls between the two, an all-too-human figure who alternates between firm resolution and subjugation to what Scipio (and sometimes Masanissa himself) dismissively calls "Brunst" (erotic passion; IV 403, V 553). After his interview with Scipio, however, Masanissa has a change of heart. Reason and self-interest together dictate that Sophonisbe must meet her doom. Masanissa finds it difficult to reach this harsh decision, but despite his scruples, he concludes that in order to attain lasting fame, he must shun the temptations of his senses. His last act, therefore, is to send Sophonisbe a vial of poison to ensure that she will not fall into the hands of the Romans. Drastic as this sounds, it will in fact save her from the fate she most dreads, and confirms Masanissa's humanity. It also confirms, however, that under pressure from Scipio he has been successfully converted to Machiavellianism.

As for Sophonisbe, her Machiavellian policy has failed, and she courageously accepts the consequences. They are confirmed when the ghost of Dido foretells the impending destruction of Carthage. Seeing no hope, Sophonisbe and her sons are prepared to follow Dido's example of self-immolation by setting fire to the temple and citadel, and perishing in the flames, but then Masanissa's messenger arrives with poison. The boys, who were so eager to sacrifice themselves in Act I, are just as keen to follow their mother's example by committing suicide, an act that Sophonisbe commends as the final triumph over one's enemies and over the inconstancy of fortune:

> Recht so! wer hertzhaft stirbt / lacht Feinde / Glück und Zeit;
> Verwechselt Ruh und Ruhm mit Angst und Eitelkeit (V 479-80).
>
> Quite right! Someone who dies bravely can laugh at enemies, fortune,
> and time, and exchanges fear and vanity for rest and fame.

Her choice of suicide underlines Sophonisbe's heroic character and glorifies her even by Roman standards. Roman history is full of heroic suicides, the best-known probably being that of Cato the Younger, who killed himself in 46 BCE rather than submit to the victorious Julius Caesar.

That the final act shows Sophonisbe in a heroic light is confirmed by a reference to her death in Lohenstein's play *Cleopatra*. Since Antonius is worried about what Cleopatra may suffer if Augustus gains Egypt, his

[24] Gillespie 1965, 114.

companions suggest that he repeat Masanissa's praiseworthy deed by sending Cleopatra poison, and praise Sophonisbe's action:

> Wo Sophonißbe nicht sol ihren Ruhm beschämen
> Die in der Sterne Gold ihr Grabmahl eingeetz't
> Als sie den Gifft-Kelch hat so freudig angesetz't
> Umb ihres Liebsten Ruhm / und Zepter zu erhalten
> (*Cleopatra*, I 1008-11).
>
> Sophonisbe did not disgrace her reputation, but inscribed her monument in the gold of the stars, when she joyfully drank from the poisoned goblet in order to save the reputation and the sceptre of the man she loved.

Her male companions, Himilco and Micipsa, fall on their swords, leaving only Sophonisbe's female attendants to show Masanissa what has happened when he arrives in the vain hope of saving Sophonisbe's life. Scipio's influence seems to have been short-lived, for on seeing Sophonisbe's corpse Masanissa falls into an agony of grief and self-reproach. Scipio himself appears, however, and rebukes Masanissa severely for yielding to erotic passion ("Brunst", V 553); points out that it was Sophonisbe's own choice to take the poison, so Masanissa should not blame himself; and adds that Masanissa is mad to regret the loss of a lustful woman. Despite this brutal speech, Scipio consents to Masanissa's request that Sophonisbe should receive a decent burial instead of having her body displayed in Rome. He repeats that Carthage will be destroyed. Syphax is sent to Rome as a prisoner, and his kingdom is handed over to Masanissa, in fulfilment of the promise Scipio made to Masanissa in Act IV. Masanissa, having promised to overcome his emotions, is now rewarded for his renewed loyalty to Rome. He has not heard what the ghost of Dido prophesied about him:

> Denn Masanissa / den die Stadt
> Carchedon auferzogen hat /
> Wird Kronen zwar / doch in den Fesseln tragen.
> Rom / das die Dienstbarkeit der Welt
> Fur himmlisches Verhängnüs hält /
> Wird seinen Stamm selbst in die Eisen schlagen.
> Ich sehe 's Joch schon seinen Enckel zihn (V 131-37).
>
> For Masanissa, brought up in the city of Carthage, will indeed wear crowns, but in fetters. Rome, which considers the subjugation of the world to be its heavenly destiny, will place his whole tribe in chains. I can already see his grandson carrying the yoke.

In terms of its allegorical framework, the play sets Masanissa firmly back on the path of virtue. In terms of the political realities that it stages, however, it

leaves Masanissa in an uncomfortable half-way house between the unsuccessful Machiavellianism of Sophonisbe and the successful Machiavellianism of Scipio. Masanissa has been disloyal to Sophonisbe, has silently acquiesced in Scipio's dismissal of her as worthless, and has been rewarded with a crown which merely disguises his servitude to the ruthless power of Rome. Sophonisbe, on the other hand, has at least met her fate with fortitude and voluntarily accepted a heroic death. Masanissa's surrender to Rome helps to vindicate the nobility of Sophonisbe's desperate resistance.

The professional diplomat Lohenstein celebrates, especially in the "Reyen", the triumph of Rome, of which the Habsburg Empire of his day is presented as the heir. He vindicates the policy of reason of state which is embodied in Scipio. He does not invite us to wish nostalgically that Carthage had retained its independence. But he also encourages his audiences and readers to enter imaginatively into the experiences of the victims of empire, and to appreciate the achievements and customs of an exotic civilization. The most alien of these customs, human sacrifice, is presented not as victimization, but as an intelligible and voluntary expression of patriotism – and hence, if one reflects further, not quite so alien after all. Sophonisbe herself, although she adjusts as best she can to the rapid changes of the political action, suffers from the conflict between Machiavellian statecraft and the demands of love, which defeat her calculations at a crucial moment by making her unable to kill her husband. This conflict makes her a much more engaging figure than Scipio, who prides himself on his unsusceptibility to love or even sexual desire. (He and Sophonisbe never meet. If they had, would his icy asceticism have been proof against the appeal of her passionate character?) Lohenstein has thus shown us the necessary ruthlessness of politics, along with the human cost of Sophonisbe's heroic and doomed resistance to the Roman juggernaut.

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