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Sophonisba in Early Modern Literature

eds.
Anastasia Ladefoged Larn &
David Hasberg Zirak-Schmidt

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Introduction: Rediscovering Sophonisba in Early Modern Europe

Early modern dramatists and poets took a remarkable interest in the Carthaginian noblewoman Sophonisba who lived during the Second Punic War (218-201 BC). Although she was a minor character in Greco-Roman histories of the war, Sophonisba became a popular, yet often ambivalent, female character across confessional and national borders in early modern Europe. According to the Latin historian Livy (59 BC-17 AD), whose account of the war in *Ab urbe condita* was fundamental for early modern retellings, Sophonisba was a beautiful patriot, the daughter of the general Hasdrubal Gisgo and married to Syphax, king of the Masaesyli tribe of western Numidia. As the fortune of war began to favour Rome, Syphax and Sophonisba came under siege in the city of Cirta by Masinissa, king of the Massylii tribe and an ally of the Roman general Scipio Africanus. After Cirta fell and Syphax was taken prisoner, Sophonisba seduced Masinissa and made him swear that he would not allow her to become a Roman prisoner of war. In order to keep his promise, Masinissa married Sophonisba. Scipio, who was afraid that she might succeed in turning Masinissa against the Roman cause, opposed the match, rebuked Masinissa for his lust and insisted on taking Sophonisba as Roman war booty. In order to uphold both his promise to his new wife and the Romans, the distraught Masinissa sent Sophonisba poison so she could commit suicide in order to be spared Roman captivity; a fate which she willingly and bravely accepted.

This special issue of the *Nordic Journal of Renaissance Studies* highlights the ways early modern authors and dramatists reshaped, reimagined and negotiated the character of Sophonisba. From the Greco-Roman sources, the early modern world inherited an ambivalent female character. In Livy, dramatists and poets could find a frightening but brave figure, and the first meeting between Sophonisba and Masinissa in Cirta was well-suited as a dramatic scene. In other sources, Sophonisba is not a seductress but rather the wronged party. According to Appian (c.95-165 AD), Sophonisba had previously been engaged to Masinissa but had been forced to break the engagement and marry Syphax to settle local political strife. As we shall see in this theme issue, there were two distinct traditions that shaped how early modern writers handled Sophonisba. In the Livian tradition, particularly influential in the first part of the sixteenth-century, Sophonisba was a patriot who bravely committed suicide to protect her honour, yet she was a dangerous *femme fatale* who posed a threat to Roman power. In the Appianic tradition, however, Sophonisba and Masinissa were framed as pitiable lovers who were

tragically subjected to political and historical forces outside their own control. This double-sided nature of the character supplied the early modern imagination with a moldable story that could be shaped and made to serve a variety of different purposes.

While not always condoning her marriage to Masinissa, early modern writers took a much more sympathetic approach compared to the Greco-Roman historians. Petrarch, who kickstarted early modern interest in Sophonisba, took up her story in multiple works including his Latin epic *Africa* (composed 1337-1343) wherein he treats her as a second Dido. Writing two decades later, Giovanni Boccaccio portrays Sophonisba as an example of exceptional female fortitude in his *De mulieribus claris* (written 1361-62), raising her to the heights of Roman and Biblical women. Beginning with Gian Giorgio Trissino's *Sofonisba* (written 1514-1515 and published in 1524), Sophonisba and Masinissa's doomed love furnished the plot of countless tragedies. Trissino's tragedy was furthermore translated into French by Mellin de Saint-Gelais in 1556 at the request of Catherine de Medici, with yet another independent French translation by Claude Mermet in 1584. The tragic fate of Sophonisba was subsequently taken up in such dramatic traditions as English restoration drama (Nathaniel Lee's *Sophonisba, or Hannibal's Overthrow*, 1676), the German Trauerspiel (Daniel Casper von Lohenstein's *Sophonisbe*, 1680) and Venetian opera (Nicolò Miato's *Scipio Africano, dramma per musica*, with music by Francesco Cavelli, 1664) to name just a few. The death of the courageous Carthaginian was furthermore interpreted by artists such as Andrea Mantegna who depicts Sophonisba as a virtuous woman in contemporaneous Italian clothes.

Sophonisba was not the only African queen to pique the interest of early modern writers and artists—other notable examples include Dido and Cleopatra—but her popularity and ubiquity in the period has gone largely unnoticed by critics. But why were early modern writers and dramatists so fascinated by the Carthaginian? One reason for this was the inherent ambiguity of Sophonisba which became firmly entrenched in the early modern imagination. Contrary to Mark Antony, Masinissa did give up his rebel queen which seems to have made Sophonisba's transition into a male-dominated world of politics more morally condonable. This made Sophonisba's story psychologically compelling, and it also made her an exceptionally versatile character for the early modern period's many generic experiments such as the reintroduction of Latin and Greek styled tragedy. Many of the articles in this theme issue underscore the importance of Trissino's *Sofonisba* which proved influential throughout the sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth century. *Sofonisba* is one of the first original tragedies in Italian and reintroduces a number of Greek and Latin

stylistic elements such as a chorus to divide the action, the unity of time and place and a non-allegorical character gallery. Trissino was not alone in using Roman history as his source for the reintroduction of Greek and Latin styled tragedy, nor was he the first to take up the Sophonisba story in dramatic form as he was preceded by Galeotto Del Caretto who wrote a *Sophonisba* around 1502. Yet Trissino's version of the story was to have a lasting impact on subsequent tragedies, and his miserable Sophonisba bewailing her misfortune to her confidant Erminia became a tragic trope in early modern tragedy at large. In this way, Trissino placed Sophonisba as the very core of early modern renegotiations of tragedy.

The articles that follow also make clear how Trissino's tragedy was rarely a model to imitate blindly but functioned as something to critically negotiate. Trissino closely follows Livy's account, and his Sophonisba remains a somewhat secondary character. Masinissa's choice whether to break his marriage vows or break his pledge of allegiance to the Romans is a major focus point of the *Sofonisba*, and Scipio is represented as a mentor who tries to steer Masinissa away from the dangers of succumbing to his lust. Later dramatists exploited other nuances of the story and played around with the Livian character gallery. Thus, dramatists increasingly questioned Masinissa giving up his Sophonisba and pictured him killing himself alongside her or doomed him for his weakness. Similarly, Scipio could be framed as a ruthless dominator to criticise the Habsburgs' claim as heirs to the Roman empire in the Netherlands and in Silesian Germany. Or he could be praised for his unaffectedness when it comes to women to underscore the dangers of women in politics. These different rewritings build on each other in a complex network of intertextual references with Trissino as just one amongst many other versions. In this way, our theme issue complicates Trissino's importance. The following articles testify to the ways dramatists contributed to an ever-growing imaginary pool of stock-scenes, rhetorical soliloquies and political allegories across national boundaries. This points to a complex transnational intertextual impact of the Sophonisba story throughout the early modern period.

Another reason for Sophonisba's enduring popularity was early modernity's increasingly complex and ambiguous relationship with the Roman past as Greek authors, including historians such as Appian and Plutarch, were rediscovered in the second part of the sixteenth century. These supplied Renaissance humanists with new nuances on the familiar Roman past and on history writing as such. Particularly the rediscovery of Plutarch's 48 biographies on famous men from Greek and Roman history in the *Parallel Lives* introduced early modern poets to a diverse set of stock characters and added new nuances to such familiar figures as Mark Antony and Scipio

Africanus. Jacques Amyot's French translation of Plutarch's *Vies des hommes illustres* (1559, with revised editions published in 1565 and 1567) made Plutarch available to a new vernacular audience outside the narrow university setting, and the translation became a veritable bestseller with numerous reprints throughout the century and furnished countless tragic plots. Amyot's French version was also translated into English by Thomas North in 1579 and famously influenced Shakespeare's Roman plays.

Sophonisba formed part of this Greek revival. The story of Sophonisba is told in the *Life of Scipio* which, however, did not form part of Amyot's translation. Plutarch's original version is now lost, but existed in a recreated Latin version by Donato Acciaioli (1467/68) which would have been accessible to scholars, and the biography also existed in French in a translation by Simon Borgouyn (from before 1515) and another by Charles de L'Écluse (found in Simon Goulart's annotated version of Amyot from 1583). Here dramatists and poets could find a short mention of Masinissa and Sophonisba, but with Scipio as the main character. This meant that their story and inner life lacked the kind of details available for the story of Cleopatra and Mark Antony in the latter's biography, and this might have prompted dramatists to explore Masinissa's inner life in the same way.

On a more abstract level, the rediscovery of Plutarch also gave history a more human face. Together with new translations of Appian, this way to read history seems to have inspired dramatists to play around with the story and introduce another Sophonisba and prompted the question of who was the tragic hero of the story. Was it Sophonisba who had to surrender to forces outside her own control? Or rather Masinissa who was caught between personal wishes and political loyalty? The story of Sophonisba seemed ideally suited to negotiate not only the one-sided point of view of the Roman sources, but also explore the many layers of history.

A third and final reason for Sophonisba's long afterlife was her suitability as a political allegory. Surprisingly, Sophonisba's political usefulness was not restricted to any political opinion or context in particular. In France, both Catholics and Protestants claimed her as a mirror image during the religious wars. Sophonisba also proved a potent reflection during the War of Candia (1645-1669) in Venice, and in the Netherlands and in Germany, she was used to express critique of the Habsburgs' claim to power in these two territories. The story of Sophonisba with its conflation of love, lust and politics could furthermore be used to reflect on abstract themes such as loyalty, the hardships of war, the precariousness of civilians, particularly women, in cities under siege or to warn against the mixing of politics and personal desire. With its mixed character gallery of both conquerors and captives, the story of

Sophonisba offered dramatists and writers a prism through which they could examine the conflicts and issues of their own time.

The theme issue brings together articles by a wide array of scholars whose work showcases just how versatile Sophonisba proved to the early modern imagination. In the opening article of this volume, Samuel AGBAMU examines the racialisation of Sophonisba, tracing it from antiquity, particularly in the works of Livy, to early modernity. Comparing and contrasting Sophonisba with other important North African queens, Dido and Cleopatra, the article shows how Petrarch's works—*De viris illustribus*, the *Africa* and *Triumphus Cupidinis*—were pivotal moments in the racialisation of Sophonisba, and how they are crucial in understanding the development of modern discourses on race.

Nina HUGOT's article uncovers French sixteenth-century dramatists' diminishing fascination of Sophonisba's eloquence vis-à-vis the Latin and Greek source material as well as Gian Giorgio Trissino's Italian play. Whereas Mellin de Saint-Gelais's 1556 play showcases the queen's eloquence, the subsequent drama by Claude Mermet (1584) introduces a new ambiguity by stressing more firmly her dangerous ability to divert two kings from their alliance with Rome. With Antoine de Montchrestien (1596) and Nicolas de Montreux (1601), the fascination for her rhetorical skills is relegated to the background as Sophonisba's eloquence becomes almost exclusively a tool of manipulation. A development which questions the possibilities of women in public discourse at the turn of the century.

Christian HØGEL examines Cretan dramatist Georgios Chortatsis's tragedy, *Erofili.* Høgel shows that Chortatsis's play uses the main plot of Giraldi's *Orbecche*—although the location of the action is moved from Persia to Egypt—and two choral odes from Trissino's *Sofonisba*. Considering Chortatsis's refashioning of these two earlier plays, Høgel argues that *Erofili* combines the family drama of *Orbecche* with a focus on social themes which the playwright adapted from *Sofonisba*. Chortsatsis's *Erofili* is, then, a play which discusses moral rectitude, meritocratic values and the social importance of rich and poor.

In their article, Jan BLOEMENDAL and James A. PARENTE Jr. discuss two little known Dutch versions of the Sophonisba story from the 1620s by the Haarlem poet Govert van der Eembd and the Antwerp painter and poet Guilliam van Nieuwelandt. Both made novel contributions to the theme by treating the story of Sophonisba, Syphax and Masinissa as a romance or as an historical drama about the establishment of Roman power in Africa respectively. By discussing these almost forgotten Sophonisba plays, the authors showcase the surprisingly intertextual connections between French, Dutch and German drama when discussing such themes as sexual desire,

political behaviour, and the ethos of empire at a time when the Dutch Republic was debating whether to negotiate a peace with the Spanish Habsburgs.

Guðrún KRISTINSDÓTTIR-URFALINO's article traces how Pierre Corneille in his *Sophonisba* (1663) refashions his protagonist into a political and moral reflection by exploring the implications of her pride in choosing death over dishonour. The article highlights two important poetic processes. Firstly, the leitmotif of jealousy which underlines Sophonisba's passion as both romantic and political. And secondly, the invention of a new character, Éryxe, who, by comparison and contrast, highlights the dark side of Sophonisba's patriotism which indicates a possible detachment with regard to political greatness as a critique of France's growing colonial involvement.

Beth CORTESE's article is about Nathaniel Lee's tragedy *Sophonisba, or Hannibal's Overthrow* (1676). Cortese argues that Lee uses the story of Sophonisba and Masinissa—a story fraught with love, divided loyalties and warfare—to comment on the political situation and growing tensions at the court of Charles II. Focusing on the topicality of *Sophonisba*, Cortese shows that the figure of Masinissa and his problematic love for Sophonisba becomes emblematic of ongoing questions of religion, politics, government and political allegiances that were catalysed by Charles's French mistress, Louise de Kéroualle.

Sofie KLUGE's article argues that Pedro Calderón de la Barca's play *The Second Scipio* from 1677 is a rewriting of the story of Sophonisba. Drawing on Erich Auerbach's concept of figural interpretation—which establishes a connection between two historically separate events or persons; one signifying the other and the other fulfilling the first—Kluge argues that Calderón's play conflates several Scipios—Scipio Africanus Major, who fought in the Second Punic War, and Scipio Africanus Aemilius Minor—as well as Sophonisba and Arminda. In this way, Calderón subtly rewrites the story of Sophonisba and suggests a happy ending that provided useful advice to its first audience, the future king Carlos II.

Ritchie ROBERTSON's article takes a fresh look at the exoticism in Lohenstein's *Sophonisbe* (1680). Lohenstein's heroine has been much criticised for her desperate measures, particularly her readiness to sacrifice one of her sons to propitiate the gods. However, all of Sophonisba's actions, though sometimes seemingly inconsistent, are explained by her patriotism, torn as she is by her conflict between Machiavellian statecraft and the demands of love. The article argues how Lohenstein shows us the necessary ruthlessness of politics, along with the human cost of Sophonisba's heroic and doomed resistance to Roman rule.

Finally, Enrico ZUCCHI's article traces changing conceptions of Sophonisba in seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Venice and Italy. Zucchi shows how the image of Sophonisba in Venetian literature went from a heroic *virago*, largely thanks to the popularity and influence of Trissino's *Sofonisba*, to a power-crazed woman. These changes were due to the misogyny of the *Accademia degli Incogniti* but also to the contemporary political climate. Having lost the Kingdom of Candia to the Ottoman Empire, Venice was on the brink of an international crisis. As a consequence, Venetian writers celebrated the virtuous Scipio Africanus, emphasizing the links between the Serenissima and the Roman past, and condemning the Sophonisba who became a figuration of the Ottoman Other.

Tracing these many early modern dramatic and literary representations of the Carthaginian woman, this special issue gives due critical attention to the intriguing character of Sophonisba and studies early modern representations of her from a comparative perspective. Taken together, these articles form a larger picture of the meaning of Sophonisba and the cultural network in which she is embedded and show just how influential Sophonisba was in the early modern period.

March 2023,

Anastasia Ladefoged Larn & David Hasberg Zirak-Schmidt

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Contributors

Samuel AGBAMU is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow and Lecturer in Classics at the University of Reading. He is currently working on a project investigating the role of Petrarch's Latin writing, and especially the *Africa*, in the development of discourses of nationhood, empire, and 'race'. He has also worked on the ideological uses of the Roman empire in modern Italian imperial contexts, and is writing a book on this theme. He has also written about classical reception in contemporary art as well as a number of pieces on topics around inclusivity and anti-racism in classical studies.

Jan BLOEMENDAL is a senior researcher at the Huygens Institute for the History and Culture of the Netherlands, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, and Privatdozent at the Ruhr University Bochum. He is the coordinator of the *Erasmi Opera Omnia*. He has published on Neo-Latin literature, transnationalism and early modern drama in Latin and the vernaculars, and Erasmus. He was a co-editor (with Philip J. Ford and Charles Fantazzi) of *Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Early Modern World*, and is chief editor of the series 'Drama and Theatre in Early Modern Europe'. He also co-edited a special issue of the journal *Renaissance Studies* entitled *Transnational Exchange in the Early Modern Low Countries* (2022). He is currently conducting the NWO-funded project *TransLatin: The Transnational Impact of Latin Theatre from the Early Modern Netherlands*.

Beth CORTESE is an Assistant Professor (Lecturer) in English Literature, specializing in Restoration and 18th Century Literature at the University of Iceland. Beth wrote her Doctorate on women's wit onstage in comedies from 1660-1720 at Lancaster University, UK. She was a research fellow on the Unearned Wealth: A Literary History of Inheritance project at Aarhus University, Denmark. Her research has been published in Restoration and 18th Century Research journal, *Law and Literature* Journal, and in edited collections with Routledge.

Christian HØGEL is Professor of Ancient Greek, Latin, and Modern Greek at Lund's University (Sweden). He has published extensively on Byzantine hagiography and *metaphrasis,* on Arabo-Greek translations, and on the history of various concepts, not least that of Ciceronian *humanitas* in his *The Human and the Humane. Humanity as Argument from Cicero to Erasmus* (V&R Press, 2015). He is co-director of the Centre for Medieval Literature (CML, Odense/York), and of the research project *Retracing Connections.*

Nina HUGOT, agrégée in Modern Letters, is a lecturer at University of Lorraine. Her works are devoted to the tragic genre in Renaissance France and examine the role of female characters and femininity in the Tragic Aesthetics of the Sixteenth Century. In 2021, she published a book at Droz publishing house entitled "*D'une voix et plaintive et hardie" French tragedy and the feminine between 1537 and 1583*, which gives a new interpretation of the aesthetics of Renaissance tragedy based on the characteristics of its heroines; she has also published more than a dozen articles on this matter. Currently, she is leading a project called "Melponum – Melpomene in the digital age" aimed at publishing the theatrical corpus of the Renaissance online and her analyses open up to comic and late 16th century corpuses.

Sofie KLUGE, PhD in Comparative Literature and dr. phil., University of Copenhagen, is associate professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Southern Denmark. She is a member of the *Academia Europaea*, the author of four monographs and 40+ peer reviewed articles and book chapters on Spanish Golden Age and European early modern literature.

Guðrún KRISTINSDÓTTIR-URFALINO is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Iceland working on a research project entitled *The French Wave in Icelandic Theatre*, financed by the Icelandic Research Fund (Rannís). She holds a joint doctoral degree from the University Sorbonne-Nouvelle Paris 3 and the University of Iceland. Her doctoral research concerned the Roman Civil War as a subject of French XVIth and XVIIth century tragedy. Her research interests include the memory of the wars of Religion in French tragedy and translation and adaptation of French neoclassical theatre in the Nordic countries.

James A. PARENTE, Jr. is a Professor Emeritus of German, Scandinavian, and Dutch literature at the University of Minnesota. He has published widely on early modern German, Dutch and Neo-Latin literature. His books include *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition: Christian Theater in Germany and the Netherlands* (1987), and more recently, an updated reprint of the co-edited volume (with George C. Schoolfield and Richard Schade) *Literary Culture in the Holy Roman Empire, 1555-1700* (2021), and (with Jan Bloemendal and Nigel Smith) a special issue of the journal *Renaissance Studies* entitled *Transnational Exchange in the Early Modern Low Countries* (2022). He is currently working on several projects concerning transnational literary relations between the German Empire, the Netherlands, and Nordic Europe.

Ritchie ROBERTSON retired in 2021 from the Schwarz-Taylor Chair of German Language and Literature at Oxford University. His recent books include *Enlightenment and Religion in German and Austrian Literature: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2017), *The Enlightenment: The pursuit of Happiness, 1680-1790* (London: Penguin, 2020), and *Friedrich Nietzsche* in the series Critical Lives (London: Reaktion, 2022). He is currently completing a study of German political tragedy from Lohenstein to Hochhuth.

Enrico ZUCCHI is a Post-doc Research Fellow in Italian Literature at the University of Padova, where he gained his PhD in 2017 with a dissertation on the eighteenth-century Italian and French tragedy. He has been researcher in Turin (Fondazione 1563), Paris (Sorbonne-Paris IV), Leiden (Universiteit Leiden), Bergen (Universitetet i Bergen) and Strasbourg (Université de Strasbourg). His research interests focus mainly on the seventeenth and eighteenth-century theatre and on early modern republicanism and political literature. Currently, he is part of the research team of the ERC project RISK – Representing Republican State Power in the Europe of Absolute Monarchies.

Petrarch's Sophonisba Between Antiquity and Modernity

By Samuel Agbamu

This article traces developments in representations of Sophonisba between antiquity and early modernity. In particular, the article considers how Petrarch's representation of the Carthaginian woman can illuminate an important moment in the development of modern discourses of "race". After outlining the ancient sources available to Petrarch, the article hones in on Sophonisba in Petrarch's De viris illustribus*, the* Africa*, and* Triumphus Cupidinis*, and how she relates to Dido and Cleopatra. The article takes Mantegna's "A Woman Drinking" as a pivotal moment in the reception of Sophonisba during the early Renaissance between her story in Petrarch's texts and later dramatic re-presentations.*

Introduction[1]

A visitor to Room 54 of London's National Gallery will come face-to-face with two "exemplary women of antiquity", depicted as "fictive bronzes" – paintings made to look like bronze reliefs. One of these women, part of a cycle of four images, is enigmatically named "A Woman Drinking" (c. 1495-1500) in the National Gallery's catalogue (*Figure* 1). It most likely represents Sophonisba. In the past, the authenticity of this painting had been questioned, and its subject has at times been thought to be a personified Autumn or the Carian queen Artemisia II. However, the consensus is now that the painting is by Andrea Mantegna (c. 1431-1506) and that it shows the Carthaginian noblewoman Sophonisba, the subject of this special issue.[2] I start with Mantegna's painting for two main reasons. Firstly, the fact that Sophonisba can be numbered among the four exemplary women of antiquity, alongside her compatriot Dido, Tuccia the Roman Vestal Virgin, and the Biblical

[1] The research for this article was carried out thanks to the generous support of a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship. This article was submitted prior to Robert Clines' excellent 2023 article on the question of the racialisation of Sophonisba in Petrarch's *Africa* being published in *postmedieval*. Although I have tried to take Clines' article into account, his use of Fanon's concept of the epidermalization of race contributes much to discussions of the Sophonisba of the *Africa*, which cannot fully be addressed in this article.

[2] Tietze-Conrat 1955, 186.

heroine Judith, is significant for reasons that I will explore in this article. Secondly, the fact that she is represented as a virtuous woman, adjacent to Europeanness, is equally noteworthy. In this article, I will explore how Sophonisba was transformed into the exemplary woman of Mantegna's fictive bronze, what this says about developing ideas around "race" in the Renaissance, and how this impacts upon later versions of Sophonisba.

I begin by raising some considerations on "race" in pre-modern representations of Sophonisba before moving on to outline the ancient literary representations of Sophonisba that shaped her characterisation in early Renaissance texts. Petrarch's reception of these texts in his Latin epic, the *Africa* (c.1338-1350s), in his Latin biography of Scipio in *De viribus illustris* (1338-1357), and in his Italian poem *Triumphus Cupidinis* (1351-1374), I suggest, were of pivotal importance in representations of the Punic woman in the subsequent centuries. Part of this investigation involves looking at how Sophonisba is positioned in Petrarch's texts as a substitute for the Carthaginian founder-queen Dido, as portrayed in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Finally, I explore how Mantegna's painting indicates a shift in perceptions of Sophonisba and consider possible reasons behind this shift. Refracted by so many historical lenses, we might very well therefore ask: who was Sophonisba in reality?

While the relationship between Petrarch's Sophonisba and Virgil's Dido has been well-discussed in existing scholarship,[3] and a 2021 article by Ronald Martinez has foregrounded the theme of antisemitism and anti-Islamic prejudice in the *Africa* (although not addressing the Sophonisba episode),[4] this article represents the first attempt to situate Petrarch's version of the Carthaginian woman in relation to developing conceptions of "race".[5] Why, for example, can Petrarch represent Dido as virtuous and assimilable to Roman and Christian constructions of virtue, but Sophonisba remains irreconcilably "Other"? How, furthermore, are we to account for Sophonisba's threatening alterity at the same time as accepting her idealised somatic beauty, equivalent to Petrarch's own beloved, and *Italian*, Laura? What are we to make of the notion that, by the time of Mantegna, Sophonisba is indistinguishable from a generic, tragic woman? Such questions require a closer look at what I mean when I talk about "race" in the context of Petrarch's texts.

[3] Wilhelm 1976; Simpson 2006; Cazeaux 2015.

[4] Martinez 2021.

[5] See, however, Gilman 1997, who suggests that questions of race and historicity are subordinated to Petrarch's representation of Sophonisba as a generic seductress.

Sophonisba and the question of "race"

Sophonisba was a Carthaginian, a people of Phoenician, Near Eastern origins who migrated to the North African coast sometime in the late second millennium BCE or early first millennium BCE, depending on which foundation myth you choose.[6] In ancient Greek and Latin literature, Phoenicians and Carthaginians were subject to a range of negative stereotypes, chief among which being perfidy, treachery and cruelty.[7] Livy's description of Hannibal is emblematic as a caricature of the Carthaginian character:

> Has tantas viri virtutes ingentia vitia aequabant, inhumana crudelitas, perfidia plus quam Punica, nihil veri, nihil sancti, nullus deum metus, nullum ius iurandum, nulla religio. (21.4.9)
>
> The enormous vices of this man equalled his great virtues: inhuman cruelty, a perfidy more than Punic, he held no respect for the truth or the sacred, had no fear of the gods, no adherence to oaths, and no religious convictions.[8]

The distinction between "Punic", here an adjective to refer to Hannibal's *perfidia*, and "Carthaginian" is a notable one. George Franko suggests that *poenus*, 'Punic', is commonly an ethnic tag, frequently with negative connotations, while *Carthaginiensis*, "Carthaginian", is a more neutral, civic one, referring to Carthage as a city of origin, rather than ethnic identity.[9] Jonathan Prag suggests that the negative stereotypes attached to the ethnic tag of *poenus* played a role in the development of antisemitic stereotypes in early modernity:

> The overwhelmingly negative image of early modern, anti-Semitic [*sic*.] accounts finds its justification and reinforcement in the ancient texts, in the commonplace *perfidia plus quam punica*.[10]

If there is a relationship between representations of Carthaginians in classical Latin literature and antisemitic stereotypes in early modernity, the role of Petrarch's depictions of the Punic people therefore occupies a pivotal space. The concept of "race" thus lurks underneath the surface of Petrarch's portrayal of Sophonisba.

"Race", in the words of Michael Omi and Howard Winant in their important 1986 work *Racial Formation in the United States* is a "way of making up people. It is socially constructed, and its contours shift through

[6] See Quinn 2017. App. *Pun.* 1. lays out the different foundation legends.
[7] Isaac 2004, 324-351.
[8] All translations are my own unless otherwise specified.
[9] Franko 1994.
[10] Prag 2006, 2.

time and space". The process of racialisation involves making people Other which in turn justifies structural oppression, expropriation and/or extermination. While "race" is tied to so-called phenotypes – observable biological traits such as skin colour, hair texture, or the shape of facial features – these phenotypes are historically mutable and shift in meaning in social life. Generally speaking, "race" as we understand it today is considered a modern phenomenon arising during the Enlightenment. For example, Omi and Winant see Christian hostility towards Jews and Muslims as distinct from racial formation since these were antagonisms structured along religious rather than racial lines.[11]

There are a number of ways in which Petrarch's representation of Punic alterity, embodied by Sophonisba, complicates and is complicated by Omi and Winant's widely accepted conception of race. Firstly, phenotype plays little role in Petrarch's representation of Sophonisba. In fact, when Petrarch does draw attention to the physical appearance of Carthaginians, it is to flatten the somatic difference between Sophonisba and an idealised Italian woman. Secondly, although Ronald Martinez has shown how antisemitism and anti-Muslim sentiment comes into play in Petrarch's depiction of the Punic Wars,[12] thus supporting Jonathan Prag's suggestion quoted above, Carthage was not a Jewish city. Therefore, Omi and Winant's assertion that Christian hostility towards Muslim and Jewish people is not properly race-based but religious runs into a problem. What happens when religious prejudice is translated into a racial one? I use the term "racial" rather than "ethnic" advisedly. Ancient Roman and Petrarch's representations of Carthage and Carthaginians promotes an image of alterity and attaches negative traits to geographic origin. These negative traits are transferable from generation to generation, such that Carthage's "semitic" character allows for similar stereotypes to be attached to early modern Jewish communities. Finally, Petrarch's prejudice against Carthage is not religious. It is based on the idea of a "semitic" race to which Jewish and Muslim people also belong.

Nancy Bisaha argues that Petrarch's representation of "the East", which I expand to North Africa in order to take account of Carthage, served to assert cultural supremacy over the East at a time when Europe lacked political hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean, especially after the rise of the empires of Islam. In some respects, Bisaha suggests, Petrarch can be seen as a bridge between classical constructions of the East and West, and later colonial discourses.[13] Bisaha does not consider Petrarch's representations of Carthage or Carthaginians when formulating her argument. This article

[11] Omi and Winant 2015, 4, 110-113.
[12] Martinez, 2021.
[13] Bisaha 2001, 286.

therefore also aims to address this absence and to build on Bisaha's work.

Petrarch's Sophonisba then is an especially illuminating figure through which to explore the development of such discourses. Before I move on to Sophonisba in Petrarch, however, it is necessary to outline the ancient source material to which Petrarch had access.

Sophonisba in ancient literature

Sophonisba was the daughter of Hasdrubal, a Carthaginian general who fought against Rome during the Second Punic War (218-201 BCE). Sophonisba was married to the Numidian king Syphax of the Masaesyli tribe, who became allied to Rome. However, under the influence of his marriage to the Carthaginian noblewoman, he switches to the Carthaginian side. In 203 BCE Syphax is then defeated and handed over to the Romans by Massinissa, another Numidian king ruling the Massyli confederation. At this stage of the war, Massinissa is allied to Rome, although he initially fought against Scipio in Spain. Upon entering Cirta, Syphax's capital, Massinissa meets Sophonisba, who begs him not to hand her over to the Romans. Massinissa agrees and marries Sophonisba. However, Scipio prevails upon him to remember his loyalty to Rome and to give her up to the Romans to be paraded in triumph. In order to keep his word to both Scipio and Sophonisba, Massinissa has poison sent to his new wife, which she willingly accepts as a wedding gift, drinking it to avoid the shame of capture.

For Petrarch, the Roman historian Livy's *Ab urbe condita* (27-9 BCE) is the most important text to treat the story of Sophonisba. Livy expands on Polybius' earlier, Greek-language account significantly, elevating it to the status of a moralising drama, imbued with the language of elegy.[14] Jacqueline Fabre-Serris indicates that we do not know how Livy first found out about the story of Massinissa and Sophonisba, suggesting possible sources in Coelius Antipater or Valerius Antias.[15] As with Polybius' account, Sophonisba and Massinissa first meet after Syphax's defeat. Also, like Polybius, Livy characterises Syphax as emotionally fickle and driven by libidinous impulses, and this due to his ethnic identity, telling us that "the

[14] Haley 1989; Fabre-Serris 2021. The Greek historian Polybius, who accompanied Scipio the Younger on his campaign during the Third Punic War (149-146 BCE), gives us our earliest surviving source for the life of Sophonisba. In Polybius' account Sophonisba and Massinissa meet for the first time upon the latter's capture of Cirta in 203 BCE. Sophonisba's appearance is brief and she remains unnamed, referred to instead as "the girl" (παιδίσκη). More illuminating is how Syphax and his relationship with Sophonisba is represented. Scipio, hoping that Syphax's infatuation with his new wife might have worn off, knows "both the easily-pleased nature of the Numidians and their faithlessness to gods and men" (Polybius 14.1).

[15] Fabre-Serris 2021, 95.

Numidians are immoderate in love, beyond all other barbarians" (*sunt ante omnes barbaros Numidae effusi in uenerem*, 29.23.4). After Syphax's defeat and capture, Massinissa enters Cirta, where he meets Sophonisba on the very threshold – *in ipso limine* (30.12.11) – of the palace. This is the first point in Livy's narrative at which Sophonisba is named. She begs Massinissa not to give her up to the Romans, even if her death be the only thing to prevent it, appealing to their common Africanity. At this point, Livy describes Sophonisba's physical appearance: she is of remarkable beauty and at the most flourishing age (*forma erat insignis et florentissima aetas*, 30.12.17). Again, Livy emphasises the libidinousness of the Numidians, this time with reference to Massinissa:

> ut est genus Numidarum in uenerem praeceps, amore captiuae uictor captus (30.12.18)
>
> As the Numidian race are inclined to matters of love, the victor was captured by love to the captive.[16]

The juxtaposition of *captivae victor captus* draws attention to the inversion of the natural order of things. Not only is it the case that Sophonisba, the defeated, is now vanquishing the conqueror, Massinissa, but it is also a woman influencing the actions of the male.[17] This inversion is rectified by Scipio's exemplary sexual continence and with the Roman commander's injunction upon Massinissa to give up Sophonisba.

The Livian Sophonisba forms part of a triptych of dangerous African queens who stand in opposition to Roman imperial power, along with the Virgilian Dido and Cleopatra whose representations in Augustan Latin texts share key characteristics.[18] The story of Virgil's Dido as presented in the *Aeneid* (29-19 BCE) is well known. Aeneas, the Trojan prince fleeing the destruction of his city, sets sail to found a new homeland, along with other survivors from Troy. He is washed up after a storm on the shores of North Africa, where he meets Dido. Dido is a Phoenician queen, also an exile and refugee, who is in the process of founding a new city, Carthage, when Aeneas meets her. Through the interference of the gods, she falls in love with Aeneas,

[16] Cf. Horace, *Ep.* 2.1.156: *Graeca capta ferum victorem cepit*, and Propertius 3.11.16, on Achilles being seized by love for the defeated Penthesilea. See also Ov. *Met*. 3.95; *Epist.* 9.2; Luc. 10.6, which Fera 1984, 156 suggests took inspiration from Livy 30.12.18. See also Petrarch *Canzone* 232.1: "Vincitore Alexandro l' ira vines" (anger conquered Alexander the conqueror).

[17] Fabre-Serris 2021 suggests that this inversion is taken from the language of elegy, along with Massinissa's amorous *furor*. Cf. *furor* in the Medea of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Seneca's *Medea*. See Auhagen 2005.

[18] Wilhelm 1976; Haley 1989; 1993; Cazeaux 2015. Petrarch saw Sophonisba and Cleopatra as sharing certain characteristics. See *Fam.* 18.7.3.

who is compelled, again by the gods, to leave her, sailing away to pursue his destiny of founding a new homeland for the Trojans. In rage and despair, Dido kills herself, but not before cursing Aeneas and his descendants, calling forth a future avenger, the here-unnamed Hannibal, to pursue the Romans with fire and iron. In an influential article, Nicholas Horsfall suggests that Virgil's depiction of Carthage's founding queen embodied deeply held Roman hatred towards, and fear of, Carthage, despite the North African city having been destroyed more than a century prior to Virgil's commencing writing the *Aeneid*.[19] Virgil's Dido has been shown to show deep intertextual links with the African woman who posed the greatest threat to Augustan imperial power: Cleopatra.[20] This triadic relationship between these African queens went on to play, as we will see, a major role in shaping representations of Sophonisba in the early Renaissance, particularly in Petrarch's writing.

The later, Greek-language historians of Rome, Appian and Diodorus Siculus give us an alternative narrative to that presented by Livy and Polybius, in which Sophonisba had already been betrothed to Massinissa, and in the case of Diodorus, even married, before she is wedded to Syphax. These competing traditions would shape differing reimaginations of Sophonisba in the late Middle Ages and in early modernity. However, it would be the Polybius-inflected account of Livy which influenced the most significant Sophonisba of the late Middle Ages or the early Renaissance: that of Petrarch.

Petrarch's Sophonisba

Sophonisba appears in three of Petrarch's texts: in the *Life of Scipio* within the Latin anthology *De viris illustribus* (On Illustrious Men); in the Latin epic of the Second Punic War, the *Africa*; and in the Italian poem, *Triumphus Cupidinis* (The Triumph of Love), part of series of allegorical poems themed around the triumph of different virtues and entities. Since his treatment of the story of Sophonisba is fullest in the *Africa*, it is this epic that will take up most of my discussion in this section.

Petrarch was a keen reader of Livy and is credited with reconstructing much of the Latin text of *Ab urbe condita* that we have today.[21] Such was Petrarch's dedication to Livy that, in a series of letters written to Roman authors such as Virgil, Cicero, and Varro, alongside Homer as the sole Greek representative, Petrarch also addressed the long-deceased historian over whose works he had laboured so much in his twenties. In his letter to Livy (*Fam*. 14.8), Petrarch bemoans the fact that he was not born in ancient Rome,

[19] Horsfall 2020.

[20] See, for example, Benario 1970 on Dido in the *Aeneid* and Cleopatra in Hor. *Carm.* 1.37; Hexter 1992; Haley 1993.

[21] Billlanovich 1951; Mann 1984, 29-30.

before explaining his own efforts to restore Livy's text. Since Petrarch's ability to read Greek was insufficient for any Greek text – be it Polybius, Appian, or Diodorus Siculus, none of whom was accessible in Latin at the time – to inform his representations of Sophonisba, and in the context of his devotion to Livy, the reasons for Livy being his primary source for Sophonisba are abundantly clear.

I will begin with *De viris illustribus*, the inspiration for which Petrarch claimed was his first visit to Rome in 1337 (*Fam.* 2.14), and which prompted his younger contemporary fellow-poet, Giovanni Boccaccio, to respond with his *De mulieribus claris* (On Famous Women, 1361-2). Within the first book of *De viris*, which is concerned with figures from classical antiquity, the life of Scipio is the second longest after Caesar's, and it is here that we read of Sophonisba.[22] In this version of Sophonisba's story, Petrarch follows Livy's account very closely, introducing her in very similar language, meeting Massinissa on the threshold (*in limine*) of Syphax's palace and as being "of an illustrious family and flourishing age, and excellent in the shape of her body" (*genere clara et etate florens et forma corporis excellens*, 21.6.54). The rest of the account given in Petrarch's *Life of Scipio* continues to closely follow Livy, including references to the Numidian tendency towards lustful behaviour (21.6.56), and the emphasis on the inversion caused by the conquered Sophonisba conquering the heart of the conqueror Massinissa (*ibid*.).

The *Africa*, a nine-book epic poem about the Second Punic War, which Petrarch began around 1337, inspired by the same trip to Rome, is where Sophonisba starts to take on features which make her more than just a supporting character in the *Life of Scipio*. There are diverging readings of the Sophonisba of the *Africa*, with Craig Kallendorf, for example seeing her as "an evil character by the *Africa*'s standards",[23] while Donald Gilman rehabilitates her to an extent by suggesting that she demonstrates many of the virtues for which Scipio is praised: devotion to her homeland and to her father.[24] I suggest that it is difficult to maintain that she is to be read in a positive light, given that she is introduced in Book Five of the *Africa* as *malefida regina* (5.11), a faithless queen, in keeping with Punic stereotypes.[25] Carthage was a republic, and thus Sophonisba's characterisation as a queen

[22] Martellotti 1941; Bartuschat 2000, 113. The *Life of Scipio* comes down to us in three redactions, the first of which, written in 1341, the year in which Petrarch was laureated for the *Africa*, did not contain the story of Sophonisba. Instead, the story is inserted into the second redaction (1341-42).

[23] Kallendorf 1989, 40.

[24] Gilman 1997; cf. Elwert 1982; Visser 2005, 154-6.

[25] Cf. Dido as *male sana* (*Aen.* 5.8). See Visser 2005, 163. Auhagen 2005, 124-6 points to parallels between Sophonisba's story and Seneca's *Medea*.

serves to portray her in terms of Carthage's founding queen, Dido. Sophonisba's story occupies the entirety of the fifth book of the *Africa* and the beginning of the sixth book of Petrarch's epic, mirroring the insertion of the love story between Aeneas and Dido in Book Four of the *Aeneid*.[26]

As with Livy's account, Massinissa meets Sophonisba on the threshold of Syphax's palace in Cirta.

> Hec subitis turbata malis in limine uisa est
> Obuia uictori, si quam Fortuna pararet,
> Tentatura uiam dureque leuamina sortis. (Africa 5.12-14)
>
> She was seen on the threshold, distraught at the sudden misfortunes,
> Standing in the way of the victor. If fortune allowed her,
> She would try to find a way to alleviate this difficult situation.

According to Vicenzo Fera, "alleviations" (*levamina*, from *levare* – to lift) invites comparison with "falls" (*casus*, from *cadere* – to fall) thanks to their juxtaposition in Book Three of Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas is telling Dido about his ordeals between departing from Troy and arriving at Carthage.[27] Here, he tells Dido about the death of his father, Anchises, whom he describes as *omnis curae casusque levamen* (*Aen.* 3.709) – the alleviation of every worry and misfortune. Already, then, at the first encounter between Massinissa and Sophonisba, we are encouraged to bear in mind the meeting of Aeneas and Dido.

However, Petrarch's Sophonisba represents an even more subversive figure than Virgil's Dido, and this is underscored by Petrarch through constant and explicit references to Sophonisba's liminality. Thomas Greene points out that throughout its narration in the *Africa*, Massinissa's affair with Sophonisba is narrated in terms of crossing thresholds. After defeating Syphax, Massinissa enters Syphax's capital, Cirta, like a wolf entering a sheepfold, and meets Sophonisba, as in Livy's account, on the threshold *(Africa* 5.12, *in limine*). Similarly, when entering the citadel of Cirta, he passes the *secreta limina* (5.166). Scipio, when prevailing upon Massinissa to forsake his relationship with Sophonisba, speaks in the same terms, speaking of the "ruinous pleasure" of this forbidden love, which is able to bypass any barrier or "armed boundaries", *ferrata…limina* (5.410-11). At the end of Book Five, Sophonisba kills herself and at the beginning of Book Six, when we see her in the underworld, she is hesitating on the threshold of Hades (*sub ipso limine*, 6.51-52), an infernal mirroring of how she first met

[26] Bartuschat 2000, 116. See also Visser 2005, 202-3 for parallels between Massinissa and Aeneas.

[27] Fera 1984, 151.

Massinissa.[28] Witnessing Sophonisba in the underworld also calls to mind Aeneas' encounter with Dido in the underworld in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*.

The emphasis on Sophonisba's liminality draws attention to her transgressive nature and her power to subvert social relations, as emphasised by Petrarch's repetition of the trope of the conqueror being captivated by the captive, although the extremity of Massinissa's attraction to her is amplified and extended from Livy's account:

> […] Ilicet ergo
> Vulnus inardescens totis errare medullis
> Ceperat: estivo glacies ceu lenta sub estu,
> Cera vel ardenti facilis vicina camino,
> Liquitur ille tuens, captiva captus ab hoste,
> Victaque victorem potuit domuisse superbum. (*Africa* 5.270-5)
>
> […] Immediately a
> burning wound, making its way right through to his very marrow,
> took hold of Massinissa. Just like ice melts in the warm summer,
> or wax melts easily close to a burning forge,
> so he, looking at her, melted, captivated by the captive enemy,
> and the vanquished woman was able to subdue the proud victor.

Here, again, we are reminded of the intensity of emotion felt by Dido towards Aeneas, which is also characterised as a burning wound (*Aen*. 4.1-2). In the case of Sophonisba, however, it is a Carthaginian woman having this effect on a male hero, rather than vice versa. The sheer helplessness of Massinissa – like ice in summer or wax close to fire – emphasises Sophonisba's sexual power, made explicit by Petrarch reiterating the *captiva* / *captus* pairing inherited from Livy, but here put in immediate juxtaposition, with the *victa* / *victorem* contrast.[29] Sophonisba and Massinissa are bound by a "wild love" (*ferus amor*, 5.155), *ferus* being a word most frequently used in the *Africa* to describe Hannibal, as at *Africa* 2.30, or war (6.151), thus highlighting the threatening nature of their affair. Similarly, the love between Dido and Aeneas is also characterised as *ferus* in the *Aeneid*. For example, in a state of lovesickness, Dido has a dream in which she is pursued by Aeneas, who is described as *ferus* (*Aen.* 4.466). Later, while Dido contemplates a path of celibacy, she refers to such a choice as living a life *more ferae*, in the manner

[28] Greene, 1982b.

[29] This contrast is also made by Petrarch when referring to Hannibal's love for the Apulian *meretrix*. See *De viris* 1.17.46, 19.71; *Rem.* 1.69. For the imagery of melting snow in the *Canzoniere* see Corradini 1874, *ad loc.*

of a wild animal (*Aen.* 4.551).[30] By describing Sophonisba and Massinissa's romance in this manner, their love is not only doomed, but dangerous, since Dido's love for Aeneas ends not only with Dido's death, but also with an undying hatred between Carthage and Rome.

Sophonisba's subversiveness and liminality are further emphasised by Petrarch's description of her when Massinissa first encounters her. She looks like an idealised vision of beauty according to fourteenth-century Italian norms, as we will see, but appearances can be deceiving. The description of her starts from her head and moves down her body, as common in medieval descriptions of beauty:[31]

> […] Stabat candore niuali
> Frons alto miranda Ioui, multumque sorori
> Zelotipe metuenda magis quam pellicis ulla
> Forma uiro dilecta uago. Fulgentior auro
> Quolibet, et solis radiis factura pudorem,
> Cesaries spargenda leui pendebat ab aura
> Colla super, recto que sensim lactea tractu
> Surgebant, humerosque agiles affusa tegebat
> Tunc, olim substricta auro certamine blando
> Et placidis implexa modis: sic candida dulcis
> Cum croceis iungebat honos, mixtoque colori
> Aurea condensi cessissent uascula lactis,
> Nixque iugis radio solis conspecta sereni. (Africa 5.22-34)

> […] With its snowy whiteness
> Her face was enough to astonish Jupiter on high,
> and much more worrying for his jealous sister than
> the beauty of any adulteress, pleasing to an unfaithful
> husband. Brighter than any gold, and putting the sun's rays to shame,
> her hair flowed down, spread by a light breeze
> over her neck, which rose gradually in a straight milky line.
> Her hair, falling, covered her slender shoulders,
> and was then bound up carefully with smooth gold
> and tied in a pleasing way. Thus, gentle whiteness
> joined with the dignity of gold, and the golden strands
> of hair fell into the vessels of milk,
> the changeless snow lying beneath the rays of a bright sun.

[30] In his commentary to the *Aeneid*, Servius points to Pliny the Elder's description (*NH.* 8.43) of lynxes monogamy and celibacy after the death of their partners. Serv. *ad Aen.* 4.551.
[31] Raimondi 1970, 168.

For the first time, she is explicitly racialised as white.[32] Interestingly, the word used to refer to Sophonisba's hair, *cesaries*, was, in medieval lexicography, usually used to refer to the hair of men and animals, with *crinis* more usual for the hair of women.[33] Although Petrarch seems not to have observed such distinctions between the hair of men and women, using *cesaries* to refer to hair belonging to people of both genders (e.g., *Africa* 8.958-59 for men; *Epyst*. 1.2.15-16 for Rome personified as a woman), the ambiguity of the word here does speak to the ambivalent representation of Sophonisba, able to subvert gendered hierarchies. Similarly ambiguous, while *candida* might be translated as shining, fair, or beautiful, the comparison with milk and lilies makes it clear that here we are to understand Sophonisba as being white.[34]

However, despite this description of Sophonisba as physically attractive, there is something deeply sinister about her characterisation. In spite of her somatic white-washing, Petrarch is unable to fully suppress the fact of Sophonisba's Africanity. When introducing Sophonisba in terms of her physical beauty, Petrarch refers to her glance as being capable of turning hearts into "Medusan marble", such that "the African land did not lack a second monster" (*Africa nec monstris caruisset terra secundis.* 5.40).[35] Not only is Sophonisba adjacent to monstrosity, but this is an African monstrosity, since we hear of Perseus' slaying of Medusa among the African stories told by Syphax's bard in Book Three of the *Africa* (3.407-417). Moreover, as further proof of Sophonisba's sinister nature, she curses Scipio as she is about to drink her cup of poison at the end of Book Five in addition to Massinissa should he remain faithful to his allegiance to Rome (Ibid 5.748-766). In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dido foretells the coming of a nameless Punic avenger – Hannibal – who will rise up from her bones against Rome (*exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor. Aen.* 4.625), the subject of Petrarch's epic. In a similar way Sophonisba curses Massinissa's family to internal strife, predicting his descendant Jugurtha's eventual defeat at the hand of Marius (*Africa* 5.763-766), both of whom of course remain unnamed in Sophonisba's prophecy. Petrarch thus makes Sophonisba represent the most dangerous elements of Virgil's Dido.

[32] See Clines, 2023.

[33] Fera 1984, 152-3.

[34] Cf. the contrast between white snow (*nivem candidam*) and a black crow (*corvum nigrum*) in *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* (*Africa* 4.55). Cf., for example, *candida Dido* in Virg. *Aen.* 5.571, repeated in *Africa* 4.5, where *candida* can more reasonably read as "fair" or "radiant".

[35] See Corradini 1874, *ad loc.* for Medusa as an angry woman (*Canz.* 179) or a "heavenly breeze" (*l'aura celeste*) capable of freezing Petrarch to the spot (*Canz* 197). NB. "l'aura" and Laura. On this pun, see Greene 1982, 113.

This whitewashing of a North African woman would become more obvious when Sophonisba became a popular subject for paintings in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but it is Petrarch who first describes her as white, influencing later visual representations of her. In this respect, Petrarch follows the tradition of French medieval Romances written and set at the time of the crusades. In these texts Saracen princesses – Saracen being a racialised and derogatory term for Muslim – are become explicitly described as white when they become the virtuous objects of desire for crusading knights. These white Muslim heroines display their virtue by betraying their family and faith – Muslim women who remain faithful to their kin and religion are represented as dark-skinned and ugly.[36] Petrarch, as a vocal proponent of a renewed crusade against Islam, exemplified in, for example, *Canzone* 27 or his *De vita solitaria*, doubtless drew parallels between Rome's wars against Carthage and Christendom's against the Muslim world.[37] In emphasizing her threatening liminality and her insidious seductiveness, Petrarch has to make Sophonisba legibly desirable to his readers, and this means making her white. This preempts the orientalizing trope of the odalisque, the harem woman with western complexion, which would come to play such an influential role in later imaginings of Cleopatra, and indeed Sophonisba, in visual arts.[38]

Further considerations exist about the whitewashing of Sophonisba. For example, there are certain physical similarities between the *Africa*'s Sophonisba and Petrarch's characterisation of Laura, the beloved of the *Canzoniere*. Similar to Sophonisba's snowy complexion, Laura is described as having "a head of pure gold and a face of hot snow" (*la testa òr fino, et calda neve il volto*, *Canz.* 157, l. 9).[39] The effect of Petrarch's affection for Laura is comparable to Sophonisba's power over Massinissa, as for example in *Canzone* 211 in which Petrarch describes first setting eyes on Laura and being pulled along by pleasure (*piace mi tirar*), his reason dead (*la ragion e morta*). Petrarch's love for Laura is impossible in the same way Massinissa's love for Sophonisba is.[40]

However, the characters of Laura and Sophonisba greatly differ. Laura is almost perfectly virtuous, and it is Petrarch's love for her which is at fault, rather than there being any sense of her actively seeking to seduce Petrarch, as Sophonisba does Massinissa (see *Secretum* 4.1). Aldo Bernardo points to

[36] De Weever 1998.

[37] See Martinez 2021, 20-22.

[38] See Carlà-Uhink and Wieber 2020; Brown 2004.

[39] Laura's blond hair is mentioned in numerous poems of the *Canzoniere*, for example 1, 12, 90. 185, 196, 197. See also Raimondi 1970, 181-7 and Corradini 1874*, ad loc*.

[40] Bartuschat 2000, 119-20. See also Auhagen 2005, 131-2 for Petrarch's possible identification with Massinissa.

Sophonisba's descent to Hades at the beginning of Book Six of the *Africa* as the inverse of Laura's ascent into heaven in *Canzone* 346.[41] Where Laura is surrounded by angels and the blessed spirits (*l'anime beate*) who marvel at her beauty upon her arrival in paradise, Sophonisba, descending to the underworld as a *violentus spriritus (Africa* 5.773), is surrounded by crowds of Carthaginians (*agmina Penarum*. *Africa* 6.5) and the Furies. Sophonisba as a "violent sprit" in some respects corresponds with Dido, in the *Africa*, being referred to as *ferox* (3.424), a word with generally negative, un-Roman connotations in Petrarch's epic. Petrarch's use of the adjective also places Dido in conversation with that other dangerous African queen, Cleopatra, who is described by Horace (*Carm.* 1.37.29) as *ferocior* – more fierce – for her deliberate death.[42] *Ferox,* its cognate *ferus*, and *violentus* being adjectives associated with African women in Petrarch's epic, contributes to a semantic field of wildness and savagery into which Sophonisba, and by extension Dido and Cleopatra, are placed.

After her descent to the underworld in the sixth book of the *Africa*, Sophonisba is condemned to the third circle of hell, reserved for those whose lives were governed by love, rather than the second circle, where those who kill themselves are confined, as Rhadamanthus, one of the keepers of hell, initially rules before being overruled by Aeacus, another of hell's guardians. Although, in Dante's *Divina Commedia* it is the second circle of hell that is reserved for those guilty of lust, this is also the circle in which we find his Dido (*Inferno* 13.61-62), a representation of the Punic queen that follows the Virgilian tradition. In Dante's *Inferno*, Dido is *placed* alongside Cleopatra, among others, in the second circle.[43] However, when the *Africa*'s Sophonisba descends to this third cell of hell, Dido is missing from the number of legendary lovers encountered by Sophonisba.

The absence of Dido can be explained by the *Africa*'s resistance to the Virgilian model of the Carthaginian queen, whose story I outlined earlier. In a letter penned in his old age to a younger poet, Petrarch claimed to be the first of his era to "shatter the lie" of the Virgilian Dido (*Sen*. 4.5), restoring the 'historical' Dido of earlier authors. As Ralph Hexter suggests, this claim does not hold much water. Anyone who had access to Servius (*ad Aen.* 1.267), and indeed to Augustine (*Conf.* 1.13), Macrobius (*Sat*. 5.17.5), or Jerome (*Ep*. 123.7), would also have known the chaste Dido.[44] Prior to the *Aeneid* there was another tradition of the Dido story in which she never met Aeneas, since

[41] Bernardo 1962, 30 n.7.
[42] Fratantuono (2007) 119.
[43] On Dante's Dido, see Desmond 1994, 94-98.
[44] Hexter 1992.

Dido's foundation of Carthage and the fall of Troy are traditionally dated to be three hundred and forty years apart, according to Servius.[45]

The relationship between the *Africa*'s Sophonisba and Petrarch's pre-Virgilian Dido bears further consideration. The *Africa* presents us with both a negative and positive representation of Dido. For example, in Book One, during Scipio's dream in which he is visited by the spirits of his deceased father and uncle, the elder Scipio says to his son,

> […] viden illa sub Austro
> menia et infami periura palatia monte
> femineis fundata dolis? (Africa 1.180-3)
>
> Do you see those walls in the south
> And that perjured palace set on an infamous mountain
> Founded by feminine trickery?

Of course, this is Publius Cornelius Scipio speaking. As a Roman who died fighting Carthage, the antipathy towards the Punic city and its founding queen that he demonstrates here are understandable. The trickery that Scipio's father here refers to is Dido's ingenious solution to being granted as much land as is covered by an ox-hide by cutting the hide into strips that could then encircle the Byrsa, the citadel of Carthage, βύρσα being the Greek for "ox-hide" (Virg. *Aen*. 1.365-8). While this does not necessarily contradict the pre-Virgilian Dido found elsewhere in the *Africa*, it does at least portray her in a more negative light than is found in Book Three of the *Africa*. In this book of the epic, Scipio's lieutenant Laelius has been sent to lead a delegation to the Numidian king Syphax in order to secure his allegiance against Carthage.[46] As part of this diplomatic mission, Syphax's bard and Laelius trade exemplary stories, an African one for a Roman one. The pattern of exemplary Roman deeds being mirrored by foreign ones closely follows Valerius Maximus' *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium libri* (Books of Memorable Deeds and Sayings), a work more explicitly emulated by Petrarch in his *Rerum memorandarum libri*. The story of Dido presented here is explicitly pre-Virgilian, with Dido choosing death over dishonouring her dead husband by marrying a local African king. The bard acknowledges that an alternative version of Dido will one day come to differ from the virtuous queen presented here:

[45] On the "historical Dido" see Davidson 1998. Boccaccio would also come to represent Dido along the lines of the "historical" version in the 1350s, during which time he read Servius' commentary on the *Aeneid* and met Petrarch. See Cerbo, 1979. See also Desmond, 1994 for a broader discussion on the reception of Dido in the early modern period.

[46] In Livy 28.17 it is Scipio himself, rather than Laelius, who goes to Syphax's palace.

> Huic fiat, si forte aliquis - quod credere non est -
> Ingenio confisus erit, qui carmine sacrum
> Nomen ad illicitos ludens traducat amores! (*Africa* 3.425-7)
>
> What will happen to her, if by chance there be someone
> – this is unbelievable – who, confident in his skill, will in a poem
> drag Dido's sacred name into illicit loves.[47]

This skilful poet is Virgil, although Anna Cerbo in her study of Dido in Boccaccio's work suggests it may be Dante, and his representation of Dido in the *Commedia*.[48] The unreliability of Virgil's representation of Dido also shows up in Petrarch's *Secretum* in which Saint Augustine chastises Petrarch for his excessive desire for Laura. Augustine uses Virgil's Dido as an example of the effects of such desire, saying that Dido burned with love (*ardet amans Dido*), even if what the poet wrote is a total fabrication (*fabulosa narratio tota sit*. *Secretum* 5.12).[49] The frequent reference to the pre-Virgilian, "historical" model for the founding queen of Carthage in the *Africa* as well as the *Triumphus Pudicitie* and the *Secretum* opens up for Petrarch a space to be occupied by an African woman in the tradition of the Dido of the *Aeneid*: one given over to her libidinous impulses, who threatens the progress of Roman imperialism, and whose suicide is accompanied by an undying hostility towards Rome. The fact that the Sophonisba of the *Africa* takes the place of the Dido of the *Aeneid* allows for Petrarch to represent Dido as the virtuous founding figure found in the competing tradition to Virgil's. As we will see, if Dido could so effectively be rehabilitated in the imaginary of early Renaissance authors such as Petrarch and Boccaccio, then Sophonisba could later benefit from this same revisionary phenomenon.

Besides showing how representations of North African women – principally Dido – shaped the Sophonisba of the *Africa*, her characterisation also allows Petrarch to construct different forms of racialised masculinities around her. He emphasises the fact that North African men are those most prone to lustful behaviour, in this regard following Polybius and Livy's account of this episode. In the *Africa*, the description of Sophonisba is from Massinissa's point of view and is characterised by its prevailing tone of lasciviousness. Massinissa's racialised lack of discretion is contrasted with Scipio's exemplary masculine chasteness which is later mobilised to persuade

[47] See Corradini 1874, *ad loc.*

[48] Cerbo 1979, 181.

[49] Cf. Dido in Servius' commentary to the *Aeneid*, a late antique source much used by Petrarch and other early humanists. Servius ad *Aen*. 4.36; 4.674. On Servius and other Virgilian commentators in shaping twelfth-century Latin epic, see Haynes 2021. On Petrarch's "Ambrosian Virgil" which included Servius's commentary, see Mann 1984.

Massinissa to forsake Sophonisba and to help Syphax to see the error of his ways in betraying his allegiance to Rome for the sake of Sophonisba.

In the second book of his poem *Triumphus Cupidinis*, Petrarch again introduces us to Massinissa and Sophonisba. The poem takes the shape of Petrarch observing a triumphal procession, led by Love himself, trailed by his famous victims. Among the parade of the vanquished, he notices a pair who are marked out by their "strange dress" and "foreign speech" (*Triumphus Cupidinis*, 2.7). Although marked out as different by their clothes and language, with Sophonisba further distinguished by her hatred for Rome, no mention is made to any somatic difference. By comparison, later in the same book of the *Triumphus Cupidinis*, Andromeda is described as a "dark (haired) maiden" (*vergine bruna*). In the *Triumphus Cupidinis*, Massinissa narrates to Petrarch the story of his love with Sophonisba, while Sophonisba maintains her silence, breaking it only to declare her hatred for Rome (lines 77-78). The resentful silence of the spirit of Sophonisba in the *Triumphus Cupidinis*, along with her professed hatred for Rome, once more puts Sophonisba in dialogue with the Dido of the *Aeneid*, whose spirit in the underworld refuses to speak to Aeneas. The suggestion that Massinissa's and Sophonisba's difference lies in clothes, language, and character, but not physical appearance, is reinforced by art from the century following Petrarch's career.

Sophonisba also features in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, Boccaccio's answer to Petrarch's *De viris illustribus* mentioned earlier. Boccaccio's narrative of Sophonisba essentially paraphrases Livy's account, complete with the representation of the North African men in her life as hypersexual. Such characterisations of African male hypersexuality are also present in Boccaccio's narration of Dido, which, following Petrarch, follows the pre-Virgilian tradition of a virtuous, chaste queen who never met Aeneas. Here, the Numidian king Iarbus' love for Dido is explained by the fact that African men are most prone to lust (*cum in libidinem pronissimi homines Affri sint*. *De mulieribus* 42.10). In Boccaccio's accounts, therefore, there are clear parallels between Sophonisba's story, and that of the virtuous pre-Virgilian Dido, both subject to the hypersexuality of Numidian men but responding to it in different ways.[50] However, if, in Petrarch's and Boccaccio's later writing, Dido is held up as a "positive" image of femininity and Sophonisba as its "negative" counterpart, this would later be inverted. By the later Renaissance, the Virgilian Dido had become the hegemonic version once again, and Sophonisba had been transformed into the tragic victim in Appian and Diodorus Siculus.

[50] On Boccaccio's Dido, see Desmond 1994, 58-73.

A white-washed Sophonisba?

A key document for the changing attitudes towards the figure of Sophonisba is the painting by Andrea Mantegna with which I began my article. I suggest that although Mantegna's work engaged with Petrarch's poetry in a sustained and profound way, his representation of Sophonisba breaks away from the Livian narrative favoured by Petrarch, and indeed Boccaccio, and plays a part in shaping her characterisation in dramatic texts of the following centuries. Mantegna is critical in post-Petrarchan versions of Sophonisba. Not only was he a close reader of Petrarch's *Triumphi*, but he was significantly associated with the Gonzaga court of Mantua, from which the earliest dramatic representations of Sophonisba emerged. He therefore stands between these two moments and competing strands of Renaissance representations of the Carthaginian woman.

Mantegna was a keen antiquarian whose works were deeply influenced by the remains of Roman antiquity.[51] His fixation upon the ruins of Rome finds a precedent in Petrarch's fascination with the ruinscape of the imperial city, as expressed, for example, in Petrarch's letter to Giovanni Colonna (*Fam.* 6.2). The inspiration for Mantegna's paintings of Roman triumphs, including the "Triumphs of Caesar", which Vasari saw as Mantegna's greatest achievement and are now in Hampton Court Palace, can probably be attributed to Petrarch's representations of triumphs.[52] These nine large paintings were commissioned by Mantua's Gonzaga family between 1484 and 1492, prior to the exemplary women of which Sophonisba is a member.

The fictive bronzes of Sophonisba and Tuccia the vestal virgin were at one point thought to accompany another representation of a triumph, this time one associated with Scipio (*Figure* 2), painted by Mantegna from 1505 onwards for Francesco Cornaro in Venice.[53] The painting shows the introduction of the worship of the goddess Cybele into the city of Rome in 204 BCE (Livy 21.10,11,14; Ovid *Fast.* 4.30) and being welcomed into the city by Scipio Nasica, cousin of Scipio Africanus. According to Burckhardt, the Cornaro family believed themselves to be descended from the Cornelii, the family of which Scipio Africanus was a member.[54] Given the subject matter of this painting, it would certainly make sense for Sophonisba to be included within this context, although Tuccia has a less immediately relevant subject matter. All four exemplary women painted by Mantegna feature in Petrarch's *Triumphi*: Dido and Tuccia in the *Triumphus Pudicitie* (1343-44); Judith and

[51] See Bodon 2010.
[52] See Martindale 1979, 47-55 on triumphs in the early Renaissance.
[53] Lucco 2006, 94.
[54] Burckhardt 1990, 127.

Sophonisba in the *Triumphus Cupidinis*.[55] In Mantegna's painting of Dido, she is shown holding the funerary urn of her husband Sychaeus, making it explicit that we are viewing the pre-Virgilian representation of her as also depicted in Petrarch's *Triumphus Pudicitie.*[56] Mantegna's Sophonisba is more challenging to interpret. In the *Triumphus Cupidinis*, Petrarch recognises Sophonisba and Massinissa because of their strange dress (*Triumphus Cupidinis* 2.7), yet in Mantegna's paintings, she is dressed as a virtuous Italian matron, without the exoticized accoutrements of, for example, Dido in this same series of paintings, who wears splendid jewellery and a crown.

As mentioned in the introduction, Mantegna's Sophonisba has occasionally been identified as Artemisia II, queen of Caria in Asia Minor, who is reputed to have designed the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus for her dead husband (and elder brother) Mausolus.[57] Matthew Sears describes Artemisia as belonging to a "philhellenic Persian dynasty", and in iconography, she is depicted in Greek attire.[58] According to Valerius Maximus (4.6 *ext.*), Artemisia was so distraught by the death of her husband-brother that she mixed his ashes into her daily drink, which is what may be shown in Mantegna's painting. However, the uncertainty as to whether this is Sophonisba or a Hellenised queen is significant in itself. Although Carthage was also influenced by Hellenic culture, in the iconography of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is substantially orientalised.[59] Already in Mantegna's painting, Sophonisba or Artemisia is starting to lose the morality-based alterity which marks her in Petrarch's representations, facilitating her transformation into a generic tragic woman. By the time of Giovanni Battista Zelotti's 1565 frescoes in the Sophonisba Room in Villa Caldogno, in Caldogno, Italy, Sophonisba had become a generic, tragic woman, no longer marked by her North African identity.

[55] Lucco 2006, 96.

[56] See Franklin 2000.

[57] Franklin 2000, 119 n.2. Rembrandt's "Artemisia" (1634) has similarly been thought to represent Sophonisba. See Golhany 2000. Artemisia appears in the *Triumphus Cupidinis* III, and Petrarch also wrote about her in his *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae*, and her story is told by Boccaccio in *De mulieribus claris* and *De casibus virorum illustrium.* See Lummus 2017, 464-465.

[58] Sears 2014, 213.

[59] On Hellenised Punic material culture, see Acquaro 1986. On orientalised representations of Carthage, cf. the near-contemporaneous frescoes by Jacopo Ripanda (attr.) in the Capitoline Museums' Hall of Hannibal.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have traced Petrarch's reception of the story of Sophonisba, as he encountered it in Livy, through three of his texts that include the Carthaginian woman, especially the *Africa*. Petrarch's emphasis on the story of Sophonisba impacted Boccaccio's *De mulieribus* as well as Mantegna's fictive bronzes, via Petrarch's *Triumphs*. I suggest, in closing, that Petrarch's presentation of Sophonisba's and Massinissa's romance highlights anxieties around miscegenation – the biological reproduction between people of different "races". Although Carthage was founded by migrants from the Levant, and thus frequently seen as not properly African in classical Latin texts such as the *Aeneid*, Petrarch frequently conflates Carthage and Africa. Thus, for Massinissa – a Numidian – to be romantically involved with a Carthaginian does not automatically trouble any proto-racial boundaries. In order to present this romance as the threat that it is to Massinissa's character and his allegiance to Rome, the attraction exerted by Sophonisba on Massinissa must be made to be subversive. This subversion is represented by Sophonisba's ability to crossing boundaries, including racial ones. Numidian alterity, when compared with Romans, is emphasised. Petrarch, in keeping with his classical sources, presents Numidians as fickle and hypersexual, contrasted with Scipio's pious chasteness. Carthaginians are Other too, mainly due to their perfidy and cruelty. However, in order to accentuate the boundary-crossing subversiveness of Sophonisba and Massinissa's affair, as well as to emphasise Sophonisba's attractiveness, she is made to be white. Although Massinissa is not explicitly described as having darker skin, a well-travelled fourteenth-century Italian such as Petrarch would have known that North Africans generally have darker complexions. Thus, Massinissa's phenotypic alterity is to be taken for granted, whereas Sophonisba's whiteness is not, hence the extended description of her appearance. Indeed, in later Renaissance visual depictions of Sophonisba – such as Zelotti's – she is shown to be white and contrasted with darker Carthaginians and Numidians. This also corresponded with a gradual reframing of Sophonisba as an innocent victim of a tragic love, rather than a subversive schemer.

Mantegna's painting demonstrates a particular moment in this development. By the time Mantegna depicted Sophonisba, the first Latin translation of Appian's works had been published by Petrus Candidus in 1452, thus allowing non-Greek readers access to the other version of Sophonisba's story, in which she appears as a more virtuous, heroic figure. Although I have argued that Mantegna builds on the Sophonisba of Petrarch's *Triumphs*, there are hints of a more praise-worthy figure than that of the *Africa*, since she stars alongside other heroines who are more unambiguously

virtuous. Thus, I argue, part of the "whitewashing" of Sophonisba's morals meant a more explicit whitewashing of her somatic differences.

If "race" is a modern concept that evolved into what we currently understand of it during the Enlightenment, then we need to trace its developments by investigating that awkward period of history that sits somewhere in between the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance. Petrarch, frequently cited as a key figure of early humanism, therefore represents an important thinker for the elaboration of this fraught concept. Since part of Petrarch's apparent "modernity" was in his project to revive classical models drawn from his reading of Latin literature, then the most "classical" of his works, the *Africa*, is also the most obvious place to start in probing Petrarch's "modernity". And if it is the idea of "race" that we are investigating, then where better to start than with the story of Sophonisba, that curiously pale-skinned, blond-haired African temptress. In the centuries following the *Africa*, Sophonisba would go through multiple, diverging iterations on the dramatic stage, in literature, and in the visual arts. All of them are indebted in some way to Petrarch, and thus, the afterlives of Sophonisba in early modernity are anchored in this curious fourteenth-century Latin epic, which looked to antiquity to articulate a vision of modernity.

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Illustrations

Figure 1: Andrea Mantegna, A Woman Drinking, from Two Exemplary Women of Antiquity, about 1495-1506. Image: © The National Gallery, London (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/andrea-mantegna-a-woman-drinking

Figure 2: Andrea Mantegna, "The Introduction of the Cult of Cybele at Rome" / "The Triumph of Scipio". Image: © National Gallery, London (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/andrea-mantegna-the-introduction-of-the-cult-of-cybele-at-rome

L'ÉLOQUENCE DE SOPHONISBE, DE SAINT-GELAIS À MONTREUX (1556-1601)

By Nina Hugot

Sophonisbe is particularly present in French sixteenth-century tragedy. Although her story fits easily into the tragic aesthetics of that time, this figure presents a singularity: Sophonisbe is an eloquent queen, who uses her rhetoric and manages to divert two kings from their alliance with Rome. In Saint-Gelais and Mermet, a fascination for the queen's speech appears; however in Montchrestien and Montreux, interest in the queen's eloquence diminishes, while, for the characters, it is increasingly associated with manipulation – as if a woman's eloquence should not be given too much space on the theatrical stage.

Parmi les héroïnes tragiques de l'Europe moderne, Sophonisbe[1] occupe une place de choix, puisque c'est avec elle que Gian Giorgio Trissino fait renaître en Italie la tragédie à l'antique. Si, en France, Cléopâtre est d'abord mise à l'honneur par Étienne Jodelle, force est de constater que ces deux femmes ne sont pas sans ressemblances : reines africaines captives des Romains, Sophonisbe comme Cléopâtre n'ont d'autre choix que de se tuer pour ne pas perdre leur liberté et leur honneur. En outre, la primauté donnée à l'Égyptienne n'empêche pas la Carthaginoise de trouver sa place dans le théâtre français, puisque le seul seizième siècle nous a légué quatre versions tragiques de son histoire : en 1556, à la demande de Catherine de Médicis, Mellin de Saint-Gelais donne une traduction prosimétrique de la pièce de Trissino, et cette première version est suivie de trois autres en vers, celles de Claude Mermet en 1584, d'Antoine de Montchrestien en 1596 et de Nicolas de Montreux en 1601. Bien sûr, plusieurs raisons contextuelles peuvent expliquer la récurrence de cette figure, ne serait-ce que le succès de la version

[1] Les noms de Sophonisbe/Sophonisba ou Massinisse/Massinissa sont francisés dans certaines versions, et non dans d'autres : par souci d'uniformité, nous choisissons ici de nous conformer à l'usage moderne (Sophonisbe/Massinissa), en dehors des citations du texte que nous laissons telles quelles.

italienne. Plus profondément, l'histoire de Sophonisbe – celle d'une femme qui subit un renversement de fortune et démontre sa grandeur d'âme et sa hardiesse face à lui – correspond tout à fait à la définition éthique et esthétique de la tragédie de l'époque[2]. En outre, comme certaines de ses consœurs[3], la reine est caractérisée non seulement par sa grande beauté, mais aussi par son éloquence, et même par sa capacité à faire usage, sur scène, de sa rhétorique[4]. Certes, le style de la tragédie étant par définition élevé[5], le langage des personnages est toujours éloquent, mais cette éloquence n'est pas nécessairement portée au crédit du personnage – *in fine*, elle l'est peut-être plus à celui du dramaturge – : elle est la conséquence du rang et n'est pas commentée par le reste du personnel dramatique. Or dans le cas de Sophonisbe, la parole féminine est un élément essentiel de l'intrigue, puisque la reine convainc deux hommes, Siphax et Massinissa[6], de rompre leur engagement vis-à-vis de Rome[7]. Pourtant :

> Bien qu'encore au XVI^e^ siècle français, l'éloquence soit fréquemment présentée sous des traits féminins […], la pratique de l'art oratoire et les préceptes qui s'y appliquent ne sont pas, on le sait, destinés aux femmes, car celles-ci n'ont pas habituellement, à la différence des hommes, à prononcer de discours sur la place publique.[8]

Dès lors, cette éloquence féminine est-elle subversive ? Comment est-elle ici représentée ? Cette représentation est-elle stable ou évolue-t-elle au fil du

[2] Voir Hugot 2021 et Delmas 2000.

[3] Esther et Cléopâtre sont également caractérisées par leur parole possiblement manipulatrice chez Rivaudeau, 1566 et Jodelle 1574.

[4] Sur la différence entre ces deux notions, voir La Charité, « introduction », dans La Charité et Roy 2012, 7-8. Sur la question de l'éloquence, voir Fumaroli 2002 [1980], La Charité 2007 et Goyet 2015. Sur la rhétorique, voir Fumaroli 1999, qui entend aller contre l'association de la rhétorique à la manipulation des mots. Voir également sur ce point Montagne 2012.

[5] Par exemple, Bochetel (1550, 4) définit la tragédie par la « sublimité du style et gravité des sentences ».

[6] Si le lecteur-spectateur voit sur scène la manière dont Sophonisbe convainc Massinissa de prendre son parti, Siphax rappelle à Scipion qu'il a lui-même été détourné de son engagement par la reine.

[7] De nombreuses lectures rhétoriques de ce théâtre humaniste ont pu être proposées (voir notamment Griffiths 1970 et 1962, ou encore Jondorf 1990, qui insiste sur la nécessité d'avoir une définition large de la rhétorique) : nous ne nous inscrivons pas dans ce sillage, puisque notre idée est d'interroger la représentation de cette rhétorique féminine – la rhétorique est donc étudiée ici en tant que motif de la pièce, et non en tant que structure.

[8] Desrosiers 2019. Elle montre également que dans les traités de rhétorique, le féminin apparaît comme un repoussoir, notamment parce qu'il s'associe au fard. Voir également sur ce point La Charité et Roy 2012. Pour un état de la recherche, désormais relativement ancien, sur cette question, voir dans ce volume l'article de Diane Desrosiers, « Femmes et rhétorique. État présent de la recherche », 13-21.

siècle ? Peut-on en tirer des conclusions sur la place de la parole des femmes au théâtre ? Ce sont ces questions que nous poserons aux quatre *Sophonisbe* du XVI[e] siècle français[9], en les abordant dans leur ordre chronologique.

Saint Gelais et Mermet : « D'une parolle ferme et assurée »

Les deux premières versions, celles de Mellin et Mermet, qui suivent de près la *Sofonisba* italienne, présentent une certaine fascination pour la parole de la Reine. Ce sont les mots de Sophonisbe qui ouvrent les deux pièces :

> De quoy puis-je las tenir propoz sinon de ce que jour et nuict tourmente ma pensée ?[10]

Et chez Mermet :

> Helas ! de quel costé doy-je tourner ma langue,
> Pour former le discours de ma triste harangue,
> Sinon là où me poind mon fascheux pensement […]. [11]

Comme chez Trissino, les pièces s'ouvrent *in medias res*, au beau milieu d'une conversation entre Sophonisbe et Herminia, sa dame de chambre et amie, et attirent d'emblée l'attention du public sur la parole de la reine[12]. Dans les deux pièces, cette dernière est loin de prononcer la majorité des répliques[13] – notamment parce que les troisième et quatrième parties sont consacrées aux

[9] Bien sûr, l'étude pourrait être poursuivie en intégrant les pièces suivantes sur Sophonisbe. Néanmoins, la plupart des études qui suivent cette voie ne distinguent pas Saint-Gelais et Mermet, faisant d'eux de simples traducteurs de Trissino (voir par exemple Daele 1947, p. 185-194). Nous préférons donc resserrer le corpus notamment pour insister sur les différences entre ces deux dramaturges et montrer leur spécificité par rapport à la source italienne. En étudiant un corpus bien plus large, Clotilde Thouret (2010) montre que chaque pièce se rapporte à une tradition différente de mise en scène de Sophonisbe : Montchrestien se situe dans la veine amoureuse, les trois autres dans la veine morale, avec un Montreux intéressé par la question de la fidélité, là où Mellin et Mermet, comme Trissino, choisissent la méditation néo-stoïcienne « sur les inconstances de la fortune et les malheurs des grands », conformément, du reste, à l'esthétique tragique de l'époque.

[10] Saint Gelais 1559, fol. 3 r°.

[11] Mermet 1584, 1.

[12] Ces premiers mots pourraient être la réponse de la reine à un reproche de sa dame de chambre, ou du moins à une requête de sa part, visant à la faire changer de propos. La suite du dialogue, où Herminia invite au contraire Sophonisbe à lui confier ses plaintes et ses peurs (chez Saint-Gelais « vous pouvez seurement descharger vostre cueur, et me dire ce qu'il vous plaira », fol. 3r°), montre que c'est Sophonisbe qui s'interroge sur la valeur de sa parole, et non son entourage.

[13] Chez Saint-Gelais, l'édition moderne nous a permis de dénombrer 270 lignes attribuables à Sophonisbe (discours rapporté ou prononcé sur scène), sur les 1320 du texte ; néanmoins le compte n'est pas représentatif puisque l'assemblée de dames parle en vers, contrairement aux autres personnages. Chez Mermet, Sophonisbe prononce d'après nos relevés 471 vers sur les 2524 de la pièce, sans compter les soixante-sept vers de discours rapportés.

Romains et aux négociations de Massinissa avec ces derniers – mais, lorsqu'elle est présente, elle prend une part importante au dialogue, en prononçant souvent de longues tirades. Mieux encore, lorsqu'elle est absente, dans la cinquième partie, la parole de Sophonisbe se fait entendre par de nombreux discours rapportés[14].

Au-delà du volume, les dramaturges travaillent particulièrement les prises de parole de Sophonisbe : c'est surtout chez Saint-Gelais, qui dispose des ressources de la prose, que la rhétorique de la reine se distingue le plus de celle des autres personnages. Dans la pièce, Sophonisbe est tour à tour porteuse d'une parole dominée par le *pathos*, où la douleur s'exprime par un style coupé et des modalités expressives, et d'un style périodique, de modalité assertive et parfois gnomique, qui témoigne de son acceptation résignée du destin[15]. Ainsi, à l'acte I, la reine se montre lucide lorsqu'Herminia l'invite à ne pas désespérer et à accepter les événements :

> Je congnois assez qu'il se debvroit ainsy faire comme vous dites, mais la force de ma douleur lie mes sens de telle sorte qu'ilz ne peuvent obeyr à raison : Tellement que si le ciel pitoiable ne prent mon affaire en protection, je me veoy conducte au but, oultre lequel les corps n'ont plus de vie.[16]

Le calme et la lucidité de Sophonisbe sont ici retranscrits par une rhétorique de la période, avec des phrases amples et complexes, articulées par des connecteurs logiques témoignant de la construction raisonnée du discours. Plus loin, lorsqu'elle apprend que son époux est captif, l'émotion prend cette fois le pas :

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[14] Chez Saint-Gelais, ses femmes rapportent au discours direct les propos qu'elle a tenus hors scène, face au porteur du poison, à Herminia, à ses enfants et, surtout, face à la mort qui l'attend. Chez Mermet, nous trouvons même un discours direct rapporté supplémentaire, lorsque le Messager raconte le mariage et ce qui le précède, 35 (voir également Trissino 1572, fol. 18 v°). Notons que ce passage présente aussi, plus haut, un discours indirect de la dame « A qui la dame feit response, sur le champ, / Que d'estre à un Seigneur si puissant mariée, / Auquel premièrement elle fut destinée, / Cela ne luy pourroit que grand plaisir donner […] » 35. Pour les autres discours directs, voir la prière à Junon (71-72) puis les adieux à ses dames et à son fils (72-73). Cependant, comme Sophonisbe meurt sur scène, conformément à ce que l'on trouve chez Trissino, les discours rapportés qui ont lieu à ce moment se trouvent désormais sur scène, voir 85-86, et chez Trissino 1572, fol. 37 r° et v°.

[15] En ce sens, Sophonisbe partage bien la voix « et plaintive et hardie » de Cléopâtre. Voir Hugot 2021.

[16] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 5 v°. Chez Mermet (1584, 8) : « Je connoy bien qu'on doit ton bon conseil tenir : / Mais la griefve douleur du tout exorbitante, / Et le sens rebellant à raison pertinente, / Abbatent ma vertu, empeschent mon devoir, / Et me rendent en fin sans force ny pouvoir, / De m'opposer au mal qui me fait tant d'outrage : / Si le ciel n'a pitié de moy, en ce naufrage, / Diminuant un peu ceste aspre anxieté, / Voicy mon dernier jour fini et limité : / De toutes mes douleurs, cecy est la derniere ». Voir Trissino 1572, fol. 8 r°.

> SOPHONISBA. O fortuné Syphax, où es tu maintenant ? Et es mains de qui suis-je demourée ?
> DAMES. Quel cueur est si cruel qui voyant en telz termes
> Ceste princesse cy, peust contenir les larmes ?
> SOPHONISBA. O malheureuse haultesse, à quel abisme m'as tu conduicte ?[17]

Outre l'intervention des dames, qui guide la réaction du public, le changement de style de Sophonisbe renseigne sur la gravité de la situation. La reine, qui vient de s'évanouir, prononce des phrases plus courtes, de modalité interrogative, ponctuées d'interjections, et adressées à un absent, Siphax, puis à une abstraction, la « hautesse » de sa condition. Cette parenthèse émotionnelle se referme cependant assez vite, puisque Sophonisbe retrouve la modalité assertive et une certaine amplitude phrastique lorsqu'elle annonce son choix de la mort dans une adresse à son père Hasdrubal :

> La foye que je m'estois promise en fin de vous donner de cest avantageux mariage, sera que vous me verrez en continuel tourment ; sera que je seray desnuée de toute grandeur, et esloignée du pays de ma naissance ; qu'il me fauldra passer la mer, devenir esclave ; et servir à la superbe nation, naturelle ennemye de la mienne, non, non, vous n'entendrez point telles nouvelles de moy, vous orrez plus tost dire que je seray morte que serve.[18]

Le récit de sa mort présente une ambivalence semblable, puisque la seconde femme insiste sur la « parolle ferme et asseurée » de la reine[19], tout en racontant que, lorsqu'elle se tourne vers Herminia et que celle-ci lui donne son fils, ses paroles deviennent « coup à coup entrerompues de groz sanglotz et de larmes » [20]. Ainsi, lorsqu'elle est entourée de ses alliés, Sophonisbe oscille entre le style coupé de l'émotion face à la séparation et la période oratoire signalant l'acceptation du sort[21].

La Carthaginoise n'est jamais sur scène avec ses ennemis, mais le public l'observe face à Massinissa, précisément lorsqu'elle tente de faire de lui un allié. Sophonisbe met alors en œuvre divers procédés de l'argumentation et le persuade, en deux temps, de la protéger du joug romain en l'épousant. En guise d'exorde, elle se place sous la puissance de son adversaire :

> Monseigneur, je sçay bien que le ciel, et la fortune, et voz vertuz, vous ont donné la puissance de faire de moy ce qu'il vous plaira ; mais si à

[17] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 8 v°. Voir Mermet 1584, 13 et Trissino 1572, fol. 10 r°.
[18] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 9 r°. Voir Mermet 1584, 14 et Trissino 1572, fol. 10 r° et v°.
[19] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 45 r°.
[20] *Ibid*., fol. 46 r° et v°. Voir Mermet 1584, 72-73 et Trissino 1572, fol. 33.
[21] En cela, Sophonisbe correspond parfaitement à la double caractérisation par Jodelle de la voix de l'héroïne tragique comme étant « et plaintive et hardie » : voir Hugot 2021.

> une prisonniere estant à la discretion d'autruy est permis de parler, et de supplier, je vous requiers une seule grace, c'est qu'il vous plaise ordonner à ma personne condition telle que bon vous semblera : pourveu que vous ne souffriez que je vienne à la puissance et servitude d'aucun Romain. Vous seul au monde, Seigneur, me pouvez delivrer de ce joug.[22]

Dans ce double portrait, la Carthaginoise insiste sur le pathétique de son statut de prisonnière et, symétriquement, flatte Massinissa en faisant de lui le seul homme « au monde » à pouvoir la sauver. Elle fait ensuite appel à la solidarité africaine face aux envahisseurs romains, puis, pour conclure, revient au registre pathétique, espérant que « vous esmeuve à compassion la misere et calamité où je suis ores, et la felicité de ma vie passée »[23]. D'abord, Massinissa lui répond qu'il est touché par ses paroles, mais qu'il ne peut rien faire pour elle, puisqu'il est lui-même soumis aux Romains. Encouragée par le chœur, Sophonisbe reprend pourtant la parole et indique : « je prendray la hardiesse de parler avec plus de confiance à vous » [24]. Elle lui souffle alors le moyen de la sauver, en lui posant cette question rhétorique qui le dépeint à nouveau en vainqueur : « Car qui ausera debatre qu'il ne vous appartienne bien, oultre le principal du buttin, avoir une femme en vostre disposition ? »[25]. Ensuite, Sophonisbe revient aux ressources du pathétique, en insistant sur le sort funeste qui l'attend, puis en se jetant aux genoux de son adversaire[26]. Massinissa cède alors, et Sophonisbe le remercie en mettant en scène sa propre parole :

> Avec quelles parolles pourray-je assez dignement vous rendre graces de ceste liberalle et magnanime promesse, laquelle veritablement vous montre bien meriter les victoires, le nom et la hauteur en quoy vous estes ? Et pourtant, si je me trouve doubteuse et confuse, et ne sçay bien ordonner mes propoz, je ne suis point indigne d'excuse. Car il me semble estre impossible de pouvoir parler d'un cueur si genereulx comme est le vostre, en la façon qu'il appartient, ne donner assez de louange à un si glorieulx et louable fait comme cestuy cy.[27]

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[22] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 10 v°. Voir Mermet 1584,17-18, et Trissino 1572, fol. 11v°-12r°.

[23] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 11 r°.

[24] *Ibid.*, fol 12 r°.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] « Qui me faict de rechef vous demander ceste grace de m'en delivrer, par ces genoulx que j'embrasse, et par cette victorieuse main, pleine de valleur, et de foy, que je vous baise. Autre refuge ne m'est demeuré en ce monde si non vous Monsieur, à qui j'ay recours comme au port de ma sauveté », Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 12 v°. Voir Trissino 1572, fol. 13 r° et v°. Sur ce geste, voir Buron 2015.

[27] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 13 r° et v°. Chez Mermet 1584, voir p. 23 « Sçauroy-je deslier ma langue en façon telle, / Que vous remercier je puisse dignement, / Le bien que vous

Nous pourrions bien sûr interroger la sincérité de la reine dans le passage – c'est du moins ce que font les autres personnages, nous allons y revenir –, mais si les propos de Sophonisbe sont sûrement plus maîtrisés qu'elle ne l'admet, ils ne sont pas sans rapport avec la situation : elle est en effet parfaitement démunie face aux Romains et n'a plus que Massinissa pour l'aider. Quoi qu'il en soit, ces trois épisodes, celui de la découverte par Sophonisba de son renversement de fortune, celui de la persuasion de Massinissa pour tenter d'aller contre ce renversement, celui des adieux à la vie enfin, qui constituent les moments phares des pièces, donnent une image vive et variée de la parole de la reine.

En outre, les dramaturges prennent soin de distinguer la rhétorique de l'héroïne en la faisant souligner par les personnages qui l'entourent. Certes, dans les deux pièces, le débat sur les pouvoirs de la parole ne se limite pas à la seule Sophonisbe : ainsi, Massinissa explique que c'est parce que Siphax a fait « tant par ses menaces » qu'il a pu obtenir la main de la Carthaginoise[28]. De manière plus nette, lorsque Massinissa avance face à Scipion que, puisque Sophonisbe lui avait été promise, il pouvait l'épouser de droit, le Romain lui répond :

> Qui ne sçauroit certainement de quel costé seroit le tort, oyant ce que vous venez de discourir, mal-aisement se pourroit persuader que je ne l'eusse : mais celuy n'est pas le plus juste, ny n'a le meilleur droict, qui mieux sçait collorer de belles parolles, ce, à quoy le pousse son desir : ains est celuy qui jamais ne se depart de la verité.[29]

Chez Mermet, Lélio loue encore en ces termes les mots de Caton :

> Caton vous dites bien, et usez d'un langage
> Si orné de raison, que sage ne seroit,
> Ains trop presumptueux, qui s'y opposeroit.[30]

Plus profondément, un élément essentiel de l'intrigue tourne autour de la parole : faut-il considérer que Massinissa a des droits sur Sophonisbe parce

m'offrez ainsi courtoisement ? […] Helas non : je ne sçay de quel costé tourner / Ma langue, pour louange entiere vous donner. / Et si j'ay crainte en moy de demeurer confuse » ; voir Trissino 1572, fol. 14 r°.

[28] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 29 v°.

[29] *Ibid*., fol. 30 v°. Chez Mermet 1584 : « Celuy qui ne sçauroit à qui donner le tort, / Ayant bien entendu vostre parolle toute, / Je croy qu'il ne faudroit me le donner, sans doubte. / Mais un brave causeur qui dit tout ce qu'il veut, / Plus juste pour cela estimer on ne peut : / L'on doit donques priser celuy qui de la voye / De pure verité jamais ne se forvoye » (58). Voir Trissino 1572, fol. 28 r°.

[30] Mermet 1584, p. 46.

qu'elle lui avait été promise avant Siphax [31] ? Ainsi, la question de la parole et de ses pouvoirs est au cœur des deux pièces, mais la réflexion se cristallise bien autour de l'héroïne, dont la parole conduit deux hommes à trahir leur camp politique et militaire. Or, autour de la représentation et de l'interprétation de la force rhétorique de la Carthaginoise, des différences apparaissent entre les deux dramaturges.

D'abord, Mermet insiste, plus que ne le fait Saint-Gelais, sur les pouvoirs de la beauté de la reine – ce qui, *de facto*, amoindrit l'importance de son éloquence. Ainsi, chez Mellin, Massinissa affirme qu'il ne peut mal la traiter:

> car il n'est chose plus vile que d'oultrager femmes, et courir sus à ceux qui sont opprimez et sont sans aide et resistance. Et puis la jeunesse où vous estes, les bonnes graces, et beauté dont vous estes pleine, voz doulces parolles et prieres, meritent trouver non seullement pitié, mais faveur.[32]

Ce sont la beauté et l'éloquence de Sophonisbe qui persuadent ici Massinissa, conformément à ce que l'on trouve chez Trissino[33], tandis que, chez Mermet, la beauté prend plus de place :

> car chose plus abjette,
> Ny plus vile se peut au monde excogiter,
> Qu'outrager une femme, et que persecuter
> Ceux qu'on void sans faveur, en langueur et oppresse.
> Comment ! vostre beauté, ceste rare jeunesse,
> Ce parler moderé, ce maintien vertueux,
> Ceste douce priere, et aspect gracieux,
> Ceste humble contenance, à chacun agreable,
> Feroyent bien devenir un Tigre pitoyable.[34]

Massinissa fait l'éloge de la beauté ainsi que de l'éloquence de la reine, mais ici, la beauté physique est plus déterminante que chez Saint-Gelais. Dans cette même scène, l'Assemblée de dames, qui souhaite que Massinissa vienne en aide à sa reine, commente encore chez Saint-Gelais :

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[31] Voir par exemple chez Mermet 1584 : « Mais si l'on vous avoit Sophonisbe promise / (Comme vous avez dit) ains que Syfax l'eust prise : / Vostre femme elle n'est pour cela nullement, / Promise ne l'ayant qu'une fois simplement : / Car une seule, simple, et legere promesse, / Ne fait le mariage, eu esgard à jeunesse » (59). Voir également le dialogue entre Herminia et Sophonisbe, où les deux femmes réfléchissent alternativement aux pouvoirs de la parole de l'autre : Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 40 v°, 41 r° et 42 r° ; Mermet 1584, 80 et 82.

[32] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 11v°.

[33] « *Però, ch'esser non può cosa più vile, / Che offender Donne, et oltraggiar coloro, / Che sono oppressi senz'alcuno aiuto. / Poi questa vostra giovenile etate, / Gli alti costumi, le bellezze rare, / Le suavi parole, e i dolci priegh / Farian le Tigre divenir pietose* », Trissino 1572, fol. 12 v°.

[34] Mermet 1584, 19.

Grande force devroit avoir un beau langage,
Prononcé doucement et sortant du couraige
D'une si accomplie et aymable personne.[35]

Et chez Mermet :

Grande force doit avoir
La parole gracieuse
D'une Dame vertueuse,
Quand on peut sa beauté voir.[36]

Chez Mermet, avec la mise en place de la subordonnée, la beauté conditionne la réception de la parole gracieuse, alors que chez Mellin, ces deux éléments sont coordonnés, conformément à ce que l'on trouve chez Trissino[37]. Comme le remarque l'éditrice moderne de Saint Gelais : « le rôle de Sophonisba surtout acquiert sous la plume de nos auteurs quelque chose de plus viril. Le Trissin insistait surtout sur la beauté, Mellin de Saint-Gelais met en relief sa bonté et sa vertu »[38]. En effet, sa beauté semble passer à l'arrière-plan chez Mellin[39], tandis que, chez Mermet, celle-ci prend plus d'importance (y compris par rapport au Trissin) et ne s'accompagne plus d'un éloge global[40].

De même, les deux auteurs présentent une sensibilité différente à la question de l'éloquence féminine. De fait, la parole de Sophonisbe est présentée comme extraordinaire, voire comme transgressive. Ainsi, lorsque

[35] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 12 v°.

[36] Mermet 1584, 21.

[37] « *Gran forza haver devrebbon le parole, / Che son mosse dal cuore ; e dolcemente / Escon di bocca d'une belle Donna* », Trissino 1572, fol. 13 v°.

[38] Zilli 1989, 245-246. Peut-être faut-il également y voir une conséquence de la distribution prévue par la pièce, puisque le rôle de Sophonisbe est tenu lors de la représentation de Blois par la comtesse Louise de Clermont-Tallard, alors âgée de 52 ans.

[39] L'assemblée des dames l'apostrophe « divine beauté » mais mentionne immédiatement sa « bonté si rare » et sa « vertu ». De même, le Premier gentilhomme de la reine la décrit comme une « si belle et si vertueuse dame » ; l'assemblée des dames évoque encore une princesse « de toutes graces pourveue » ; concluant le récit de la mort de Sophonisbe, la seconde femme la décrit comme « tout ce qu'il y avoit de parfaicte beauté, douceur, courtoisie, et bonté en ce monde », tandis que les derniers mots en prose de la pièce voient Massinissa la décrire comme « une si vertueuse princesse » (Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 6 v°, puis 34 r°, 43 v°, et fol. 46v° et 47r°).

[40] Ainsi, la première dame la désigne comme une « beaute si rare » durant le premier chœur (10) ; les dames parlent de « sa beauté, / sa beauté et sa noblesse » (29), le serviteur indique qu'elle s'est « belle revestuë / d'un accoustrement blanc » (64) puis la désigne comme une « si belle dame » (66) ; la servante évoque plus loin « son corps delicieux » (69) et sa « beauté » (70) ; Massinissa parle encore de « ceste Dame belle » (90) ; la troisième Dame d'une « Dame tant accomplie » (90) et Massinissa évoque sa « belle face nette » (92) puis s'exclame encore « ha ! l'honorable Dame / C'estoit la bonté mesme : ô la galante femme » (92-93).

le second soldat rapporte à Lélius que Massinissa a épousé Sophonisbe et évoque leur rencontre, nous lisons :

> LÉLIUS. Mais où estoit elle ? où la veid-il premierement ?
> SECOND SOLDAT. En la place devant le chasteau.
> LÉLIUS. Que luy dist-il d'entrée ?
> SECOND SOLDAT. Elle parla à luy la premiere.
> LÉLIUS. Comment ? De l'espouser ?[41]

Cette scène, qui se trouve déjà chez Trissino et se retrouve chez Mermet[42], signale le caractère transgressif de la parole de la reine, laquelle va outre les convenances de genre en parlant « la premiere ». Or, sur cette éloquence extraordinaire, les jugements des autres personnages sont plus sévères chez Mermet qu'ils ne le sont chez Mellin. Ainsi, lorsque le Second Soldat rapporte à Lélius que Massinissa a promis à Sophonisbe sa liberté, Lélius l'interroge sur les moyens de la persuasion :

> LÉLIUS. Qui peult induire à faire si folle promesse ?
> SECOND SOLDAT. Amour, grande beauté, et douces parolles.[43]

Dépourvues d'article, les notions abstraites du dernier vers cité confirment la double origine de la séduction physique et verbale. La densité de l'expression vise à frapper l'oreille et l'esprit du spectateur, pour insister sur l'association topique de la beauté avec la tromperie[44]. Chez Mermet, la traduction est encore moins favorable à Sophonisbe :

> LELIO. Mais qui l'a donc induit telle chose promettre ?
> LE MESSAGER. Amour, et les propos tous sucrez à l'entour.[45]

Or, chez Trissino, nous lisons :

> *Lelio. Che'l potè indurre a far questa promessa ?*
> *Messo. Amore, e le dolcissime parole.*[46]

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[41] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 17 r°.

[42] « *LELIO. E che le disse nel primero incontro ? / MESSO. La Donna a lui parlò primieramente. / LELIO. Ella gli parlò pria d'essergli moglie ?* », Trissino 1572, fol. 17 v°. Chez Mermet (1584, 33) : « LELIO. Et qu'est-ce qu'il luy dict par le premier propos. / LE MESSAGER. La Dame luy parla, de premiere arrivée. / LELIO. Luy parla-elle pas d'estre sa Dame aimée ? ». L'interjection puis l'interrogation de Lélius, spécifiques à Saint-Gelais, renforcent l'idée de transgression.

[43] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 17v°.

[44] Sur la vision ambivalente de la beauté féminine, voir par exemple Berriot-Salvadore 1993, 95-108.

[45] Mermet 1584, 34.

[46] Trissino 1572, fol. 18 r°.

La traduction de Mermet caractérise bien plus négativement l'éloquence de la reine que celle de Mellin. Voici encore comment Siphax justifie sa trahison auprès de Scipion, chez Mellin :

> La seule cause, Scipion, en a esté l'amour de Sophonisba, laquelle estant affectionnée envers son pays, autant ou plus que dame le sçaurait estre, et m'ayant tellement enflammé le cueur de l'amour de sa bonne grace et de son incomparable beauté, qu'elle avoit toute puissance de disposer de moy à sa volonté, sceut si tresbien dire que finablement elle me retira de vostre alliance et me tourna du tout à celle de son pays.[47]

D'après lui, Siphax a d'abord eu le cœur « enflammé » par la grâce et la beauté de Sophonisbe, ce qui a permis à cette dernière de le convaincre par son éloquence. Chez Mermet, nous lisons :

> O Seigneur Scipion il faut que je vous die
> Que l'amour, l'excellence, et la rare beauté
> De ceste Sophonisbe, à ce m'ont incité […]
> Elle sceut si bien dire en fardant son langage,
> Qu'elle me feit, chetif, vous tourner le visage […].[48]

Et chez Trissino :

> *La causa fù la bella Sofonisba :*
> *De l'amor de la qual fui preso et arso ;*
> *Sendo costei de la sua patria amica,*
> *Quanto alcun'altra mai, ch'indi n'uscisse.*
> *E di costumi, e di bellezze tali,*
> *Che potean far di me, cio ch'a lei piacque.*
> *Si seppe dir, ch'ella da voi mi smosse ;*
> *Et a la patria sua tutto mi volse.*[49]

Par rapport au Trissin et à Saint-Gelais, Mermet ajoute l'idée de fard, et explicite le caractère volontaire de la manipulation. Si le spectateur n'a pas accès aux propos que Sophonisbe a tenus à Siphax, il a pu observer sa force de persuasion sur Massinissa dès la partie II, puisque ce dernier trahit ses engagements en épousant Sophonisbe pour la protéger de Scipion. Or ce dernier comprend que les paroles de Siphax valent avertissement :

> Avez-vous point noté les parolles de Siphax ? quand il m'a dict que les persuasions de Sophonisba ont esté les poingnans aiguillons qui l'ont

[47] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 25v°.
[48] Mermet 1584, 51.
[49] Trissino 1572, fol. 25.

> incité contre nous. Cela me faict penser qu'il sera bon de pourveoir à ce que ses doulx attraiz ne nous soustraient encores ceste aultre icy.[50]

Il demande chez Mermet :

> Avez-vous remarqué (Caton) ce qu'il a dit ?
> Comme il a clairement Sophonisbe chargée
> De l'avoir, par sa ruse et parole affectée,
> Animé contre nous, luy et tout son pouvoir ?
> Il seroit donques bon se prendre garde, et voir
> Qu'elle fine et accorte, encores ne nous puisse
> Oster d'entre les mains, et ravir Massinisse,
> A force de babil, et doux enchantement.[51]

Là encore, Saint-Gelais reste plus proche de Trissino[52], tandis que Mermet ajoute l'idée de manipulation et de ruse. Ainsi, chez Mellin et Mermet, l'éloquence de Sophonisbe a une grande importance dans la pièce, mais Mermet accentue l'importance de sa beauté dans le processus de persuasion et fait exister plus de discours qui caractérisent négativement cette parole, du côté de la ruse et de la manipulation. Faut-il comprendre que Mermet entendrait dévaloriser l'usage que la reine fait de la parole, plus que ne le fait Mellin ? Chez ce dernier, Caton demande à Massinissa :

> Seriez vous bien si mal conseillé de vouloir la guerre contre les Romains, pour l'amour d'une femme ?[53]

Or Caton demande chez Trissino :

> *Forse voler combatter coi Romani*
> *Per questa Donna ?*[54]

Le Romain insiste sur la disproportion, sensible dans l'opposition du nombre « les Romains » / « une femme », et sur le caractère déraisonnable de cette action. Si le Caton du Trissin utilise le démonstratif « *questa* », chez Mellin, l'article indéfini « une » dévalorise Sophonisbe en l'intégrant dans une catégorie plus large et en rappelant les conséquences désastreuses de la beauté et de l'éloquence féminines en général – ce qui ne se trouve pas chez Mermet[55]. D'un autre côté, chez ce dernier, comme chez Trissino,

[50] Saint Gelais 1559, fol. 27 r°.
[51] Mermet 1584, 53.
[52] « *Catone, udiste il ragionar, che ha fatto / Siface, e come'l dir di Sofonisba / Gli fù contra di noi dui sproni ardenti ? / Però fia buon veder, che non ci toglia / Quest'altro con le docli sue lusinghe* », Trissino 1572, fol. 26r°.
[53] Saint-Gelais 1559, fol. 23r°.
[54] Trissino 1572, fol. 23r°.
[55] Mermet 1584, 46.

Sophonisbe réfléchit brièvement à la spécificité de la parole féminine, face à Massinissa :

> Il est vray qu'un Seigneur qui des flateurs n'a cure,
> Desdaigne de se voir loué oultre mesure :
> Tellement que craignant ce danger encourir
> Je me tairay, sans plus de voz faicts discourir :
> Sçachant que quand par femme un propos se raconte,
> De tout ce qu'elle dit on n'en tient pas grand conte.[56]

Ces propos, qui ne se trouvent pas chez Saint-Gelais, montrent une Sophonisbe consciente du discrédit porté sur la parole féminine. Le théâtre restant par nature polyphonique, il est difficile de se prononcer sur ce qui serait une polarisation de l'éloquence de la reine : cette insistance sur une rhétorique manipulatrice étant essentiellement le fait des Romains, peut-être faudrait-il y voir une manière de discréditer ces derniers plutôt que la reine, comme pourrait le montrer l'évocation par Sophonisbe de la dévalorisation systématique de la parole féminine. Il est difficile de conclure sur ce point, mais cette tendance à accentuer la manipulation se confirme dans la version suivante de la pièce, chez Montchrestien, tandis que semble peu à peu disparaître la fascination pour la parole de Sophonisbe.

Montchrestien[57] : une « accorte femelle » ?

Par rapport à ses prédécesseurs, Montchrestien, qui s'inspire de Pétrarque et ne reprend pas les éléments issus d'Appien, s'éloigne du texte de Trissino[58]. Comme chez ce dernier et chez Mermet, la beauté tient une place essentielle dans la description de Sophonisbe : à l'acte II, Massinissa l'apostrophe « ma belle et douce dame », évoque la « Beauté reine des cœurs » et décrit la reine comme une « rare beauté » [59]. Par rapport aux auteurs précédents, l'éloquence de Sophonisbe est cependant moins présente. Certes, la reine discourt toujours du renversement de fortune à l'acte I face à la Nourrice[60] ; ses adieux sont en revanche beaucoup plus rapides à l'acte V, et Sophonisbe est bien

[56] Mermet 1584, 23. Voir Trissino 1572, fol. 14 v° : « *e perche ancora / Scema ogni laude in bocca d'una Donna* ».

[57] Nous nous fondons ici sur l'édition de 1604. Sur les différentes éditions de la pièce, voir notamment Rigal 1905.

[58] Sur la spécificité de Montchrestien et ses sources, voir notamment Thouret 2009, 100-101. Nous n'énumérerons pas ici les nombreuses différences entre ces pièces, mais nous pouvons noter les différences principales de l'intrigue, outre le remplacement d'Herminia par la Nourrice : à l'acte III, Lélius réprimande Massinisse mais lui dit qu'il le soutiendra auprès de Scipion ; à l'acte IV, Scipion est mis au courant par Massinisse du projet de mettre fin à la vie de Sophonisbe, et l'accepte.

[59] Montchrestien 1604, 140 et 145.

[60] *Ibid*., 133-146.

moins vectrice de *pathos*[61]. Quant à la scène de persuasion de Massinissa, elle prend ici une autre forme[62] : chez Trissino, Mellin et Mermet, elle se fait en deux temps, puisque Massinissa refuse d'abord d'aller contre la volonté des Romains, avant d'accepter après une deuxième tirade de Sophonisbe. Chez Montchrestien, une seule tirade suffit : on pourrait alors considérer que le dramaturge insiste sur la force de l'argumentation puisque Massinissa ne résiste plus, ou alors, au contraire, qu'il souligne moins la capacité argumentative de la reine. De fait, nous retrouvons chez Montchrestien des procédés rhétoriques présents chez les dramaturges précédents, qu'il a rassemblés en une longue réplique : ainsi, Sophonisbe reste détentrice de sa force rhétorique. C'est surtout la réaction de Massinissa qui change : il indique à la reine qu'il cède, subjugué par « les beaux mouvemens mariez à la voix »[63], mais la voix ne renvoie pas à l'ordonnancement du discours ; de même, lorsqu'il raconte la scène à Lelius, il insiste sur le fait que la reine était « pitoyable et belle » [64]: c'est avant tout la beauté de la prisonnière qui l'aurait convaincu.

Dès lors, Massinissa ne mentionnant plus l'éloquence de Sophonisbe, son meilleur défenseur disparaît[65]. Ainsi, la sincérité de la reine est plus franchement mise en doute : Lélius évoque ses « feintes larmes » lorsque Massinissa lui rapporte la scène[66], et Siphax est ici plus négatif, puisqu'il dépeint la « bouche sorcière » ou encore les « yeux brillants » de la reine, puis indique :

> […] joignant les attraits à l'art de l'éloquence
> La douceur aux desdains, la grace à la rigueur,
> Elle s'est faite en fin maistresse de mon cœur.[67]

Il la décrit encore comme « piperesse »[68], comme détentrice d'une « voix charmeresse » ou de « trompeurs appas », et Scipion conclut : « O sexe detestable ! embusche de douleur ! / Tousjours tu nous produis quelque nouveau malheur »[69]. Plus loin, il évoque encore une « accorte femelle » aux « trompeurs hameçons »[70]. Enfin, contrairement à ce que nous avions

[61] *Ibid*., 185-186.

[62] D'après nos relevés, Sophonisbe prononce 412 vers dans la pièce. Elle est présente sur scène durant tous les actes, sauf à l'acte IV.

[63] *Ibid*.,154.

[64] *Ibid*., 162.

[65] Contrairement à Mellin et Mermet, Montchrestien met en scène un Massinissa avouant de lui-même son mariage à Lélius et demandant même l'autorisation à Scipion d'aider Sophonisbe à mourir… Sophonisbe est donc bien plus isolée dans cette pièce.

[66] *Ibid*., 162.

[67] *Ibid*., 171.

[68] *Ibid*.

[69] *Ibid*., 172.

[70] *Ibid.*, 175

auparavant, Sophonisbe elle-même accrédite cette idée puisqu'elle annonce ainsi sa rencontre avec Massinissa :

> Allon, chere Nourrice : il faut que je m'appreste
> De vaincre sa rigueur. L'esprit felon de Mars
> Qui des champs Thraciens vient d'avec ses soldars,
> Amolli par les yeux de la belle Ciprine,
> Esteint entre ses bras l'ardeur de sa poitrine.[71]

S'il n'est jamais question de ce qui serait un amour véritable de Sophonisbe vis-à-vis de Massinissa, les dramaturges précédents ne la montraient pas du moins élaborant une stratégie avant sa rencontre avec le roi.

Chez Montchrestien, l'association systématique de l'éloquence à la manipulation n'est pas synonyme de condamnation de la reine. Cette dernière demeure caractérisée par sa constance face à la mort[72] et son choix radical de la liberté, sur lequel insiste l'épigramme finale[73]. Néanmoins, son éloquence, moins représentée dans l'œuvre et exclusivement négative, ne contribue plus à son éloge : le dernier dramaturge, Montreux, accentue encore ce phénomène.

Montreux : un « langage doux »

La pièce de Montreux s'affranchit parfaitement du modèle italien et ne semble pas non plus se fonder sur les prédécesseurs français, ce qui n'implique pas, bien sûr, que le dramaturge n'ait pas eu connaissance de ces pièces ni qu'il n'ait pu s'en inspirer[74]. La pièce, qui s'ouvre alors que Massinissa a déjà épousé la reine et la garde sous sa protection, prend une allure assez différente et donne moins de place à l'héroïne[75]. Montreux semble en effet explorer dans cette pièce la réaction des vaincus face à Rome, en confrontant les comportements de Siphax, de Massinissa et de Sophonisbe, ce qui amoindrit, *de facto*, l'importance de cette dernière, qui partage désormais l'affiche avec ses époux. Ainsi, celle-ci n'ouvre pas la pièce et

[71] *Ibid*., 146.

[72] *Ibid*., 185-186.

[73] « Mourons dit-elle donc, c'est là trop arresté : / Si ce n'est en gardant la chere liberté, / Ce sera pour le moins apres l'avoir perduë », *ibid*., 187.

[74] Voir Montreux 1976, 5-15. Voir également Thouret 2011 : elle confronte les pièces de Montreux et de Montchrestien en montrant que le premier semble répondre au second sur les questions de la fidélité politique (et amoureuse, en donnant précisément moins d'importance à cet aspect, du fait de la composition de la pièce qui s'ouvre après l'union de Sophonisbe et de Massinisse). Concernant les sources, Montreux indique dans l'Argument avoir suivi Appien et Plutarque, que l'édition de 1976 donne en appendice, 25-29.

[75] Comme le note Donald Stone dans son introduction (*ibid.,*11), la critique a été sensible à cette moindre importance de Sophonisbe.

n'apparaît qu'à l'acte II, à la toute fin de l'acte IV, puis à l'acte V[76]. Sophonisbe n'apprend pas sur scène le renversement de fortune et le public perd donc le spectacle de sa réaction face à lui (quoique sa scène d'entrée à l'acte II, au cours de laquelle elle se lamente et annonce sa mort, reste poignante) ; en outre, n'étant plus accompagnée d'Herminia (c'est déjà le cas chez Montchrestien), et n'évoquant plus ses enfants au moment de sa mort, elle perd son grand moment pathétique ; surtout, puisque le spectateur ne la voit pas convaincre Massinissa, la mise en scène de sa rhétorique persuasive disparaît[77]. Bien moins représentée, l'éloquence de Sophonisbe est également peu évoquée. Ainsi, lorsque Siphax explique à Scipion les raisons de sa trahison à l'acte I, il le fait en ces termes :

> Sophonisbe ma femme, excellente en beauté,
> Qui ravit par ses yeux ma chere liberté,
> Belle d'ame et de corps, en prudence admirable,
> Et en rare sçavoir, en terre sans semblable,
> Qui Affriquaine née, a tousjours procuré
> Le salut de Cartage et son bien deferé.[78]

Le portrait que Scipion propose de la reine est bien plus positif que chez les autres dramaturges, puisque son amour pour son épouse est toujours vivace, et il inclut non seulement la beauté mais encore un éloge moral de la dame – il n'est cependant pas explicitement question de son éloquence[79]. De même, lorsque Massinissa fait le portrait de la reine, nous lisons :

> […] j'ay butiné sa femme
> Sophonisbe qui tient jà captive mon ame,
> Sophonisbe la belle, et qui brave de cœur
> Au milieu du peril trace le saint honneur,
> Sophonisbe, l'honneur de Cartage ruinee,
> Dont ores nous voyons la gloire terminee,
> Sophonisbe ma femme, et dont l'honneur si beau
> A ma brave vertu sert de sacré flambeau […].[80]

Dacée dit encore à Sophonisbe à l'acte II :

> Hé, n'avez-vous encor ceste mesme beauté

[76] Son volume de parole est légèrement restreint par rapport aux dramaturges précédents, puisqu'elle prononce 458 vers sur les 2842 de la pièce.

[77] De fait, ce passage est essentiellement rapporté par Tite-Live (*Ab urbe condita*, XXX, 12-15), source dont Montreux ne se revendique pas.

[78] Montreux 1976, v. 375-380, 51.

[79] Le « rare sçavoir » loué par Siphax peut renvoyer à l'éloquence de la reine, comme le montre *infra* la réplique de Dacée, mais cela reste implicite.

[80] *Ibid.,* v. 545-552, 60.

Qui rendoit de Siphax serve la volonté ?
N'avez-vous ce sçavoir dont l'appast ordinaire
Dispose son esprit du tout à vous complaire ?[81]

Le « sçavoir » qui peut séduire les hommes renvoie certainement à la rhétorique, mais ce point n'est précisément pas développé par le personnage. L'éloquence de Sophonisbe est alors seulement évoquée après sa mort, à l'acte V, une fois qu'elle n'est plus là pour la mettre en œuvre. Ainsi, lorsque Lélius fait le récit à Scipion de la mort de la reine et des événements qui l'ont précédée, nous lisons :

Tu sçais que Massinisse, ayant Siphax domté,
Espousa ceste royne, excellente en beauté,
Riche de fier courage, et cruelle adversaire
En faits et en propos de Rome tutelaire.
Son langage de vœux et de pleurs animé
Avoit jà contre nous le roy Siphax armé […]
La crainte que tu eus que le langage doux
De ceste royne peut oster d'avecque nous
Le vaillant Massinisse et le rendre adversaire,
Comme elle fist Siphax, de nostre main guerriere,
Fut cause que je fus envoyé vers ce roy […].[82]

Siphax évoque encore son « doux langage » qui l'a « traîn[é] en servage »[83]. Son éloquence est donc soulignée par ses ennemis pour expliquer son pouvoir sur Massinissa et Siphax et se voit sommairement caractérisée par sa « douceur » – une douceur bien sûr ambiguë voire perverse. La rhétorique de Sophonisbe n'apparaît alors plus qu'en arrière-plan, dans le souvenir des autres personnages.

Pour autant, Montreux ne choisit pas d'insister sur l'autre caractéristique de la reine, sa beauté physique ; celle-ci est souvent évoquée[84], mais, comme ses prédécesseurs, le dramaturge met surtout en valeur la constance de Sophonisbe, son acceptation courageuse de la mort et son refus d'une vie de servitude[85]. Bien sûr, des discours négatifs circulent sur la reine : ainsi,

[81] *Ibid.,* v. 973-976, 76.
[82] *Ibid.*, v. 2643-2659, 145.
[83] *Ibid.*, v. 2793-2794, 150.
[84] Voir « sa rare beauté », *ibid.*, v. 1444, 95.
[85] Dès l'acte II, elle clame ainsi : « La mort n'est qu'un tourment qui trespasse en peu d'heure / Où le mesme tourment immortel nous demeure. / Alors que nous vivons et que l'injuste sort / Nous fait haÿr nos jours et paresser la mort, / Ce corps est à la terre, et à la terre demande, / Afin de le guarir, qu'à ses flancs on le rende. / Or rends-le Sophonisbe, et si le mal n'a pas / Esbranlé ta vertu, la face du trespas / A bien moins de pouvoir d'en perdre la constance, / Puisque moindre est l'effort de sa cruelle outrance. » *Ibid*., v. 699-708, 66-67.

Misipsa insiste sur sa « cruauté » et décrit négativement son pouvoir sur les hommes[86]. De même, Scipion invite Massinissa à la prudence en ces termes : « Veux-tu quiter la gloire et, pour suyvre une femme, / Contraire à ta vertu deshonorer ton ame ? »[87]. Nous retrouvons ici la généralisation proposée par Mellin, et observons plus bas une autre généralité plus proche de celle de Montchrestien : « O sexe dommageable », puis « O sexe miserable », s'exclame Scipion, en évoquant Hélène, Polyxène, ou encore Cassandre[88]. Si les Romains restent critiques du comportement de la reine, nous les voyons cependant changer de ton après sa mort, puisque Scipion procède alors à un long éloge de la Carthaginoise. En outre, contrairement à ses prédécesseurs, Montreux fait dire à Sophonisbe qu'elle aime Massinissa[89], certes, une fois qu'il lui a donné le poison, mais elle évoque rétrospectivement un amour qui aurait commencé plus tôt. Relevons encore une particularité de Montreux : comme il le fait dans sa *Cleopatre*, il montre que la constance face à la mort confère à Sophonisbe un héroïsme masculin[90]. Le portrait de la reine n'est donc pas nécessairement plus sombre que chez les autres dramaturges[91] – l'éloquence, cependant, est presque passée sous silence.

Curtius, qui donne à Sophonisbe le poison à l'acte IV, évoque encore son « cœur » (*ibid*., v. 2176, 129) tandis qu'à l'acte V, Massinisse insiste sur sa beauté mais aussi sur sa « riche vertu » (*ibid.*, v. 2295, 133). Voir encore l'éloge de Scipion après la mort de la reine, v. 2721-2760, 147-148.

[86] *Ibid*., v. 1508, 98.

[87] *Ibid*., v. 1791-1792, 112.

[88] *Ibid*., v. 1811-1823, 113.

[89] *Ibid*., v. 2215-2288, 130-132. Sur cette question, voir Mazouer 2010 : il montre qu'il ne faut pas se limiter à l'opposition entre la Sophonisbe amoureuse issue d'Appien et la Sophonisbe politique issue de Tite-Live dans l'examen des tragédies, mais prêter attention au contraire aux multiples variations de la figure. Il montre également que Montreux est loin d'insister sur l'amour de Sophonisbe autant que le feront les dramaturges suivants.

[90] Massinisse reconnaît ainsi qu'il est « surpassé en constance ordinaire, / En courage, en vertu d'une femme d'honneur » (Montreux 1976, v. 2350-2351, 135) ; Sophonisbe indique encore : « » L'esprit effeminé et l'infame courage / » Tous seuls en l'univers endurent le servage, / » Pour n'avoir le courage ou le cœur assez fort / » Pour regarder le front de la cruelle mort, / » Car tout royal esprit plustost change de place / » Que se voir enchainé, et serve son audace, / » Que se voir captivé et privé du repos / » Par l'ennemy cruel de son antique los » (*Ibid.*, v. 2469-2476, 139). Dacée s'exclame encore à l'acte V, après la mort de la reine : « O rare Sophonisbe, en beauté sans semblable / Et en rare vertu aux vertus admirable. / O vertueuse royne ! o cœur d'homme parfait / Qui tousjours a haÿ le funeste forfait ! » (*Ibid*., v. 2609-2612, 143) ; nous retrouvons enfin cette idée chez Siphax : « O roine vertueuse et de qui la belle ame / Fut d'un homme royal, non d'une foible femme. » (*Ibid.*, v. 2797-2798, 150). Montreux prend la même option pour caractériser sa Cléopâtre, voir Hugot à paraître.

[91] Concernant la représentation du féminin chez Montreux, voir Buron 2009 ; Buron 2020 ; Ladefoged 2020 ; pour la pastorale, voir Hilgar 1987.

Conclusion

Les quatre dramaturges qui mettent en scène Sophonisbe au XVI^e^ siècle en proposent un portrait plutôt positif, quoiqu'ambivalent, en insistant notamment sur sa constance face au renversement de fortune. Choisissant la mort plutôt qu'une vie de servitude, Sophonisbe prouve sa valeur morale et, chez Montreux, en remontre même aux hommes qui l'entourent. Avant sa mort, la Carthaginoise se démarque par sa « beauté », « rare », « sans semblable », qui permet d'expliquer qu'elle ait pu séduire deux généraux et leur faire oublier leur allégeance à Rome. L'autre caractéristique de Sophonisbe, son éloquence, tient en revanche une place plus variable dans les pièces. Saint-Gelais est celui qui insiste le plus sur la rhétorique de la reine, qui la met le plus en scène et en discours ; Mermet, qui suit la même source trissinienne, conserve la fascination pour cette parole mais renforce l'ambivalence qui la caractérise. Chez Montchrestien et plus encore chez Montreux, si l'éloquence ne disparaît pas tout à fait, elle passe à l'arrière-plan et s'associe presque exclusivement à la manipulation. Ainsi, dans la tragédie française du XVI^e^ siècle, la fascination initiale des dramaturges pour la parole éloquente de Sophonisbe disparaît peu à peu. Faut-il y voir la conséquence de choix individuels, de différences de sensibilités ou encore de contextes – par exemple, le fait que la pièce de Saint-Gelais soit commandée par Catherine de Médicis et jouée par des femmes de la cour pourrait avoir son importance[92] –, ou faut-il comprendre que l'éloquence ne fait plus partie des caractéristiques valorisées chez les femmes en cette fin de siècle ? Comme l'écrit Claude La Charité :

> À première vue, personne ne semble plus étranger à la rhétorique que les femmes d'Ancien Régime. D'une part, cet art de persuader par la parole se fonde sur une tradition androcentrique de l'Antiquité, comme en témoigne l'adage prêté à Caton le Censeur, *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, l'homme de bien, au sens sexué du terme, est habile à la parole. D'autre part, de la Renaissance à la Révolution, les femmes ont été exclues de l'enseignement formel de la rhétorique dispensé dans les collèges au sein du *trivium* à côté de la grammaire et de la logique. Et pourtant, du XVI^e^ siècle aux Lumières, nombreux sont les témoins qui insistent sur l'éloquence remarquable de leurs contemporaines.[93]

La rhétorique des femmes existe, mais elle est l'exception, et non la règle : c'est bien ainsi qu'est présentée l'éloquence de Sophonisbe, dès Trissino, et, en outre, les personnages masculins la reçoivent avec une ambivalence certaine, ce qui peut fonctionner comme un avertissement adressé au public

[92] Sur ce point voir Lebègue 1946 et Zilli 1991.
[93] La Charité 2012, 7.

féminin. Néanmoins, tout se passe comme si ces deux éléments, l'exception et l'ambivalence, ne suffisaient plus à neutraliser le danger représenté par cette éloquence féminine déployée sur scène. En effet, la parole éloquente de la reine constitue et révèle sa force individuelle, et elle permet plus largement d'affranchir le pouvoir féminin de la simple beauté physique. C'est donc d'une partie de sa puissance que Sophonisbe est amputée au fil de ses mises en scène, comme s'il ne fallait pas trop insister, au théâtre, sur les pouvoirs de la parole des femmes[94].

[94] Pour prolonger la réflexion, on pourra consulter Dufour-Maître dans La Charité 2012, 102-110. Elle montre que Corneille peint des héroïnes contestant les modèles rhétoriques admis, ce qui a, du reste, provoqué des débats à l'époque. Voir également Lochert 2021.

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Erofili – an Egyptian Sofonisba from Crete

By Christian Høgel

The models of Georgios Chortatsis's play Erofili, *written around 1590, were to a large extent Italian plays written a few generations earlier. Main plot elements were adopted from the* Orbecche *(1541) by Giovanni Battista Giraldi, with a tragic love story involving a princess and her secret marriage, whereas two of Chortatsis's choral odes included adapted translations from choral odes from Trissino's* Sofonisba *(published 1524). It is the aim of the present article to show that Chortatsis's choice of an African scene, Egypt as opposed to Persia in* Orbecche, *as well as new themes – not least meritocratic values and the social importance of rich and poor – can also be tied to themes in Trissino's historical drama* Sofonisba. *The present article therefore argues that Chortatsis was inspired by this play not only in the two choral odes, a connection that has been noted in earlier scholarship, but also more generally, in combining the family drama of the* Orbecche *with more societal values, which Chortatsis may have found inspiration for in Trissino's historical drama.*

Introduction

Early modern Cretan theatre has left us three tragedies, of which the *Erofili* (written around 1590, also commonly transliterated as *Erophile*) is the most renowned.[1] It was written by Georgios Chortatsis, from whose hand we also have a pastoral play, *Panoria,* and a comedy, *Katzarapos*, as well as four so-called *intermedia* (interludes), which in certain versions accompany the *Erofili*.[2] For more than a century, scholars have been identifying the sources of the *Erofili,* primarily showing how Chortatsis and his contemporary

[1] For an overview of the *Erofili,* see Puchner 2017, 123-27 and Αλεξίου 2001, 11-83. On the little we know about the life and position of Georgios Chortatsis, see esp. Savoye 2009, 61-84. The exact date of composition (or staging) of the play is unknown, and the dating by modern scholars fall variously within the 1580s and 1590s, with Αλεξίου 2001, 49-50, opting for the year 1595.

[2] All these are now available in the edition by Rosemary E. Bancroft-Marcus, with English translation on facing pages, in Chortatsis 2013. On earlier editions, see Savoye 2009, 99-112.

playwrights heavily depended on the new Italian plays that since the first decades of the 1500s had been highly successful also elsewhere outside Italy.[3] The island of Crete was at the time closely tied to the Italian sphere for it had been under Venetian rule ever since the fourth crusade in the early thirteenth century.[4] Whereas administration worked through a combination of Greek and Italian, the theatrical stage of Crete was in Greek, in fact in the commonly spoken local Cretan dialect.[5] Being to some degree free adaptations of Italian plays, and reflecting common motifs from Italian theatre, the Cretan plays mirrored plots, genre discussions, and even ideological stances coming from Italian theatre, sometimes downplaying controversial themes, in other cases further elaborating these.[6] It is the aim of the present paper to give a more politically observant interpretation of the *Erofili* than is normally given, primarily based on how Chortatsis chose to employ not only Giovanni Battista Giraldi's *Orbecche* (1541) as his primary model, but also to find inspiration in various aspects taken from Trissino's *Sofonisba* (first printed 1524).[7] Former studies have shown how Chortatsis's *Erofili* also reflected social or political problems through its presentation of a past Golden Age, without wars and prideful rulers and in which not least women were free to choose whom to marry. These ideas had been stated forcefully not long before Chortatsis's play in the *Aminta* (published 1580) by Tasso.[8] But Chortatsis extended this notion of a Golden Age and combined elements into an even more societal drama. By including themes and elements stemming from the historical drama of *Sofonisba,* set in the proximity of ancient Carthage and drawing on ancient historical sources, Chortatsis converted the plot of the *Orbecche* – staged in an exotic and perverted faraway world – into an *Erofili* engaged in issues of moral rectitude and in questions involving rich and poor, as well as social values such as fair reward for one's good deeds. In the end, the *Erofili,* still a play on love, staged in a not-so-distant Egyptian setting, will in this light appear to be discussing meritocratic values and perhaps even including some notion of contemporary Ottoman Egypt. Drawing attention to these aspects of Chortatsis's play may further involve Cretan drama in

[3] On Cretan drama, see Puchner 1991; Puchner 2017, esp. ch. 3 "Re-Inventing Theater: Renaissance and Baroque Crete under Venetian Rule (1500s–1600s)"; and Puchner 2018.

[4] Maltezou 1991, Δετοράκης 1986.

[5] On the linguistic and cultural mix, see Maltezou 1991, 32-35.

[6] See esp. the study by Paschalis, primarily analysing Chortatsis' *intermedia* (interludes), Πασχαλης 2011a.

[7] Edition of the *Orbecche*, with facing French translation, is found in Giraldi Cinzio 2018. Giraldi's name was Giovanni Battista Giraldi, to which he appended the nickname Cinzio (variously spelled); modern references shift between Giraldi and Cinzio.

[8] Analysed in Πασχάλης 2011b, 353-57.

discussions of developments that European drama underwent in the age of the Counter-Reformation and Ottoman threat.

The plot: from Giraldi's *Orbecche* to Chortatsis's *Erofili*

First, a small recap of the storyline in the *Erofili* of Chortatsis. The plot of the *Erofili* follows that of Geraldi's *Orbecche,* but with some important deviations.[9] Also in the Greek play, we have a princess, Erofili, now daughter of an Egyptian king of Memphis, who has secretly married her childhood friend, Panaretos. Panaretos – also a prince it turns out towards the end of the play – has been living at the Memphis court since early childhood, and as general of the king he has accomplished important victories over neighbouring enemies from Persia and a "Kingdom of the East".[10] But at the beginning of the play, he is now caught in an insecure position, having secretly married the king's daughter, without the king's knowledge. A joint delegation from those very countries that Panaretos fought against now arrives, with a marriage offer to Erofili: She is free to marry either of the two princes from the enemy countries. Caught up in this constraint of royal marriages, Erofili confesses her love for Panaretos to her nanny, whereas Panaretos finds a trustful ear with his friend Karpophoros, but to no avail. At a later stage in the drama, the ghost of the dead brother of the king appears on stage, announcing that revenge is imminent. For the king had, in order to rise to power, killed this brother as well as two nephews, and married the sister-in-law. She is the mother of Erofili, and we now see what dreadful family horror lies behind her birth. Receiving reports about the relationship between Erofili and Panaretos, the king is enraged. His advisor and Erofili attempt to assuage him, but though seemingly softened, he has Panaretos caught, tortured, and executed. In the final scene, quite closely mirroring the fate of Orbecche, the king, father of Erofili, offers her what he presents as a wedding gift, but which turns out to be the head, hand, and heart of the dismembered Panaretos in a bowl. In horror, Erofili commits suicide but unlike Orbecche, who kills her father before her suicide, it is the chorus of local maidens who at the end of the *Erofili* kill the king, after a maiden of the chorus has made him trip by pretending to want to kiss his feet.

As we see, this plot in many ways follows that of Geraldi's *Orbecche,* a fact that was noticed already in 1870.[11] Some important differences, however, set the two plots apart. As noted already, in the *Erofili* it is the chorus – not the protagonist Erofili – who at the end kills the king (and father). Furthermore, the whole tragic family story is in certain ways simplified in the

[9] On this, see Πασχάλης 2008; Savoye 2009, 443-69.
[10] τὸ βασιλιὸ τσ᾽ Ἀνατολῆς, II.384.
[11] In an article by C. Bursian, see Πασχάλης 2008, 265-66.

Erofili when compared to the Italian model. In the Italian play, Orbecche's father had, as background to the drama on stage, not killed his brother but his wife and oldest son, due to their incestuous relation, and in this play it is therefore the ghost of the killed wife, Orbecche's mother, who appears on stage to enact revenge. And her culprit is not primarily her husband but her daughter, Orbecche, who had revealed the incestuous connection and thereby set in motion the retribution of the husband/father. The sequence of some of these elements also come in a different order in the *Erofili,* where the ghost of the murdered brother appears in act three (III.243-332; with a final curse III.361-72), whereas the murdered wife appears already in act one (I.131-219) of the *Orbecche*. The role of the counsellors/confidants of the protagonists is also remodelled, and, more importantly, Panaretos, the secret husband of Erofili, now plays a much more prominent role in the *Erofili* than does his model character, Oronte, in the *Orbecche.*

If we look alone at these changes, we may state that Chortatsis has mainly downplayed the perverted family relations, changing the incestuous story by Geraldi into a more dynastic story in the *Erofili.* It is out of dynastic ambitions that Philogonos, the king and father of Erofili, has killed his brother and nephews. Dynastic ambitions, of course, also played a role in the *Orbecche,* not least in the king's wish to have his daughter married to an enemy prince – which is closely paralleled in the *Erofili* – but in the *Orbecche* the king also kills the two children that Orbecche has secretly given birth to (in the *Erofili,* the young couple have produced no children); and the final execution of Oronte/Panaretos comes with different connotations in the two plays. In the *Orbecche,* king Sulmone's execution of Oronte may be seen as yet another act of destruction directed towards his own family, a kind of self-destruction in terms of procreation, whereas Philogonos in the *Erofili,* has Panaretos butchered as a general, who has first of all proved disloyal in a courtly-societal way by falling in love with and secretly marrying his daughter.[12]

This very aspect of incest/family destruction (*Orbecche*) as opposed to disloyalty with catastrophic implications for the family (*Erofili*) is a central divide between the two plays, and in studying and analysing the way that Chortatsis reshaped his main model – the *Orbecche* – into a new dramatic play, it becomes clear that he not only worked away from incest but also towards more societal and political aspects. The main theme of love is retained, but the new thematic twists of Chortatsis made the *Erofili* a more socially engaged play, with some broad themes about societal merits (or even meritocracy), about rich and poor, but also – as we shall see – about the

[12] On the *Erofili* as primarily a play on love involved in marriage politics, see Markaki 2015.

geographical placement of Crete in a larger context. The figure of Panaretos – whose speaking name means 'all-virtuous' or 'completely virtuous' – is the main carrier of the meritocratic theme, being a military man who has made his way up to the highest military position of general solely through his martial deeds. And as a model of virtue, he feels most guilty about his one and only fault: He has fallen in love and married the king's daughter without the king's knowing. The young couple are both keenly aware of this trespassing, but no incestuous past or hidden children burden their conscience. It is only love that has a hard time in the kingdom of Philogonos, reflected in the dynastic killings that paved the way for his rise to power and in the name of his daughter, Ero-fili, 'lover of love', whose tragic end we are to encounter. Here we may also deliberate on the king's name, for Philogonos means 'lover of offspring'. Is this an ironic/sarcastic denomination of a father who is not able to accept love even when it concerns his daughter? Or does the name carry tragic implications by indicating a person who is so concerned with dynastic matters – including securing the kingdom for himself through his own marriage to his sister-in-law and the diplomatically arranged marriage of his daughter in the hope of legitimate offspring – that he in the end precludes the success of just that? No easy answer offers itself for this.

But when searching for the models of these dynastic/meritocratic themes in Chortatsis's play and for the geographical reorientation, it turns out – as we shall see – that this is largely due to the inspiration that Chortatsis found in Trissino's tragedy *Sofonisba*.[13] This play, whose tragic protagonist also gives the play its title, stages a clearly political complication behind the tragic end of its heroine. Based on the historical accounts of Roman authors such as Livy (and possibly also that of Greek historiographers), the story of Sofonisba as told by Trissino depicts her as caught up in shifting allegiances that involve highly placed persons in Carthage just as the Romans, led by the Roman general Scipio, are approaching to conquer the city.[14] Sofonisba, after being betrothed to one local leader, is forced to marry another, and falls victim to these complications of political and military loyalty. The situation of *Sofonisba* is therefore quite different – both dramatically and in terms of a clear historical setting, based on ancient sources – than that of *Erofili,* and yet there are some resemblances that may also contribute to explaining why Chortatsis chose to translate and adapt large parts of two choral songs from Trissino's *Sofonisba* as well as a number of other features into his *Erofili.* We shall first explore the choral adaptations from Trissino's *Sofonisba* into

[13] The edition of the *Sofonisba* used here is Trissino 1975.
[14] Corrigan 1975, 8-15.

Chortatsis's *Erofili*, before looking into some more general resemblances, namely the geographical setting and the theme of meritocracy.

The choruses of the *Erofili*

As noted already early by scholars, Chortatsis's *Erofili* only finds inspiration in the choruses of *Orbecche* in the loosest sense.[15] Whereas much of the plot and the dramatic themes and events find close parallels in Giraldi's *Orbecche*, Chortatsis hardly took the choral songs of his Italian model into consideration and instead constructed wholly new and different choral songs for his *Erofili*. Here inspiration comes from elsewhere, and at least two of these choral songs have passages that are fairly close translations of parts of choral songs from Trissino's *Sofonisba,* with additions.[16]

The choral song at the end of act one in the *Erofili*, in the beginning listing the power and achievements of Eros, almost directly reproduces Trissino's choral song at the end of act three (v. 1417-49).[17] As noted above, the love motive is stronger in the plot of *Erofili* than in the *Orbecche,* and a choral song of love of course does much to enhance the speaking name of Erofili. But the first choral song in *Orbecche* (I.220-87) was actually already a love song, a chorus's prayer directed to Venus, including what amounts to a creation story of all that nature consists of, but finally mentioning "the two poor lovers" (*questi due miseri amanti* I.276), who "burn with your flame" (*ardon de la tua fiamma* I.278). Chortatsis clearly saw no attraction in taking this as inspiration, but choosing to make his chorus sing of the same theme he instead looked to a choral song from Trissino's *Sofonisba* as model. The close verbal resemblance between Trissino's Italian original and Chortatsis's Greek was studied by Pecoraro, showing that the 32 verses of Trissino (1417-49) have evolved into 46 verses in Chortatsis's play (I.585-631). In his choral song, Trissino is much more attentive to the world of human love than was Giraldi, and this must have been what made Chortatsis turn to his text as a model. But Chortatsis enhances the love theme further by adding verses on pagan Zeus and how the arrows of Eros reach even him (I.603-7), as well as on the working of nature and how also this depends on the power of Eros

[15] Pecoraro 1969 gives an overview, much more in detail in Πασχάλης 2011b, 343-48.

[16] See Pecoraro 1969, who presents the Italian and Greek texts in parallel columns, and Πασχάλης 2011b, who underlines the importance of transition from a chorus with little dramatic involvement in Giraldi (based on the Senecan tradition) to a much more involved chorus in Chortatsis, 343-349. I here follow the act division normally found in the editions of Trissino's *Sofonisba.* In the edition of Corrigan (1975), the division diverges from this, but the verse numbers are the same.

[17] The closest analysis of this choral song is found in Πασχάλης 2011b, 349-51. See also Pecoraro 1969, 374-75, who also notes the Sophoclean loans, which thus went via Italian translations back into the Greek drama of Chortatsis; see also Πασχάλης 2011b, 343-45.

(I.611-15). So, instead of Giraldi's *amor* involved in controlling all natural developments, Chortatsis – on the basis of Trissino – presents an *Erotas* (Eros) in full command of human and even divine desire. And the brief second expansion in Chortatsis' text, which inserts a description of Eros's control of nature, may be seen as retaining just a bit of the original idea from Giraldi's choral song in *Orbecche.* After this passage where Chortatsis closely follows Trissino (from v. 1450 in *Sofonisba*, I.631 in *Erofili*), the two choruses diverge, that of Trissino wishing well for Sofonisba, that of Chortatsis uttering prayers for Panaretos, that he may keep his secret wife (Erofili), and expressing its (unfounded, it turns out) dread that Erofili may accept marriage proposals from foreign princes. In the end, in finding inspiration in Trissino's *Sofonisba*, the choral song of Chortatsis further stresses the theme of love, gently redirecting our attention to the male lover, Panaretos. Chortatsis thus makes us aware of the attention we need to pay to Panaretos as an important figure.

A similar reuse of material from a choral song from Trissino's *Sofonisba* comes in the fourth choral song of Chortatsis's *Erofili.*[18] If compared, the two choral songs have the same theme, with both choruses directing prayers to the Sun, who seem to be thought of as a sort of pagan god, as the deities addressed in several other choral songs. But whereas Trissino has his chorus sing of the Sun (v. 596ff.) in attempt to encompass the dire worries after Massinissa's promise to Sofonisba of not handing her over to the Romans, Chortatsis has his choir pray to the Sun while the catastrophe is taking place. Chortatsis's choral song to the Sun comes at a late stage in the drama: Panaretos has just, in vain, tried to convince the king of his loyalty and of his royal and therefore equal origin, and he is subsequently (during the choral song) executed in his cell. This we discover after the choral song, with the arrival of the messenger who offers us the details of the gruesome execution. In the *Sofonisba* the Sun was addressed because he sees and knows everything, including the sentiments of the chorus: "Tu sai con qual dolore/D'un mal ne l'altro varco" (v. 612-13), (You know with which pain I pass from one misfortune to the next).[19] And at the same time past and future suffering is described and announced. In the choral song of Chortatsis's *Erofili*, the reason for addressing the Sun is to ask him to lower his light and stop the king's killing:

Ἠλιε-μου, το λοιπό, στα κλάηματά-μας
λυπητερό το φώς-σου ας σκοτεινιάσει,
γη εις άλλα μέρη στείλε-το μακρά-μας.

[18] Again, the closest analysis is found in Πασχάλης 2011b, 351-53.
[19] All English translations of Trissino's *Sofonisba* are mine.

Νέφος σκοτεινιασμένο ας σε σκεπάσει,
κι αστροπελέκι ας πέσει θυμωμένο,
και τούτο το παλάτιν ας χαλάσει. (Chortatsis, *Erofili,* IV.109-20)

Therefore, O Sun, at these our cries,
Darken your light in sympathy,
Or send it to remoter regions.
May pitch-black clouds obscure your face;
Let fall an angry thunderbolt
To strike this Palace, and destroy it! (trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

As we see, Chortatsis's chorus implicates the Sun as a possible agent in the plot, being no longer just a witness but a possible helper (in allowing no light into the palace) and avenger (in letting a thunderbolt come instead and destroy the palace). In these reuses from Trissino's play, we see Chortatsis as an able redactor, transposing textual elements from one section to another, to enhance dramatic effects.

The two choral songs are the only parts of Trissino's drama that Chortatsis reused in this manner, obvious to a person who has read or seen the two plays. Chortatsis may have counted on the ability to discern this from certain people in the audience, but it seems safe to conclude that he was primarily searching for dramatic effects noticeable to all. And here the choral songs in Giraldi's *Orbecche*, his prime model for the plot, did not serve his purpose, and instead, as we have seen, Trissino offered useful material for two of his choral songs. But, as we will show now, more inspiration came from Trissino's play, though in less obvious ways. These concern the geographical setting and certain societal themes of the *Erofili*.

The geographical setting of Chortatsis's *Erofili*

At first view, the *Erofili* follows the central plot elements of the *Orbecche,* its main model, and is similarly set in a foreign and somewhat timeless kingdom, *Orbecche* in Persia, *Erofili* in Egypt. Neither ruling kings nor any other information from the texts allows us to infer any known reign or historical period as the setting of either play, though references to pagan gods possibly backdate the presented events in both dramas to some remote ancient past. In terms of geography, however, there is a difference. The prologue in Giraldi's *Orbecche,* speaking on behalf of the poet, reveals his intention of transporting the audience to Susa in Persia:

Vi troverete in uno instante, in Susa,
Città nobil di Persia, antica stanza
Già di felici Re, com' hor d'affanno
Et di calamitadi è crudo albergo. (Giraldi, *Orbecche,* v. 65-68)

In an instance, you will find yourselves in Susa,
the noble city of Persia, the ancient dwelling
until now of Kings, but from now on it is
the cruel home of worries and sorrows.[20]

After offering glimpses of the city of Susa and rhetorically asking the audience why they do not avoid this horrible place, the speaker of the prologue then reveals that the audience, whether they want it or not, are now there, in Susa, and adds that the return to get back home will be long:

Egli è pur vero, et già ne sete in Susa,
Et nel tornar v'accorgerete bene
Quanti mar, quanti monti, et quanti fiumi
Havarete à varcar, prima che giunti
Ne siate tutti à la cittade vostra.
Che non vi farà agevole la via
Il poeta al tornar, com' hora ha fatto. (Giraldi, *Orbecche,* v. 80-86)

But it is true, you are now in Susa,
and at your return you will well realise
how many seas, how many mountains, and how many rivers,
you will have to cross before
you are all back in your city.
But the poet will not make the return
an easy travel, as he has done now.

So, the poet, dwelling on how the audience enters his fictitious scene, insists that the place is distant and difficult to return from. He does so just before seeing, as he says himself, the goddess of revenge, Nemesis, approaching, and passes the word to her. In Chortatsis's Greek play, the poet's prologue and the horrible divinity of fate have merged into one person, Charos, personified Death.[21] Also he tells the audience of how they will be transported to Memphis in Egypt:

Λύπη ανιμένετε λοιπό να πάρετε όλοι τώρα,
με δάκρυα να γυρίσετε στην εδική-σας χώρα·
λέγω στη χώρα-σας, γιατί δεν είστε, ωσά θαρρείτε,
στην Κρήτη πλιο, μα τσ᾽ Αίγυπτος τώρα τη γή πατείτε.
Τουτή ᾽ναι η Μέμφη η ξακουστή, τόσα νοματισμένη
για τς άξες-τση Πυράμιδες σ᾽ όλη την Οικουμένη·
κι εδώ ξαφνίδια νά ᾽ρθετε σας έκαμεν η χάρη
του Ζευς, ξομπλι πασένας-σας για να μπορεί να πάρει
στς έξοδες του Φιλόγονου, περίσσα να φαβάται

[20] All English translations of Giraldi's *Orbecche* are mine.
[21] On the prologues, see Πασχάλης 2008, 269-70; Savoye 2009, 175-234.

τ᾽ άδικο· κι όσο δύνεστε πάντοτε να μισάτε
μεγάλοι ν᾽ απομένετε με των αλλώ τον κόπο,
βλέποντας την ασυστασά τση τύχης των ανθρώπω!
(Chortatsis, *Erofili,* Prologue v. 109-20)

Prepare, then, to feel pity, all of you,
And to return with tears to your own country.
I say this, for you're not, as you suppose,
In Crete now, but you tread the earth of Egypt.
This is the famous Memphis, so renowned
For her great Pyramids throughout Creation;
And you've been suddenly transported here
By grace of Zeus, to witness the misfortunes
Of king Philogonos, and to be warned
By his example to abhor injustice,
That is, becoming great by others' toil,
Seeing how fluctuating are men's fortunes.
(trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

Closely copying the idea of Giraldi's prologue, a similar kind of transportation of the audience is now also taking place in Chortatsis's, now announced more grimly by Charos (Death). But the place of arrival is no longer described as distant, for no mention is made of the difficult home journey, or of the seas, mountains, and rivers that separates home and the setting of the play. Instead, we soon hear of the king of the country, Philogonos, and are told to avoid his vice, that of taking advantage of others' effort: "να μισάτε / μεγάλοι ν᾽ απομένετε με των αλλώ τον κόπο" (v. 119-20; to abhor injustice / That is, becoming great by others' toil). Already here we hear a first announcement of the theme of right reward for good deeds, to which we shall return below.

But comparing the two "transportations" of the audience, we noticed that Chortatsis made the distance substantially shorter. Giraldi's *Orbecche* was set in faraway Persia. Travelling to Persia from Italy would involve a long land journey or crossing both sea and land, and Italian involvement with contemporaneous (Safavid) Persia was not very extensive.[22] From the Cretan perspective of Chortatsis, however, Egypt was not far away. From Crete, it is among the closest mainland areas (together with modern-day Greece, Turkey, and Libya), and trade and other communication with Egypt was extensive.[23]

[22] Those Italian most likely to have Safavid contacts would probably be Venetians, see Guliyev 2022, 3-4, stressing trade and diplomatic relations.

[23] On Cretan trade with Egypt, see Maltezou 1991, 29-32. Maltezou (p. 31) describes Crete as a "transit station for Venetian trade … for the East", also exporting local wood-carvings for Cairo and Sinai. On the export of manuscripts, see surprising number of liturgical books, produced in Crete and ending up in Sinai, in the list in Troelsgård 2021, 71.

Furthermore, an Egyptian setting could easily have made a local Cretan audience think of recent wars fought with the Ottomans, the fourth Veneto-Turkish war (1570-71), with atrocities also witnessed on the island of Crete, being fresh in mind.[24] Such recollections could in no way arise in the minds of an Italian audience, when hearing of Persia. This shift from distant, exotic, and incestuous Persia to a more politically unruly Egypt opens up for a reading of the Cretan play as also involving a political dimension. But before expanding on this, we will have a look at some echoes in the *Erofili* from Trissino's *Sofonisba,* again based on the impression of how Chortatsis turned the features he found in Giraldi's *Orbecche* into a play with a very different thematic orientation.

In Giraldi's play, the suitor of Orbecche was Selim, king of the Parthians (*Orbecche* II.61-62). In Chortatsis's play, Erofili is courted by two princes, one a son of the king of Persia (a possible reference to the homeland of Orbecche) and the other a son of the less identifiable "Eastern Kingdom". So, while suitors to Erofili may come from as far away as does Orbecche, all the local characters of our *Erofili* are in fact relatively close in terms of geography to Chortatsis's Crete, and they in fact all have Greek names. And while the beloved of Orbecche, Oronte, is an Armenian prince, as we discover during the play, Erofili's secret husband, Panaretos, turns out to be prince of Tzirtza (Τζίρτζα; *Erofili,* I.154 and IV.676). This geographic denomination has not previously been securely identified, though it has been suggested that it refers to Georgia.[25] Much more likely, however, is the possibility that Chortatsis is here sticking to an African geography and reusing the stage location of Trissino's *Sophonisba.* By Tzirtza Chortatsis is probably referring to the city of Cirta, capital of the ancient kingdom of Numidia, in Trissino's Italian referred to as Cirta first time in v. 17 of the play.[26] Greek Tzirtza (or Tsertsa) comes close to reproducing the sound of Italian Cirta and may, in fact, reflect a local pronunciation. If this identification is accepted – and I see no other obvious solution – Chortatsis chose to include a reference to the homeland of Sofonisba and to the setting of the *Sofonisba.* It is as if Chortatsis, through geographical references, is creating a composite African world and bridging between Trissino's *Sofonisba* and his own complete retake of the plotline of Giraldi's *Orbecche.*

[24] Maltezou 1991, 18.

[25] Savoye 2009, 116.

[26] In the edition of the Greek text by Αλεξίου & Αποσκίτη 2001, I.152 and IV.676 (reprinted in Savoye 2009, 363-901), the name is spelled differently but still very close to the Italian Cirta: Τσέρτσα. I have unfortunately not had access to any of the two manuscripts of the *Erofili* written in Latin characters: Athens, Historical and Ethnological Society Θ 62 [16] and Birmingham University Library ms 742, see Lampaki 2014.

And more references to Trissino's African setting may actually be found in Chortatsis's play. Already in the prologue to the *Erofili*, Charos mentions Carthage among the glorious cities of the golden past, with no other apparent aim than to widen the geographical scope of his argument about the fall of cities that were once glorious:

> Πού ᾽ν των Ελλήνω οι βασιλειές; Πού ᾽ν τω Ρωμιών οι τόσες
> πλούσες και μπορεζάμενες χώρες; Πού ᾽ν τόσες γνώσες
> και τέχνες; Πού ᾽ναι οι δόξες-τως; Πού σήμερο είναι εκείνες
> στ᾽ άρματα κι εις τά γράμματα οι ξακουστές Αθήνες;
> Πού ᾽ναι η Καρτάγω η δυνατή, κι οι πολεμάρχοι οι άξοι
> τση Ρώμης; Πού ᾽ν τα κέρδητα τά ᾽χασιν αποτάξει;
>
> (Erofili, prologue, v. 23-28)

> Where are the kingdoms of the Greeks, the rich
> and great Byzantine towns, with all their knowledge
> And skills? Where is their glory? Where, today,
> Is Athens, once renowned for arms and letters?
> Where's mighty Carthage? Where, the doughty lords
> Of Roman wars? Where are the spoils they garnered?
>
> (trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

Charos takes the responsibility, or in fact the honour, for the downfall of all these cities. But his list of great places is intriguing. Greek and Byzantine (or *Romios,* in the original) points to Chortatsis's own sphere, whereas Rome and Carthage do not really belong here or in the setting of the play in a narrow sense. But Chortatsis is transporting the plot of the *Orbecche* from a distant realm to his closer and more familiar setting of *Erofili* in Egypt. He is thinking in terms of a (North-)African setting, and Carthage (referred to in its Latinized form, not with the traditional Greek name form, *Karchedon*) fits his image. His *Erofili* is transposed to a setting similar to that of Trissino's *Sofonisba,* from which it is now borrowing a North-African geography, both in using Cirta as place of origin of Panaretos and in mentioning Carthage – and of course in placing the whole drama in Egypt.

It therefore seems reasonable to argue that Chortatsis found inspiration for his African setting of the *Erofili* in Trissino's *Sofonisba,* though Chortatsis never reaches Trissino's level of African self-conscience. In v. 320 of Trissino's play, Sofonisba speaks of *il mio terreno* "my land", and in v. 412-13 she proclaims that, as a Carthaginian, she prefers to become the wife *D'un nostro, nato in Africa, com'io / Che d'un esterno, nato in altra parte* (of one of ours, born in Africa like myself, rather than a foreigner, born somewhere else). Chortatsis did not go as far as to include such expressions of national pride, but he did work on making the society of his play have a societal or even political aspect. Such attention to politics can of course have come from

many places, from the possible administrative profession of Chortatsis, from local discussions, and from reading other literature with a political aim.[27] Important aspects of these he drew from contemporary discussions in Italy about the place of desire within society. In some passages, Chortatsis clearly drew on Tasso's *Aminta,* in arguing that at least in a past (and ideal) Golden Age, women had been free to choose whom to marry.[28] This is in a sense the core dramatic issue in the *Erofili,* and the reference to the Golden Age, the theme of the choral song at the end of act two, thus presents an ideal past in marked opposition to what is going to happen to Erofili and Panaretos. Still, Chortatsis took these images of a just and ideal past further and introduced a more developed idea of justice, involving meritocratic values. He thereby suggested additional values needed for a fair functioning of society, and presents it as something that has been functioning in the Egypt of king Philogonos. In his kingdom, even a foreigner as Panaretos has actually been able to make a career, to enjoy – as we shall see – the fair recompense for his contributions to upholding society.

Social values and meritocracy: from *Sofonisba to Erofili*

A central theme that comes up in the *Erofili* is a sort of meritocracy, or at least some voices in the drama declare that those who serve the state or kingdom are – or should be – well rewarded. First to introduce the theme is Karpophoros, the trusted friend of Panaretos. Also his name is a speaking name, Karpo-phoros meaning 'fruit-bearing' or 'reward-bringing'. In his first speech, which Panaretos eavesdrops on, he states:

> Των αρετώ τα πωρικά παντά ᾽ναι μυρισμένα.
> κι όλοι οι αθρώποι τά ᾽χουσι πολλά πεθυμημένα.
> Δεν είν κιανείς να μην ποθεί νά ᾽χει τιμές και πλούτη,
> κι απ᾽ όλους μεγαλύτερος νά ᾽ναι στην Γήν ετούτη.
> Μα μόνο με την πεθυμιά μηδεκιανείς δε φτάνει
> ᾽ς τόπο μεγάλο και ψηλό τα πόδια-του να βάνει·
> μα είναι μεσίτης τση τιμής η προθυμιά και οι κόποι,
> κι όχι ποτέ το Ριζικό, σαν κρίνουν οι αθρώποι.
> Τον Ήλιο και τον Ορανό, τ᾽ άστρη και το φεγγάρι,
> τη γή, τ᾽ αγέρι, το γιαλό, μας έδωκεν η χάρη
> του Ζεύς κοινά, κι όποιος κοπιά κι εις το καλό σπουδάζει,
> τον εμαυτό-ντου σε τιμές και δόξες ανεβάζει·

[27] On Chortatsis's identity and possible profession, see Αλεξίου 2001, 40-50.

[28] Πασχάλης 2011b, 353-57. Paschalis furthermore shows how the debate involves the new genre of tragicomedy, which Chortatsis also contributed to with his *Panoria,* in which close textual parallels concerning a Golden Age may be found. Paschalis also believes that Chortatsis drew for his *Erofili* on the *Pastor fido* (1590) by Guarini, but this depends on a late (but possible) dating of the *Erofili.*

και πάλι, απού ᾽ναι ανάμελος δεν πρέπει ν᾽ ανιμένει
παρά απου πάντα από κακό ᾽ς χειρότερο να πηαίνει!
(*Erofili,* I.41-54)

The fruits of virtue breathe so sweet a scent
That all men are desirous to possess them.
No man does not have dreams of rank and wealth,
Of being of all men on Earth the greatest.
But no one can contrive, by mere desire,
To step into a great and high position;
For honour's agents are hard work and zeal,
Not Destiny alone, as men would have it.
The sun, the firmament, the stars and moon,
The earth, the air, the sea, we hold in common
By gracious gift of Zeus, and he who works
And strives for good, will rise in rank and honour;
Whereas the lazy cannot hope for much,
except to go from bad to worse forever! (trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

The words of Karpophoros ring somewhat naïve, given the fate of Panaretos that we are about to witness. But they do seem to reflect how things have been in the kingdom until now. Everybody seeks virtues (*aretō*), says Karphoros (thus reflecting on the name of Pan-*aretos*), but also rank and wealth. And for the latter, hard work and zeal (*kopoi, prothymia*) are needed. In fact, Karpophoros can summarise his meritocratic views in this way (v. 51-52): κι όποιος κοπιά κι εις το καλό σπουδάζει, / τον εμαυτό-ντου σε τιμές και δόξες ανεβάζει (he who works / And strives for good, will rise in rank and honour). And shortly after, he points out Panaretos as a prime example:

Τούτο το λέγω μοναχάς, γιατί κρατούσιν άλλοι,
βλέποντας τον Πανάρετο ᾽ς τόσην τιμή μεγάλη,
πως Μοίρα τον εψήλωσε, κι όχι οι καλές-του διάξες,
κι οι κόποι-του οι καθημερινοί, κι οι αρετές-του οι άξες.
Στο σπίτι τοι εγύρεψα, κι έμαθα, πρίχου αρχίσει
Ἀυγερινός τσ᾽ Ἀνατολής τα μέρη να στολίσει,
με προθυμιά εσηκώθηκε, σαν έ συνηθισμένος
κι εις τ᾽ Αφεντός τη δούλεψην έναι κατεβασμένος. (*Erofili,* I.57-64)

I make this point because some people think,
Seeing Panaretos so greatly honoured,
That Fortune raised him, not his sterling deeds,
His constant labours, and his worthy virtues.
Asking for him at home, I learnt he rose
Before the East was brightened by the Day-star,
And eagerly went down, as is his wont,
To set about the service of his master. (trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

Some are jealous of Panaretos's rise to glory, but Karpophoros argues that his success is purely the result of the recognition of his achievements. This thematic concern with what we could call a fair reward, or meritocracy, does not come out of Chortatsis's prime model, Giraldi's *Orbecche.* As stated above, there may be other sources for it, but at least an important trait of the theme grows out of dialogues in Trissino's *Sofonisba.* In a dialogue between Sofonisba and her foster-sister, Erminia, it becomes clear how Sofonisba is of high social standing, whereas Erminia is of low. And yet they are like sisters and deeply care for each other. Sofonisba even expresses a wish that she had been like Erminia:

> O che felice stato
> E 'l tuo; che quello i' chiamo esser felice,
> Che vive quieto senz'alcuna alteza. (Trissino, *Sofonisba,* v. 134-36)

> O the happy state
> is yours, for that person I call happy
> who lives quietly without any highness.

Later Erminia explains how good and bad fortune are blended by the Creator:

> Di quell sommo fattor che 'l ciel governa,
> Appresso ciascun piede un vaso sorge,
> L'un pien di male, e l'altro pien di bene,
> E d'indi or gioja, or pene
> Trae mescolando insieme, e a noi le porge.
> (Trissino, *Sofonisba,* v. 156-60)

> a vessel arises at each foot
> of that supreme Creator who governs heaven,
> one full of evil, and the other full of good,
> and now from joy, now from pain he takes
> mixing together, and hands them to us.

It is clear that Chortatsis found inspiration in this passage for composing the words of king Philogonos's counsellor in the *Erofili*:

> Μ᾽ απείτις κάποιο Ριζικό τον κόσμο ανεκατώνει,
> και πλούσιους ρίχνει χαμηλά κι ανήμπορους σηκώνει,
> δεν πρέπει, πρίχου δεί κιανείς το τέλος, να παινέσει
> στς αρχές ποτέ καλομοιριά τ᾽ αθρώπου, γη στη μέση·
> γιατι όσο πλιά τονε θωρεί στα ύψη πως καθίζει
> τση Τύχης, και με την κορφή στον Ορανό πως γγίζει,
> τόσα θα γδέχεται να δεί πεσμένη την τιμήν-ντου,
> κι οπού ᾽σανε τα πόδια-του, ριμμένη την κορφή-ντου·
> κι όσο τονε στοχάζεται βασανισμένο πάλι
> με πλήσαν κακοριζικιά και με φτωχειά μεγάλη,
> θέλει ν᾽ ολπίζει σε ψηλό σκαλέρι καθισμένο

να τονε δεί, χαιράμενο και κάλοκαρδισμένο. (*Erofili,* I.567-78)

But since Fate mixes up the social ranks,
Casting the wealthy down, raising the humble,
No one, before he sees the end, should praise
A man's good fortune at its start or middle;
Because the higher we now see him sit
On Fortune's wheel, his head touching the Heavens,
The lower should we soon expect to see
Him fall head over heels, sunk and dishonoured!
And then again, the more we see him racked
With grinding poverty and deep misfortune,
The sooner should we hope to see him perched
Upon a lofty seat, thriving and cheerful.

(trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

It is likely that the quoted passages from Trissino were in the mind of Chortatsis when writing his text, even if similar expressions are commonly in descriptions of the trickeries of fate. At least the Creator's mixing of evil and good (*mescolando insieme* v. 160) of the *Sofonisba* strongly resembles Fate's mixing of social ranks in the *Erofili* (Ριζικό τον κόσμο ανεκατώνει I.567). But it is Chortatsis's own initiative to combine this description of uncertain fate with the issue of poverty and richness. And this thematic blending of the general machinations of fate with the more specific of poverty and low origin (in opposition to nobility) continues throughout Chortatsis's drama. A little later, also Erofili's nurse tells how rich and poor are equally the subject of Fortune (τση Τύχης αποκατωθιό, *Erofili* II.198). In II.305, Panaretos mirrors the words of Karpophoros, saying:

Γείς απου την πλουσότητα δεν έχει γνωρισμένη,
με τη φτωχειά περνά ζωή καλή κι αναπαημένη· (*Erofili* II.305-6)

A man without experience of great wealth,
Though poor, can live a life of glad contentment;

(trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

This leads to Panaretos expressing the wish that he had been poor (II.337). The theme is soon picked up by the chorus at the end of the act two, who in continuation of this speaks of a golden age when no hard labour was needed (II.467-502), and by the chorus at the end of act three, lauding blessed poverty:

Φτωχειά χαριτωμένη, και με πόση
γλυκότη προσκαλείς και σιργουλίζεις
στην κλίνη-σου τον Ύπνο να σιμώσει!
Πόσες πολλές ανάπαψες χαρίζεις
δυώ αγαφτικώ πιστώ, και πόσα πλήσα

το νού και την καρδιά-ντωνε δρισίζεις!
"Τούτος δεν είναι ωσάν εμέναν ίσα"
δε λέσιν οι φτωχοί· "Το νιόν αυτόνο
μεγάλοι βασιλιοί δεν εγεννήσα"·
μα εκείνα παρευτύς που ο Πόθος μόνο
τς όρεξες προξενά, κι η πεθυμιά-τως,
ζητού γιαμιά και παίρνου, δίχως πόνο. (*Erofili* III.397-408)

O blessed Poverty, with what
Sweet blandishment you summon Sleep
Close to your couch, to bring you slumber!
How many comforts you bestow
On faithful lovers! With what bliss
You soothe their fevered minds and bodies!
The poor would never say 'This man
Is not my match in rank; this youth
Does not descend from mighty monarchs!';
Instead, those boons that lovers crave,
Induced by Love, their hearts' desires,
They simply ask for, and are given. (trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

Social rank is a matter of no significance to the poor and to lovers. Chortatsis's chorus here paints the ideal version of what his play thematises, the need to look beyond jealousy and to see that love offers such ability. All these thematic repetitions lead up to three last occurrences of the theme, in the words of Erofili, the king's counsellor, and Panaretos. First comes the combined attempt of Erofili and the king's advisor to persuade the king to solve the problem of Panaretos's seemingly low origin and lack of wealth by simply raising him to his own level. Erofili tells her father:

Μπορείς, α θές, Αφέντη-μου – γιατί παιδί κιανένα
δεν έχοντας τη σήμερο στον Κόσμο παρα μένα –
να τον αφήσεις καταπώς τον έχω καμωμένο,
με την ευκή-σου, ταίρι-μου· και τότες μπορεμένο,
πλούσο κι αδυνατότατο, και βασιλιό μεγάλο
θες τονε κάμει να γενεί παρά κιανέναν άλλο. (*Erofili* IV.335-40)

You could, Sire, if you wish – since in this world
You have no other child but me, your daughter –
Allow him to remain as he is now,
My husband, with your blessing; then you'll make him
Powerful, wealthy, and invincible,
A mighty king unmatched by any other!
(trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

And the king's counsellor restates the argument with other words, insisting that the king can solve the problem by rewarding the young man with what

he deserves (IV.551-64). This is, in a sense, the central morale of the story. Philogonos could have saved them all from calamity, had he allowed Panaretos to take the last step up the social ladder. But all to no avail, even when Panaretos reveals his true identity as son of the king of Tzirtza (IV.675-76), king Philogonos is still caught up in the shame he feels (see especially IV.155-62) and insists on punishing and crushing Panaretos.

As a final dramatic use of the meritocratic theme, closely attached to that of (virtuous) poverty, Chortatsis makes us hear the posthumous words of Panaretos, repeated by a messenger in V.83: Δεν εθάρρου / τούτη από σένα οι κόποι-μου την πληρωμή να πάρου (I never thought / that you'd reward me thus for my endeavours). At his final hour, Panaretos expresses his dejection and thereby expresses the central idea in Chortatsis's use of meritocracy as a theme: In the golden days of Philogonos's reign, one could expect fair reward for deeds; but then love came in between.

Conclusion

It is hard to know what ideas Chortatsis had about his contemporary Ottoman Egypt, and whether this went into his depiction of Erofili as belonging to an Egyptian world. The Ottoman world constituted a military threat, and the names of the characters in the *Erofili* are all Greek, assimilating them thereby somewhat to a Greek context, just as the mention of pagan gods backdates the events to a more or less ancient context. But the state of king Philogonos, regardless of what time we are dealing with, has been able to assure a meritocratic system, where the positions of rich and poor were not fixed but could be transgressed, as seems to be the case of Panaretos's rise to general due to his military success. His noble origin, probably from neighbouring north African Sirte as suggested here, is only revealed to the king at a late stage — and in vain. The tragedy of Panaretos and Erofili follows the course of Giraldi's *Orbecche,* but the setting and characters have changed, enhancing social themes of meritocracy, and reducing the incestuous complications. In the end, the role of Panaretos becomes more central, since he is the carrier of both the love theme, so central in both *Orbecche* and *Erofili,* and the example of a virtuous character who has been led to believe in just rewards for good deeds. It has been the aim of the present analysis to show that these features in Chortatsis's play go back to his reading of Trissino's *Sofonisba,* and that this drama contributed with much more than the two choral songs to the way that Chortatsis combined a tragic love story with societal ideas, now staged on the neighbouring African continent.

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The Historicization of Desire:

Sophonisba in Early Modern Dutch Drama

By Jan Bloemendal and James A. Parente, Jr.

In the Low Countries of the 1620s, the Sophonisba story was dramatized by the Haarlem poet Govert van der Eembd and the Antwerp painter and poet Guilliam van Nieuwelandt. Each of these rhetoricians made his own contribution to the theme, by treating the story of Sophonisba, Syphax and Masinissa as either a romance or as an historical drama about the establishment of Roman power in Africa. Drawing on Greco-Roman sources as well as early modern dramas and prose narratives, both writers used the material in varying degrees to explore sexual desire, political behaviour, and the ethos of empire. This article also assesses the place of these two Dutch plays in the literary history of early modern Europe.

In the early seventeenth century, the Carthaginian princess Sophonisba arrived on the Dutch stage. During the 1620s, two tragedies devoted to the unhappy love affair between the gifted Numidian warrior Masinissa and the hapless Sophonisba were written, the first by the Haarlem scholar and playwright Govert van der Eembd, active during the 1610s and 1620s, and the second, a more expansive historical adaptation, by the *émigré* Antwerp artist and poet, Guilliam van Nieuwelandt (1584-c.1635). Van der Eembd's play was printed in 1620, following a performance in the Old Chamber in Amsterdam, *D'Eglentier* (The Eglantine), the pioneering rhetoricians' association for the composition and performance of works on classical subjects.[1] Van Nieuwelandt's drama, which was written for the Antwerp rhetorician chamber *De Violieren* (The Gillyflowers), was composed sometime in the mid-1620s, and most probably was performed before its first printing in Antwerp, now lost, in 1626. The tragedy was subsequently reprinted twice a

[1] Van der Eembd 1621.

decade later in Amsterdam, in 1635 and 1639, after van Nieuwelandt had permanently settled there.[2] Both plays have been neglected in modern scholarship – in contrast to the other plays from Italy and France we discuss – and are now cast for the first time in a broader literary-historical context.[3]

Livy's account of the final days of the Carthaginian Sophonisba[4] had been a popular subject in sixteenth-century Italian and French theatre since the appearance of Gian Giorgio Trissino's *La Sofonisba* (1524; composed 1514), one of the earliest examples of the Italian humanists' enthusiastic imitation of the structure and language of ancient Greek tragedy.[5] French translations of Trissino's work followed in 1556 (Mellin de Saint-Gelais, primarily in prose), and in the 1580s in verse (Claude Mermet); the Italian play also shaped the structure, characterizations and rhetorical style of Antoine de Montchrestien's *La Carthaginoise ou la liberté* (1596).[6] A few years later the prolific dramatist and novelist Nicholas de Montreux published a markedly different version of the Sophonisba material, drawing less from Livy than from the Greek sources that recounted her story, chiefly Plutarch and Appian.[7] Prose versions of Sophonisba's last days, originally composed by

[2] Van Nieuwelandt 1635 and 1639.

[3] Despite their emphasis on several historical and political tragedies, Noak 2002 and Konst 2003 do not mention van der Eembd and van Nieuwelandt, let alone their Sophonisba plays. Smits-Veldt and Porteman 2016, 265, 280 do mention them, but only briefly.

[4] Livy, *Ab Vrbe condita,* Book XXX.

[5] Trissino 1990 and 1975. On Trissino, see *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 2019 (Valentina Gallo), and Morsolin 1878. *Giangiorgio Trissino o Monografia di un letterato nel secolo XVI* (Vicenza: Burato, 1878 [Florence, 1894^2]). See also Corrigan 1971. The text can be found on the DraCor site: https://dracor.org/ita/trissino-sofonisba (accessed 10 January 2023). For a discussion on the various intertexts informing the construction of Trissino's tragedy, see Phillips-Court 2010.

[6] For the Sophonisbe theme in France, see Andrae 1890. See also Axelrad 1956, 18-27. An edition of de Saint-Gelais' translation can be found on https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/29279 (accessed 10 January 2023); on Mellin de Saint-Gelais, see, e.g., Becker 1924; Grente and Simonin (eds) 2001, 1058-59 (Marie-Virginie Cambiels and Michel Simonin); Stone 1983, and Balmas & Dassonville (eds.) 1989^2, 237-50 (Luigia Zilli). The text was edited in Blanchemain (ed.) 1873, 159-241, published online https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/29279/pg29279-images.html (accessed 24 November 2022). Mermet 1584; on him, see Grente and Simonin (eds.) 2001, 834 (Catherine Magnien). Montchrestien 1596. On him, see, e.g., Dandrey (ed.) 1996, 897-900 (Robert Lenoble and Jean-Pierre Chauvaux). *La Carthaginoise* is edited in Petit de Julleville (ed.) 1891, 113-156, and in Fries (ed.) 1889. On Montchrestien's drama, see Griffiths 1970. The text of *La Carthaginoise* can be found on the DraCor website: https://dracor.org/fre/montchretien-carthaginoise#text and http://www.theatre-classique.fr/pages/programmes/edition.php?t=../documents/MONTCHRETIEN CARTHAGINOISE.xml

[7] Olenix du Mont-Sacré [i.e. Nicolas de Montreux] 1976. Montreux himself writes that Appian from Alexandria (*Libyca* 110-121; *Historia Romana* VI, 37.) and Plutarch's *Life of Scipio Africanus* (ch. 28-29), trans. Charles de L'Écluse, published in Plutarque 1802, 477-79 were his sources. For Plutarch's text, see Montreux 1976, 27-29. See also below, n. 39. A

Giovanni Boccaccio in his *De mulieribus claris* (1361-1375), and then retold at greater length by Matteo Bandello in the first part of his *Novelle* (1554) provided additional inspiration from which playwrights could draw.[8] In addition, Bandello had relied heavily on Petrarch's retelling of the Sophonisba-Masinissa love affair in Book V of his unfinished epic poem *Africa,* a celebration of the heroic exploits of Publius Cornelius Scipio ('Africanus'), and many passages are literal translations of Petrarch's original Latin hexameters into Italian prose.[9] Bandello's version in turn spread northwards through the extensive adaptation of his tales into French by Francois de Belleforest between 1559 and 1582.[10] His collection subsequently started to appear in Dutch in 1596, but the Dutch translation of the Sophonisba story did not appear until 1646. If van der Eembd and van Nieuwelandt were familiar with Bandello's treatment, they most likely knew his version through Belleforest's translation, or in the case of van Nieuwelandt, through the original Italian which he may have acquired during his artistic apprenticeship in Italy with the Antwerp landscape artist Paulus Bril between 1601 and 1604.[11]

Sophonisba's appearance in the Dutch theatrical repertoire of the 1620s was likely due to several factors. As in the case of earlier dramatic treatments, the story itself as recounted by Livy and supplemented by accounts from later Greek historians commingled political intrigue with libidinous passion and betrayal, and the deadly consequences of imprudence and uncontrolled desire. Near the end of the Second Punic War in 203 BCE during the Roman campaign against Carthage and its allies in northern Africa, Sophonisba, daughter of the Carthaginian general Hasdrubal Gisco, had been promised to the eastern Numidian king Masinissa, who in alliance with the Carthaginians fought against the Romans. However, the Carthaginian Senate forbade the marriage and forced her to marry Syphax, chieftain of the western Massylians, who was allied with Rome. Sophonisba persuaded her husband Syphax, whose insatiable desire for his new wife distracted him from his political responsibilities, to break his alliance with Rome and support her father in his war against the Romans. Masinissa in turn broke his alliance with

detailed summary of Montreux' play is given by Axelrad 1956, 28-36. For a discussion of Livy and Appian as sources of the Sophonisba story, see also Axelrad 1956, 15-17. On Montreux's representation of the vanquished Sophonisba as a martyr to politics and history, see Ladefoged-Larn 2023, 31-44.

[8] Giovanni Boccaccio, *De claris mulieribus*, 70; 1st printed ed. 1473. Matteo Bandello, *Novelle* I, 35 (1st ed. Lucca, 1554).

[9] See, e.g., Petrarca 2007, 244-319.

[10] Boaistuau 1559 and 1977. Belleforest 1559 and 1566-1583; on the bibliography of Belleforest's *Histoires tragiques*, see Stone 1972.

[11] See, e.g., Sluijter 2015; Schatborn a.o. 2001, 38-43. See also below, 14.

Carthage and collaborated with the Romans and their general Scipio Africanus. After Syphax had been defeated and taken captive at the battle for the Massylian city Cirta, Masinissa succumbed to Sophonisba's beauty and her pleas for protection from Rome. He hastily married her, reasoning falsely that as his wife he would be able to spare her from the humiliation of Roman captivity. Upon learning of Masinissa's hastily arranged marriage, Scipio, fearful of losing yet another Numidian ally, declared the union illegal and demanded that Sophonisba be taken to Rome in a triumphal procession. After much lamentation, Masinissa reluctantly agreed to this demand, and true to his promise to preserve her from an ignominious captivity, he had poison delivered to her which she gratefully accepted and courageously and unhesitatingly swallowed.

The narrative richness of the story of Sophonisba's two marriages, the first to Syphax, and the second brief union with Masinissa provided many opportunities for imparting political and moral-philosophical instruction to audiences currently experiencing the hardships of near perpetual war in the sixteenth century. The political complexities of forging lasting and trustworthy alliances with foreign powers, especially between smaller principalities and larger centralized states such as Spain and France, were amply revealed through the attempts of Rome to manipulate the personal and political rivalries of late third-century BCE Numidia. The narrative also represented the all-too-frequent occurrence of cities under siege, the chaos ensuing upon their fall and occupation, the slaughter of innocent inhabitants, especially women and children, the capture and enslavement of the defeated, and the fair and legally sanctioned distribution of booty among the victors. Beyond questions of political allegiances, the Sophonisba story portrayed the dangers of unbridled lust and the ability of women to use their beauty and helplessness in the face of danger to effect a politically and morally questionable decision by their otherwise martially gifted spouses. Secondary debates about women as victims or agents of war, the legitimacy of resistance against unjust political decisions, the acceptability of suicide in the face of insurmountable misfortune, and the need for forbearance and self-discipline against the temptations of the flesh—debates familiar from the moralistic collections of *sententiae* that Renaissance dramatists scattered throughout their works—were well represented throughout the Sophonisba narrative. Moreover, the similarities between her unhappy end as a Carthaginian queen because of Roman infidelity recalled Dido's abandonment by Aeneas as well as the suicide of Cleopatra after Octavian's defeat of her armies and ensuing preparations to transport her as a captive to Rome. For dramatists seeking opportunities to explore the emotions of both the conquerors and the defeated resulting from the Roman invasion and eventual subjugation of north African

kingdoms, the stories of Dido, Sophonisba, and Cleopatra provided an opportunity to cast such imperialistic ventures in the language of heroic but flawed female rulership and the misguided commingling of political ambition with sexual desire.

Beyond the inherent complexities of the Sophonisba story, van der Eembd and van Nieuwelandt were most likely aware of the increasing prominence of historical topics from biblical and secular sources, especially from classical, medieval, and near-contemporary history, that were inspiring playwrights writing in the vernacular and Neo-Latin within the Low Countries and abroad. The execution of Mary Stuart, the assassinations of William the Silent and Henri IV of France, and the martyrdom of Catholics and Protestants alike reappeared in tragedies from the 1580s to the 1620s.[12] Debates on the legitimacy of tyrannicide and revolution, on rivalries between the Catholic Church and secular rulers, or among religious dissenters themselves shaped the composition of several historical dramas. Because of this turn to historical drama, it is not surprising that van der Eembd and van Nieuwelandt would embrace Sophonisba as a novel topic to include in the Dutch-language repertoire. Both men were equally passionate about history: Van der Eembd published a play on the devastating 1572-73 siege of his native Haarlem in 1619, modelled on earlier siege tragedies such as Seneca's *Troades* and Robert Garnier's *Les Juifves*.[13] Van Nieuwelandt likewise devoted most of his theatrical energies to historical topics from the Bible and Roman history: Between 1617 and 1635, he composed dramas on Saul (1617), Solomon (1628), and Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem (1635); in addition to his *Sophonisba Aphricana*, he also produced secular tragedies on Nero (1628) and on Mark Antony and Cleopatra (1624).[14]

In embracing Sophonisba as a dramatic subject, van der Eembd and van Nieuwelandt were likely aware of the various Greco-Roman sources for her story as well as of earlier dramatic treatments of the subject. As in the case of many Renaissance dramatists, the Dutch playwrights did not acknowledge all their historical sources, and an even greater silence surrounded their indebtedness to earlier sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century writers. Similarities in the Greco-Roman historical record often meant that Sophonisba dramatists composed scenes built on specific moments in the prose sources, chiefly Livy, such as Sophonisba's first encounter with Masinissa or Scipio's upbraiding of Masinissa for succumbing to

[12] See, e.g., Zevecotius 1973; Heinsius 2020 and its Dutch adaptations by Jacob Duym (1606) (cf. Duym 1977) and Gijsbrecht van Hogendorp (1617) (cf. Kossmann 1932); Vernulaeus 1610.

[13] Van der Eembd 1619.

[14] See Keersmaekers 1957, esp. 79-96 for a discussion of these plays.

Sophonisba's charms. But in the course of the sixteenth century, following a pattern established by Trissino in his 1524 tragedy, additional scenes became an integral part of the dramatic tradition. Amplifying the classical sources, dramatists frequently included monologues in which Sophonisba laments the prospect of imminent enslavement after the fall of Cirta, Syphax bemoans the loss of his kingdom, Masinissa debates with himself about his conflicted obligations to Rome and Sophonisba, and in the final act, Sophonisba prepares for her inevitable suicide. The French translators of Trissino, Mellin de Saint-Gelais and Claude Mermet established this pattern of set-scenes in France where they were adapted first by Antoine de Montchrestien, and to a lesser extent by Nicholas de Montreux.

Writing within this tradition, van der Eembd and van Nieuwelandt used some of these same scenarios, but each of their works deviated sharply from their Italian and French predecessors to emphasize new aspects of the story. Van der Eembd begins his tragedy at what is essentially the fourth act in earlier plays, namely, the crisis afflicting Masinissa as he debates his own and Sophonisba's future. In contrast, van Nieuwelandt's work commences long before the action in the sixteenth-century Sophonisba plays with the Roman campaign against Carthage in Spain; Sophonisba herself is not even introduced until the third act. Moreover, van der Eembd approached Sophonisba through Renaissance rather than ancient sources, adapting Book V of Petrarch's *Africa* and Bandello's retelling of the Petrarchan epic as an occasion to develop Dutch as a literary language. Besides creating a rhetorically richer and psychologically sophisticated representation of sexual desire. Van der Eembd intensified the ethnic differences between European and African society through his representation of Rome and its enemies from the perspective of his own time when there was increased economic and cultural contact between the two continents. In contrast, van Nieuwelandt sought to improve upon van der Eembd's limited focus on facile comparisons between Africa and Europe and Masinissa's libidinous indecision by repositioning the story within the larger historical content of Carthaginian-Roman relations in the final years of the Second Punic War. Drawing on classical and Renaissance sources little used or not consulted by earlier playwrights, van der Eembd and van Nieuwelandt each made a unique contribution to Sophonisba as a dramatic subject, deepening the romantic discourse between Sophonisba and her lovers, and adapting the tradition to reflect the political and social landscape of the early seventeenth century as the Dutch Republic was establishing itself as a new Empire in the footsteps of Rome.

Govert van der Eembd, *Sophonisba* (1621)

Little is known about the life of Govert van der Eembd in the early seventeenth century, and what information we have about his career as a playwright, a translator of Battista Guarini's *Il pastor fido* and of Pierre D'Avity's encyclopaedic compendium *Les estats*, *empires, et principautez du monde*,[15] and as a compiler and commentator on selected Senecan *sententiae*, can be gleaned from the paratextual material that accompanied the publications of his works. Van der Eembd was trained as a lawyer, but he was also a prominent member of the rhetorician (*Rederijker*) chamber in his native Haarlem, the *Wijngaerd-ranken (Tendrils of the Vineyard)*, for whom he wrote his Guarini translation and the two surviving plays. His first dramatic work, a tragicomedy known only from its title *Lievenden Frederick*, was written before 1618, as attested in the dedicatory letter to his Guarini translation, which was published the following year in Haarlem. In 1619, he served as the *factor* or artistic director and manager of the chamber, one of three chambers in Haarlem at the time, where his first historical drama, *Haerlemse Belegeringhs treur-bly-eynde-spel,* a 'tragedy-with-a-happy-ending' on the 1572-73 siege of Haarlem was performed by his fellow members on 26 July 1619. A year later, his tragedy *Sophonisba* was presented in a more illustrious chamber, *D'Eglentier* in Amsterdam, according to the title page staged on 21 September 1620, and subsequently published in The Hague in 1621.

Van der Eembd's interest in history derived from his admiration for his native city's steadfast participation in the revolt against Spain. His drama on their heroic but unsuccessful defence of the city, written during the Twelve Years Truce (1609-1621), created a commemorative space for historical pride, a sentiment voiced again in 1623, after hostilities resumed, in van der Eembd's panegyric of the Haarlem militia marching off to Hasselt. In his dedicatory letter to the administrative leaders and city council of Haarlem, van der Eembd makes plain his affection for ancient and contemporary French historians (such as Pierre d'Avity) for their preservation of notable deeds for later generations, but he reserves his greatest praise for Homer, and especially for his account of the Trojan war: not only did Homer celebrate the valiant warriors among the Greeks and the Trojans, but he also praised the nobility of the besieged fighting courageously for their city's freedom. In

[15] Pierre D'Avity, *Les estats*, *empires, et principautez du monde: Representez par la description des pays, mœurs des habitans, richesses des prouinces, les forces, le gouuernement, la religion, & les princes qui ont gouuerné chacun estat. auec l'origine de toutes les religions, & de tous les chevaliers & ordres militaires* (Paris: Nicolas Du Fossé, 1613). For van der Eembd as a translator of *Il pastor fido*, see also Verkuyl 1971, esp. 227-51.

addition to linking the siege and fall of Haarlem to the Trojan war, van der Eembd interwove textual passages from P.C. Hooft's historical tragedy *Geeraerdt van Velsen* (1613), on the murder of Count Floris V of Holland in 1296, in which the chorus joyfully proclaims the legitimacy of inevitably bloody revolts against tyranny. He unabashedly confessed his lingering hatred of Spain—indeed he can feel little else other than their barbarity against his native city—and he reminds the young citizens of Haarlem, the children of the generation who suffered through famine, hardship, and slaughter perpetrated by the Spanish soldiers, that they must remain forever vigilant against this omnipresent threat.

The fundamental structure of a siege play—the lamentable plight of the besieged and the cruelty or magnanimity of the victor—underlies the Sophonisba story, and it is not surprising therefore that a year after the successful performance of *Haerlemse Belegeringh*, van der Eembd once again turned to relatively similar material for his *Sophonisba.* But this tragedy has a markedly different structure than the earlier play where van der Eembd incorporated traditional *Rederijker* personifications and *tableaux vivants* with detailed historical scenes representing the monthly progress of the fateful siege.[16] *Sophonisba* was written in the neoclassical mode of sixteenth-century French tragedy with careful attention paid to maintaining the three unities of time, place, and action restricting the number of characters within a given scene, and a concluding chorus to each of the five acts. The sole allegorical figure *'t Gerucht* (Rumour) functions as the prologue to introduce the historical prehistory to the events about to unfold on stage, but, in contrast to its steady presence and various manifestations as 'good and bad news' in *Haerlemse Belegeringh,* Rumour withdraws completely here after opening the play.

Such changes are not surprising. Van der Eembd wrote his *Sophonisba* for the Eglantine Chamber in Amsterdam which championed the new neoclassical style of French Renaissance drama with occasional local touches, such as the appearance of personified cities and rivers and even of the hellish Furies. But van der Eembd's poetic ambitions extended well beyond structural imitation; he also pursued an innovative approach to his historical sources and his likely French models. Like most Renaissance playwrights, he is silent about the classical historians he followed in recounting Sophonisba's final days, and no mention is made of earlier Renaissance treatments of the same material. In his prefatory apologia to potential critics ('tot de vroege Berispers ende late Beteraers'), he asks their indulgence for his free adaptation of the ancient sources and especially for

[16] On such *tableaux vivants*, see Hummelen 1992, 193-222.

his inventive introduction of Sophonisba's ghost in the final act, but he does not elaborate further. It is clear in the prologue that van der Eembd has been following Livy's account to the story, and many key events, including the siege and fall of Cirta, Sophonisba's capital city, are quickly summarized so that the play itself can focus on the last twenty-four hours of the Masinissa-Sophonisba relationship.

This creative approach to the lovers' romance is indebted to, and at the same time, distinct from sixteenth-century treatments of the subject. Van der Eembd's familiarity with earlier Renaissance versions was most likely acquired through his knowledge of French. He was not competent in Italian, and his earlier Dutch translation of Guarini had been mediated through preceding French versions. Of the possible French plays he may have known, the translations of Trissino and the Sophonisba dramas of Montchrestien and Montreux, his own play seems most indebted to Montchrestien. The latter had drawn on Trissino's sympathetic representation of the beleaguered queen and greatly amplified her role as well as that of Masinissa with several rhetorically elaborate and introspective monologues, often culminating in *tirades* for the emotionally distraught lovers. Montchrestien's casting of the star-crossed romance as the workings of the vengeful Fury Megere against Masinissa (Act III), and his expansion of the lamentations of the overly sexed Masinissa as first described by Petrarch in his *Africa* and vividly retold by Bandello, formed the foundation of van der Eembd's play. Despite the title of his work, Montchrestien's *La Carthaginoise* focuses on Masinissa and his decision to choose Rome over Sophonisba. As in Trissino's tragedy Sophonisba appears prominently at three key moments: her opening lamentation about the impending fall of Cirta and the capture of her husband Syphax, her pleading with Masinissa that she not be sent to Rome, and her final moments as she welcomes death by poison. The remainder of Montchrestien's exposition consists of debates between Masinissa and the Romans, first with his fellow commander Laelius, and later with the forgiving but resolute Scipio Africanus. In his approach to the play, however, van der Eembd sought to maintain a balance between scenes devoted to the contrastive mental states of Masinissa and Sophonisba, an expansion of Montchrestien's representation, which he realizes by limiting the scenes in which both lovers are on stage, delaying their last fateful encounter until the end, and even extending it beyond Sophonisba's suicide by introducing her ghost.

Van der Eembd likely had multiple reasons for his creative adaptation of Montchrestien and his unique representation of the material. Beyond his own poetic ambitions, recounting the siege of Cirta and its effect on Sophonisba and Syphax may have seemed too similar to his earlier Haarlem siege play. By shifting the emphasis from these political and military events, familiar

already from the sources, he was able to transform the play into a domestic tragedy between a weak and ultimately faithless lover/husband and his unjustly treated spouse. Moreover, van der Eembd takes pains to characterize Sophonisba as an innocent victim of Masinissa's unbridled lust rather than as the manipulative, politically astute seductress of Petrarch, Bandello, and Montchrestien. By commencing his play at a later stage in the Masinissa-Sophonisba relationship, van der Eembd is able to avoid the ambiguity of the pivotal moment when she seeks out Masinissa among the chaos of the fall of Cirta and intentionally uses her beauty and sexual charms to convert her conqueror into a besmitten lover. In van der Eembd, whatever seduction has happened occurred much earlier, especially since Masinissa, because of his Numidian blood as Livy first underscored, is especially prone to uncontrolled libidinous desire.

Having invoked Livy's reference to the 'African' propensity for sex, a quality all too frequently noted by narrators of the Sophonisba story, van der Eembd uses that ethnic distinction to cast Masinissa as a Black man, a Moor from Mauritania in contrast to a whiter, and hence purer and more innocent, Sophonisba. Livy was the first surviving classical source to connect lust with an African temperament when Sophonisba first persuaded Masinissa to help her,[17] but he had already hinted at it earlier when recalling Syphax's abandonment of the alliance with Scipio because of his insatiable desire for his wife.[18] For Livy, frequently Numidians are synonymous with Africans, but although there may be ethnic and geographic distinctions, he does not indicate any racial differences. Numidians and Carthaginians were ethnically Berbers as dark-skinned as many peoples on the opposite shore of the Mediterranean, but not the Blacks of sub-Saharan Africa. In Petrarch and Bandello, as well as Trissino and his French imitators, Sophonisba is unmistakably white with golden hair, an attribute that heightens the lust of her already inflamed Numidian lovers, but no mention is made of their race.[19] By designating Masinissa a 'Moor', van der Eembd aligns his characterization with contemporary connotations of Moors as dark-brown or Black peoples from Mauritania, who in the moralistically inflected spectrum of the early seventeenth century were easily linked with devils.[20] This is certainly van der Eembd's intention in this final act, when Masinissa's race

[17] Livy, *Ab Vrbe condita* XXX, 12, 18.
[18] Livy, *Ab Vrbe condita* XXX, 3, 4 and 7, 9.
[19] See, e.g. Petrarca, *Africa* V, 23-29; Bandello 1992, 384.
[20] See *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, *s.v.* "moor" A 1: "helsche mooren" (hellish moors).

is first mentioned, for it serves as a prelude to his mad, nightmarish descent into hell in retribution for his faithlessness to Sophonisba.[21]

Given these significant deviations from the previous Renaissance representations of Sophonisba, it is not surprising that van der Eembd would be especially defensive about his innovative approach. He feared that learned readers of his play may quibble about the introduction of Sophonisba's ghost, or about the compression of the Sophonisba-Syphax relationship into a few lines in the prologue. As a pre-emptive measure, van der Eembd, following Horace, reminded his readers that poetic works may be more inventive than historical narratives, and more importantly, that fictional accounts have as much intellectual value as other texts.[22] Perhaps to impress well-schooled Eglantine members, he adduces a reference from Plutarch in which the Greek historian and philosopher quotes the rhetorician Gorgias on the value of tragedy as 'a deception, in which the one who deceives is more just than the one who does not deceive, and the one who is deceived is more intelligent than the one who is not deceived'.[23] Van der Eembd leaves this artfully fashioned, paradoxical, reference without any explanation, and one wonders what his contemporaries made of it. But if they knew the Plutarchian context, they would have understood the deceiver as the poet who makes the imaginary real through his elegant language to the delight and instruction (the increased wisdom) of his audience.

Van der Eembd's inclusion of fictive characters within his historical tragedy was intended to provide additional space for the deeper exploration of a particular emotion or a set of emotions in conflict. He greatly expands the small role accorded Masinissa's lieutenant in Montchrestien's play, here called Amystas, who underscores the inhumanity of Masinissa's demands by refusing to carry them out. With Sophonisbe's ghost, moreover, he probed the extent of Masinissa's remorse and his belated recognition of unchecked lust. In his highly original final act, van der Eembd sought to improve upon the inconclusive and even contradictory endings that previous dramatists had attempted. Earlier playwrights had wrestled with the best way to balance Masinissa's decision to send Sophonisba the poison with her subsequent suicide as a courageous and noble action, worthy of contemplation and imitation. Masinissa's resolution to follow Scipio's advice about taming his unchecked sexual desires—a useful practical lesson in both the ancient and Christian world—followed by his ascent to the kingship once held by the now vanquished Syphax is most certainly a triumphant moment. But this valuable

[21] See, e.g., Waite 2013, and on the Moor on the Dutch stage, Smith 2020.

[22] van der Eembd 1639, fol. *2r-*3v.

[23] Plutarch, *De gloria Atheniensium* 25 (*Moralia* 348C); *De audiendis poetis* 2 (Moralia 15D).

moral lesson makes light of his earlier promise to Sophonisba to protect her and denigrates her into a self-serving seductress deserving of her misfortune. Even if Masinissa is overcome with remorse, the kingship still awaits him after Sophonisba's death, and his ability to reach the tough decision to follow Rome and reject her underscores his readiness for assuming the heavy responsibilities of the throne.

All of the earlier sixteenth-century versions—Trissino and the original French tragedies—devote considerable space to Masinissa's lamentations before and after his fateful decision; Trissino, in fact, incurred the disapproval of later writers by allowing a weeping Masinissa to barge onto the scene after Sophonisba's inspiring and courageous suicide, disrupting the sublimity of this innocent woman's undeserved death. Montchrestien's Masinissa casts himself as a victim of the harshness of Roman law that demands Sophonisba as war booty, and following Petrarch/ Bandello, even imagines joining her in death so they could enjoy eternity with other lovers in the Elysian Fields. He does not of course kill himself—in contrast to the Masinissa of Jean Mairet's 1635 play—but he numbers himself already among the 'walking dead' for there is no pleasure without her 'whose name and memory will never be erased from his heart.'[24] Montreux has his Masinissa adopt an even more self-deprecating stance: he may have made the right decision in accordance with Roman law, but he is ashamed of his disloyalty to her, and his earlier disloyalty to Scipio—weaknesses that undermine his qualifications for kingship—and proclaims Sophonisba herself superior and even worthy of divinity because of her constancy and courage. He imagines her body lying in a state of permanent and uncorrupted beauty in the tomb where it will flourish embalmed with flowers.[25] Moreover, Scipio himself, upon learning of her suicide, praises her virtuous behaviour, declaring himself—and Rome—overcome by such noble behaviour.[26] Montreux also has Scipio and Masinissa discuss the legitimacy of Roman rule, and praises Sophonisba for not enduring slavery.[27]

In all of these earlier representations, Sophonisba though saddened by Masinissa's decision, does not blame him for her unhappy fate, nor does she call for vengeance to punish him for his infidelity; her anger is directed, rather, at Rome. Van der Eembd interprets Masinissa's actions much more

[24] "Meurs donques pour reuiure à iamais immortelle; | Ie viurai pour mourir en douleur eternelle:|...Ni l'espace du temps, ni la longue distance, | Ni l'accident mortel, ni toute autre rigueur | N'effacera ton nom graué dedans mon coeur." Montchrestien, *La Carthaginoise*, ed. Petit de Julleville (ed.) 1891, 152. Cf. Mairet 1969, 113-15 (Act V, 8).

[25] Montreux 1976, 133-36 (Act V, ll. 2289-2400).

[26] Montreux 1976, 147-48 (Act V, ll. 2721-2760).

[27] Montreux 1976, 12-13.

critically, and in intensifying Sophonisba's innocence and the injustice of her undeserved fate, he condemns the Moor to death. His race is now coupled with culpability: he has sinned against his loyal wife whose only weakness, though certainly not a flaw, had been to trust him too readily. In the play's final moments, lapsing into madness induced by visions of Sophonisba's ghost as an avenging Fury, he imagines himself being slowly gnawed to death by a 'Kanker-worm' whom he implores to torment him more sharply to hasten his inevitable demise.[28] With this final scene, van der Eembd has returned to the vengeful world of the *Haerlemse Belegeringh* in which victims repeatedly call for divine justice to punish their persecutors. There are no loose ends in van der Eembd tragedy: Masinissa's disloyalty to Sophonisba is not a temporary state from which he will later recover as the king of a restored Numidia. Rather, despite his generous offer to protect Sophonisba, he has been revealed to be little else than a vile seducer, bent on satiating his irrepressible sexual desire as many Black Africans allegedly do, akin to devils inciting pandemonium throughout the world. In abandoning Sophonisba, Masinissa has not triumphed over sexual desire but remains enslaved to it and worthy of eternal damnation for his participation in the slaughter of an innocent victim. For the first time in a Sophonisba play, divine justice has prevailed and restored order to a chaotic world that Rome itself with its harsh, inflexible practices is revealed to be unworthy to govern.

Guilliam van Nieuwelandt, *Sophonisba Aphricana* (1625)

Alongside the publication of *Sophonisba* in 1621, van der Eembd also saw through the press his Dutch adaptation of Pierre d'Avity's massive compendium of global history and geography, *Wereld Spiegel*.[29] In his dedicatory preface to the Stadtholder Maurice, van der Eembd made plain the value of historical texts as manifestations of divine justice through their vivid portraits ('schilderye') of bygone exemplars of wise as well as tyrannous behaviour.[30] This providential view of history was likewise apparent in van der Eembd's critical reading of the encounter between Black Masinissa and Rome, and of the legitimacy of his horrendous death. Despite its pagan setting, Christian morality still informed van der Eembd's shaping of the plot, and more importantly, his concept of history and historical change. In contrast to this simplification of the complex relationship between Sophonisba and her lovers by limiting the tragedy to the final hours of the fateful romance, van Nieuwelandt recreated the larger geopolitical circumstances in which the

[28] Van der Eembd 1621, fol. Fv.

[29] Pierre d'Avity, trans. Govert van der Eembd 1621. In 1628 Johann Ludwig Gottfried published a Latin translation: d'Avity 1628.

[30] Van der Eembd 1621, fol. a3v.

plot unfolds to delight his historically minded patron and to escape from the Manichean understanding of history that shaped van der Eembd's play.

Van Nieuwelandt was born in Antwerp in 1583 or 1584 where he lived during the first years of his life.[31] In 1589, when he was five years old, his Protestant family fled the re-catholicized city in the Southern Netherlands and went to Amsterdam in the more Protestant northern part. There van Nieuwelandt was apprenticed to the painter Jacob Maertensz Savery (ca. 1565-1603), who was born in the Southern Netherlands, had settled in Haarlem and started his workshop in Amsterdam in 1589.[32] After three years van Nieuwelandt made a 'grand tour' to become one of the many Flemish-Dutch painters in Rome.[33] There, he spent some years (1601-1604) in the workshop of his uncle Guilliam van Nieuwelandt I (1560-1626) and in 1604 with the painter Paulus Bril;[34] he then returned to Amsterdam, where he settled for three years (1604-1606) and married Anna Hustaert in February 1606. From 1606 to 1629 he lived in Antwerp, where he was a member of the St. Luke's Guild, a corporation of artists and art dealers. After May 1629 he went back to Amsterdam, where he died in 1635.

In 1615, during his Antwerp years (1606-1629), the painter van Nieuwelandt who was also highly interested in poetry became a member of the re-established rhetoricians' chamber *De Olyftak* (Olivebranch). One of the regular activities of such societies was the writing of dramas, and van Nieuwelandt also wrote theatre plays. In November and December 1615 his history plays *Saul* and *Livia* were performed; both tragedies were published in 1617. Another historical tragedy *Nero* was published in 1618. However, in 1619-1620, the relationship between van Nieuwelandt and the *Olyftak* cooled down.[35] In the years 1620-1621, he left the chamber and associated with members of the competitive chamber *De Violieren*. This chamber performed his *Spel van Cleopatra* (1624), that was printed as *Aegyptica ofte Aegyptische Tragoedie van M. Anthonius en Cleopatra*. In 1625 he wrote his *Sophonisba Aphricana*, which was performed four times at the *Violieren* in February 1626;[36] an edition of the play was presumably issued in the same year, but this version has been lost.[37] After van Nieuwelandt returned to Amsterdam,

[31] A sketch of his life is given by Van den Brande 1875 and Keersmaekers 1957, 27-50. See also Sluijter 2015.

[32] On him, see Bauer 2012.

[33] See, e.g., Jansen & Luijten (eds.) 1988; Levine a.o. (eds.) 1991; Allart & N Dacos 1995.

[34] See also Schatborn a.o. 2001, 38-43, and Sluijter 2015. On Van Nieuwelandt I, see Hoogewerff 1961 and van Hille 1965; on Paulus Bril, see te Slaa 2014.

[35] It is not known why this happened. Keersmaekers 1957, 40, gives some speculations.

[36] Keersmaekers 1957, 42-43.

[37] Sweertius 1628, 315 wrote: "Guillielmus Nieulantius, Antuerpiensis Pictor et Poeta Belgicus inter primos, mihi familiarissimus, edidit et publice exhibuit coram Senatu

two new editions were issued, both by Amsterdam printers: one by Anthony Jacobsz in 1635, probably after a performance in the city, and a second by Broer Jansz in 1639.[38] In Antwerp, he wrote two other tragedies, *Salomon* (1628), printed in Antwerp, and *Ierusalems verwoestingh, door Nabuchodonosor*, printed in 1635 in Amsterdam. It is unlikely that van Nieuwelandt was active in the rhetoricians' life in Amsterdam. All three of the plays he published there were dedicated to Antwerp contacts, i.e., *Salomon* to the Antwerp secretary ('griffier') Gillis Fabri; *Ierusalems verwoestingh* to the merchant Gaspar Duarte; and *Sophonisba Aphricana* to Ioan Baptista van Lemens – all members and patrons of *De Violieren*.[39]

The first edition of *Treur-Spel van Sophonisba Aphricana* (*Sophonisba*) is lost; we base ourselves, however, on the third edition of 1639, the last printed seventeenth-century edition.[40] The title of the work is striking: no previous Sophonisba play had referred to her as an African. Van Nieuwelandt—or his publisher—may have added this geographical designation to promote the sales of the work; his previous play was entitled *Aegyptica ofte Aegyptische tragoedie van M. Anthonius en Cleopatra,* so such designations were not unusual. But the application of 'African' to Sophonisba may have also been a reference to Montchrestien's earlier *La Carthaginoise*, to which van Nieuwelandt is partially indebted (see below), but it also recalls the epithet usually accorded the victorious Scipio during the Second Punic War, Scipio Africanus, a foreshadowing of the unusually large role accorded him in this play.

Van Nieuwelandt explains in his dedicatory letter to the Antwerp merchant Ioan (Johannes) Baptista van Lemens, that he has taken special pains to follow the historical accounts of Livy and Plutarch in composing his drama.[41]

Antuerpiae maximo applausu Tragoedias VI. Saul, Neronem, Liuiam, Cleopatram, Sophonisbam et Salomonem, in gratiam sodalium Collegii Oliuiferi rami ... et pictorum Antuerpiae 1617 et 1624, 1626 typis Guilielmi van Tongeren." See also Keersmaekers 1957, 43 and n. 78.

[38] Van Nieuwelandt 1635 and 1639. On Van Nieuwelandt as a poet in Amsterdam, see Hummelen 1982, 235.

[39] On Duarte or De Weert, see Ramakers 2014, esp. 299 and 333; on his gift to the chamber of a dress for the Sophonisba character, see 299-301; van Lemens sponsored the costume for Syphax: van Straelen 1854, 70.

[40] This is available on the internet: https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/nieu001soph03_01/index.php. On the first edition, see Keersmaekers 1957, 284. The second edition is available at https://dams.antwerpen.be/asset/v1ZJLhHfLMOXJVVEkAkJ25iU. On this play, see Keersmaekers 1957, 110-113; Meeus 1983, 124, nr. 171; Schönle 1968, 100-105 and 111-120.

[41] For Livy as a source for the Sophonisba story, see above, p. 74 and n. 3; The Plutarch source is from his *Life of Scipio Africanus*, already lost in Antiquity; the reference is to the Latin *Life of Scipio* written by Donato Acciaiuoli in 1567/1468, which was regularly printed with the Latin *Lives* of Plutarch. A French translation of this Latin reconstruction by Charles

Van Lemens was an ardent supporter of *De Violieren* and especially of their lavish theatrical productions; he funded the elaborate costume for the hapless Numidian king Syphax, a major role in van Nieuwelandt's play, for the Antwerp performances in the 1620s.[42] But besides rehearsing the usual apologia for drama attributed to Simonides and Plutarch concerning theatrical productions as 'speaking pictures', a commonplace in rhetorician drama, van Nieuwelandt betrays his affection for Scipio. The Roman general, he recalls, was especially fond of reading history during his contemplative moments, for he drew on the actions of past exemplars to shape his own decisions about pending military and political matters.[43]

It is not surprising then that Scipio is accorded the leading role in the play. The work in fact handily divides into two halves, the first devoted to Scipio as a political leader and his relationship with the Numidians Masinissa and Syphax as well as with the Carthaginian leader Hasdrubal, and the second devoted primarily to Masinissa's love affair with Sophonisba, and the former's victory over his lustful desires thanks to Scipio's intervention. Van Nieuwelandt draws heavily on Livy's account of Scipio's campaign in Spain against Hasdrubal, his ensuing debate before the Senate in Rome about invading Carthage to lure Hannibal away from southern Italy and back to his homeland, and his adroit appeals to Syphax and Masinissa to remain allied with Rome against Hasdrubal. Scipio is portrayed as a wise, realistic politician who, though victorious on the battlefield, attempts to resolve territorial and political conflict through negotiation. His reputation as a paragon of virtue induces Masinissa to seek him out as an ally, and his leniency to those who sincerely regret their rebelliousness towards Rome garners him even more accolades. Only Hasdrubal remains sceptical of Scipio's peace overtures regarding them as a devious way for Rome to expand its influence across the Mediterranean without bloodshed.

This unusual conjoining of episodes from the earlier career of Scipio with the Sophonisba story no doubt pleased the historically minded Van Lemens.

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de L'Ecluse was included in Amyot's edition of a French translation of the *Lives*, see above, n. 6. In the third Amyot edition of 1567, where this *Life* first appears, the *Life of Scipio* has no separate paratexts – although it has a separate pagination – but later editions (e.g. Geneva 1594, 696 indicate that it is a translation from the Latin by Acciaiuoli, see Pade 2007, I, 37 (Antiquity) and 337-338 (Italy/France/England) (with many thanks to Johann Ramminger). Fragments of the lost life are collected in Plutarch, *Moralia* 15, ed. F.H. Sandbach, Cambridge MA, 1969 *Loeb Classical Library* 429, 76-79 ('Fragments from lost *Lives*').

[42] See van Nieuwelandt's dedication in *Sophonisba Aphricana*, van Nieuwelandt 1639, fol. A2r-A3r. Van Lemens donated the "cloak of king Syphax" (het cleet vanden coninck Sifaex), see Donnet 1907, 163 (see also above, n. 37); on van Lemens, see ibidem, 165.

[43] Van Nieuwelandt 1639, fol. A2r-v: "Simonides, Plutarchus, ende eenige andere noemen de Gedichten sprekende Schilderijen, ende de Schilderijen, stomme Gedichten" (A2v).

Narratives of Scipio's exemplary virtue were popular in the Renaissance, especially the famous episode recounted by Livy concerning Scipio's magnanimous restoration of a beautiful Spanish female captive to her family.[44] Instead of enjoying her as 'war booty' for his successful suppression of the revolt, Scipio insisted that the wedding with her fiancé, a conspirator against Rome, proceed, and he offered the monetary gift he received from her family in gratitude to the newly married couple. This episode, the so-called 'Continence (or Generosity) of Scipio' was represented in several early modern paintings, most notably that of Peter Paul Rubens which had been recently created in Antwerp in the 1610s.[45] Unsurprisingly, van Nieuwelandt includes several references to this episode in his work to help Masinissa, who admired Scipio even more deeply than he desired Sophonisba, to discipline his own desires and prove himself worthy of Scipio's affection. Not only did Masinissa triumph on the battlefield against Syphax, who, spurred on by his wife's beauty, foolishly challenged Rome, but prodded by Scipio, he learned to conquer himself and demonstrate his worthiness of the kingship Scipio awarded him.

Beyond this expanded representation of Scipio, van Nieuwelandt inserted several small nuggets of historical detail that in the printed version of the play at least would have pleased van Lemens' fondness for history, and perhaps even tested his knowledge of the past. In addition to lesser known passages from Livy, van Nieuwelandt drew on writers such as Herodotus, Sallust, Valerius Maximus, and Justinus, whom he does not openly acknowledge, to amplify the historical background to the events on stage. Several characters refer to historical events that antedate the present moment thereby broadening the historical spectrum concerning their reactions to the vicissitudes of fortune. Sophonisba's nurse reminds her mistress that Scipio's generosity and mercy are legendary: just as he forgave the recalcitrant Ilergetian rebels Indibilis and Mandonius after conquering them,[46] so too will he not subject Sophonisba to Roman captivity. Scipio opens the fourth act with a reference to the many false accusations he had to endure because of his alleged sympathy for the local Roman commander Pleminius who had wrongly seized the property of the Locrians.[47] Later when reprimanding Masinissa, Scipio likens the captive queen to the women who prostitute themselves in

[44] Livy, *Ab Vrbe condita* XXIX, 10, 10.

[45] Pieter Paul Rubens, *The Continence of Scipio* (ca. 1618-1620), private collection (see https://rkd.nl/en/explore/images/17841); Anthony van Dyck, *The Continence of Scipio* (1621), University of Oxford, Christ Church (https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-continence-of-scipio-229224). On the popularity of the theme of the Continence or Clemency of Scipio, especially in Dutch art, see Kunzle 2002.

[46] Livy, *Ab Vrbe condita* XXIX, 3, 4.

[47] Livy, *Ab Vrbe condita* XXIX, 18-22.

the temple of Venus at Sicca, a Numidian border town, to acquire funds for their dowries.[48] And the Act IV chorus refers to Tellus the Athenian, whom Solon had considered the happiest of men, in likening the virtues of Scipio and Masinissa to this exemplary Greek warrior.[49]

The most significant historical amplification occurs at the climax of the passionate encounter between Sophonisba and Masinissa, when she clarifies her relationship to the historical Dido who had built Carthage after fleeing from her home in Phoenicia. Earlier Sophonisba texts had drawn parallels between her and Vergil's Dido, for she, like Dido before her, would be abandoned by her lover for the sake of Rome and kill herself. In the midst of their love-making in Act IV, Sophonisba reminds Masinissa that she is responding to his desire not out of fear or disloyalty to Syphax but because of her love for her homeland. She likens her patriotic ardour to that of the Carthaginian brothers Philaeni who allowed themselves to be buried alive so that the boundaries of their new homeland could be established.[50] She further tells Masinissa that the Vergilian account of Aeneas' abandonment of Dido was a Roman fabrication and misappropriation of the heroic actions of the historical Dido as the loyal widow of her deceased spouse. Vergil had denigrated the historical Dido to a desperate abandoned lover to glorify Aeneas's triumph over his lust, but the historical Dido remained true to her Phoenician spouse and refused the advances of the Mauritanian king Iarbas who threatened to declare war unless she marry him. She chose, however, to remain faithful to her late husband rather than accede to Iarbas' demand; in killing herself, she removed the threat of war, and the Carthaginians later deified her for her loyalty to them.[51] As she lays dying in the final act, Sophonisba imagines Dido coming to greet her, but this is not the Vergilian Dido of despair but the historical Dido celebrating her liberation from a lustful male suitor. Framing these scenes around material derived from Sallust and Justinus, van Nieuwelandt moves beyond Livy and both enriches and augments the complexity of Sophonisba's actions. Like most rhetorician dramas, the play was written to represent a moral lesson, in this case, self-control – shown in the play by Masinissa –, as markedly expressed on the title page:

> Wie dat hem self verwint/bethoont veel grooter kracht/
> Dan die van Steden groot/de Mueren breekt met macht.

[48] Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* II, 6, 15.

[49] Herodotus, *Historiae*, I, 30.

[50] Sallust, *Bellum Iugurthinum*, 79; Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, V, 6 ext. 4.

[51] Justinus/Pompeius Trogus, *Historiae*, XVIII, 5, 1-8.

> Whoever controls himself shows a much greater power
> than he who forcefully breaks the walls of big cities.
>
> (Trans. JB and JP)[52]

In the manner of rhetoricians' plays and like van der Eembd's *Haerlemse belegeringh*, it also contains *tableaux vivants* ("verthooningen"). For instance, after the first scene of Act III, (1) offerings to the gods by Scipio are shown, then (2) – in contrast – Syphax' misery, and (3) a third *tableau* represents the battle between Scipio and Masinissa on one side and Syphax and Hasdrubal on the other. At the end of the play, three *tableaux* are likewise portrayed: (1) Love and Death triumphing over Syphax and Sophonisba, Scipio crowning Masinissa ruler of Numidia, and Virtue, Honour, Fame, Glory, Rome, and Victory embracing one another; (2) Fame hand-in-hand with Immortality triumphing over death, and Victory embracing Scipio and Masinissa; (3) Themis, the goddess of justice, grants Scipio immortality, and Virtue, Honour, Fame and Glory lead Masinissa since he has conquered death and love. Likewise, a company of Fear, Despair, Grief, Prison, Misery, Hunger, Unsteadiness and Deceit dance before Sophonisba's eyes, thus representing a vision that appears to her just after she drank the poison in V, 2.[53]

Van Nieuwelandt emphasized Scipio's prudent and pious leadership, Sophonisba's deep love for Syphax, and her infidelity in entreating Masinissa to protect her and her people. Recurringly he underscored the opposition between Roman courage and the inconstancy of Carthaginians and Numidians.[54]

Sophonisba, however, is not only a rhetoricians' play; it also has traits of a Senecan drama with five acts and the exploration of intense emotions. One of the scenes may well be a creative imitation of the *Octavia*, ascribed to the Roman philosopher: In both scenes, a wet-nurse-confidante tries to convince the protagonist to return the love of their unwanted husbands, viz. Masinissa in *Sophonisba*, and the emperor Nero in *Octavia*.[55]

Its structure is quite exceptional. In the first three acts, van Nieuwelandt explores at length the historical circumstances of the Sophonisba story, i.e. the political and military developments of the time as told by Livy, to such an extent that readers who do not have Livy's history at hand, may find it

[52] Cf. Proverbs 16, 32b: 'one whose temper is controlled [is better] than one who captures a city' (NRSVA). The lines return in the tragedy itself, in IV, 1 and (with slight variation) in V, 3, both times said by Scipio, to Syphax and Masinissa respectively.

[53] Van Nieuwelandt, *Sophonisba Aphricana* V, 2, Van Nieuwelandt 1639, fol. G4v.

[54] See also Golahny 2006, esp. 176.

[55] Keersmaekers 1957, 112; the scenes at stake are Sophonisba IV.2 and *Octavia* ll. 72-272. On the Senecan character of van der Eembd's and van Nieuwelandt's Sophonisba dramas, see also Worp 1892;, 144-148 (van der Eembd) and 150-151 (van Nieuwelandt).

difficult to understand the situation. Many passages can be compared with Livy's *Ab Vrbe condita*, books XXVIII-XXX.[56] Van Nieuwelandt also mentioned Appian as his source, but his biographer Keersmakers could not find any traces of the Greek historian's treatment.[57]

However, the play is also transnational in the way that it draws on earlier Renaissance literary traditions. Some passages were adapted from Robert Garnier's French tragedy *Les Juifves* (1582), the Dutch history play *Geeraerdt van Velsen* (1613) by P.C. Hooft, and van der Eembd's *Sophonisba* (1621).[58] Following Montchrestien and van der Eembd, van Nieuwelandt also uses Petrarchistic language to describe the beauty of the queen and the passion of Syphax and Masinissa for her.[59] Syphax expresses his love for Sophonisba first, but does so in 'ordinary' language, although still unabashedly frank. He wishes that Juno will unite them heart and soul, and that the god of marriage, Hymenaeus, will unite their bodies.[60] After the fall of Cirta, Sophonisba expresses her grief over the capture of Syphax to her

[56] Keersmaekers 1957, 112-113 gives a detailed overview of passages of Livy's history that inspired lines by van Nieuwelandt. See also above, p. 2.

[57] Keersmaekers 1957, 111; for the places in Appian, see above, n. 6.

[58] Cf. *Sophonisba* IV, 1, van Nieuwelandt 1639, fol. E3v, ll. 1275-1320), where Syphax begs for mercy from Scipio with Garnier, *Les Juifves* IV, 2, ll. 1318-1328 and 1413-1416; cf. *Sophonisba* I, 2, fol. B3v, l. 259: "Noyt sorght den Prins genoegh, die sorght voor sijnen staet" with Hooft, *Geeraerdt van Velsen* l. 772: "Nooit zorgd' hij ver genoeg, die zorgde voor een staat", and V, 2, fol. H1r, l. 2174: "O! Schepper, ick ontschep, om 't geen dat ick verwacht" with Hooft, *Geeraert van Velsen*, l. 1315: "O Schepper, ik ontschep, ontsluit mij Uw genade"; cf. *Sophonisba* V, 1 (fol. F4r), ll. 1703-10: "Ghy hebt het oock verdient door Ridderlijcke daden, | Door my trou by te staen, en wijsselijck te raden: | Maer hoe ghy grooter zijt van deughden en gemoet, | Hoe dat ick meerder my van u verwond'ren moet. | Dat ghy door dwase Min u selven hebt vergeten' with van der Eembd's *Sophonisba* III, 1 (fol. C2r): 'Doch hier in kan ick my naeuwlijcks genoegh verwond'ren, | Dat gy, die zijt in deught van Princen uyt te zond'ren, | En oyt standvastigh waert van hert en van gemoed, | In voorneem niet te wulps, maer redelijck en vroed, | Gedweegh, verduldigh, langsaem, niet te wispeltuyrigh | Van sinnen, matigh en beleeft; niet ongeduyrigh; | Niet geyl, niet wulfs, noch weyts, noch weyf'ligh in u doen: | Maer trouw oprecht, en vroom, lief-taligh met de goe'n; | Ja die noyt hebt geweest van eer noch lof te scheyden, | U nu hebt laten van een teng're Vrouw verleyden", the letter Masinissa writes to Sophonisba, *Sophonisba* V, 1, fol. G1v-G2r, ll. 1842-1882, with van der Eembd's *Sophonisba* II, 1, fol. B3v; cf. *Sophonisba*, ll. 1271-1316 with Garnier, *Les Juifves*, 1413-1456; Garnier's *Les Juifves* also inspired van Nieuwelandt to write his *Ierusalems Verwoestingh*, see Keersmaekers 1957, 116-121. On the reception of Garnier in the Low Countries, see also van Moerkerken 1894, 193-208.

[59] On European Petrarchism, Forster 1969 is still fundamental for Petrarchism as an international literary phenomenon. See also, e.g., Kennedy 2003, who connects Petrarchism to nationalism as exemplified by Petrarch, Du Bellay and Sidney, respectively. See also Hempfer & Regn (eds.) 199; Bernsen & Huss (eds.) 2009, and especially Hus 2009. For Petrarchism in Dutch literature, see Ypes 1934.

[60] *Sophonisba* II, 2, fol. D2v, ll. 858-859: "Dat Iuno dan vereent ons hart en ziel te samen, | Dat Hymeneus dan vereenight ons lichamen."

nurse Edissa (another name for the Biblical figure of Esther), and her continuing love for him. She does so in restrained Petrarchistic expressions, declaring that her soul remains with the absent Syphax, for whom she still longs, and will continue to do so even until death.[61]

The strongest Petrarchistic language is used by her second lover. In III, 4, the armed Massinissa tells Sophonisba that he has to go to war, and she in return articulates her grief. The general then expresses his love for her. He does so in highly Petrarchistic language. He starts his praise of Sophonisba thus:

> Ha! Coninckklijcke Vrou, laet mijne lippen raecken
> 't Corael van uwen mondt waer in de liefde woont.
>
> Ah! Royal woman, let my lips touch the coral of your mouth in which love lives.[62]

She is a 'mistress of his heart', his heart is wounded by her face, and the flame of her fire burns his soul.[63] Nor is the Petrarchistic paradox absent when he speaks about her as his goddess who caused bitter-sweet wounds.[64] Similar praise can be found later when Masinissa in the manner of Petrarchan poetry enumerates his beloved Sophonisba's physical attributes that have bewitched him, chiefly her hair and her eyes ("two suns", twee Sonnen).[65]

This Petrarchistic language originated, unsurprisingly, in Book V of Petrarch's *Africa*, in which the Sophonisba story is recounted. There Sophonisba's beauty, which resembles the loveliness of Petrarch's beloved Laura, is described as surpassing the heavenly stars, and her brow, hair, and eyes are all exceptionally enticing.[66] It is, however, not only the narrator who

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[61] *Sophonisba* III, 2, fol. D3v-D4v, esp. D4r, ll. 982-83: "Mijn ziel voert hy met hem, met hem ben ick gevangen, | In hem was mijnen wensch, in hem was mijn verlangen. | Hy voert mijn ziele mee, waer dat hy wort geleyt, | Ick ben tot in mijn doot te volgen hem bereyt."

[62] *Sophonisba* III, 4, fol. E2v, ll. 1195-96.

[63] *Ibidem*, ll. 1199: "Verheerster van mijn hert' and 1204: 'Mijn hert voel ick gewont door u gesight te zijn'; 'De vlam van uwen brant, doet mijne ziel verbranden."

[64] *Ibidem*, ll. 1221-1222: "ach ghy zijt mijn Goddin, | Die my veroorsaeckt hebt dees bitter soete wonden."

[65] *Sophonisba* IV, 2, fol. F1r-F2v. See, e.g., F1r, ll. 1422-1427: "Ha! Triumphante Vrouw', ghy bindt mijn ziel voorwaer, | Door dese vlechten blond', en los gekronckelt haeyr. | Ha! Princelijcke vrouw', dees' oogen sijn twee Sonnen, | Die schieten straelen uyt, die hebben my verwonnen. | Wie dat dees' oogen siet, die als twee Sonnen staen, | Mach seggen dat den dagh tot rust is wegh gegaen."

[66] Petrarca, *Africa* V, 18 sqq.: "... tamen omnia longe | Regia preradians uincebat lumina coniunx. | 20 Ille nec ethereis unquam superandus ab astris | Nec Phebea foret ueritus certamina uultus | Iudice sub iusto. Stabat candore niuali | Frons alto miranda Ioui, multumque sorori | Zelotipe metuenda magis quam pellicis ulla | 25 Forma uiro dilecta uago. Fulgentior auro | Quolibet, et solis radiis factura pudorem, | Cesaries spargenda leui pendebat ab aura | Colla super, recto que sensim lactea tractu | Surgebant, humerosque agiles affusa

describes Sophonisba's beauty. Masinissa likewise expresses his love for Sophonisba in Petrarchistic terms.[67] He even wishes to die and be buried with her so they can be conjoined forever like Paolo and Francesca da Rimini from Dante's *Inferno*.[68]

It is worth noting that neither Livy nor any of the other Greco-Roman sources of the Sophonisba story provided any description of her physical features but only mentioned her beauty without further detail.[69] Renaissance

tegebat | 30 Tunc, olim substricta auro certamine blando | Et placidis implexa modis: sic candida dulcis | Cum croceis iungebat honos, mixtoque colori | Aurea condensi cessissent uascula lactis, | Nixque iugis radio solis conspecta sereni. | 35 Lumina quid referam preclare subdita fronti | Inuidiam motura deis?" (...) (But his wife outshone everything by far and captivated the king's eyes. [20] Her face was never surpassed by the stars of heaven, and it need not have feared a contest with Phoebus before a just judge. Snow-white rose her brow, which must have elicited admiration even from the great Jupiter, and must inspire fear in his jealous sister far more than the beauty of any playmate whom her unsteady husband loved. Her hair, brighter than all gold and shameful to the rays of the sun, spread out in a light breeze and fell on her neck, which, white as milk, stretched gently up in a straight line, and at that moment it snuggled against her slender shoulders and covered them. [30] It had once been tied up with gold and plaited in light nooses, to which it resisted in a lovely way. Thus bright white and the colour of saffron were combined in sweet adornment, and before this colour combination golden vessels full of creamy milk had to take a backseat, as did the snow on the crests of the mountains, which is illuminated by the bright sun's rays. [35] How should I describe the eyes beneath her glorious forehead, desiring to arouse the envy of the gods? Trans. JB & JP). An analysis of the physical attributes of Sophonisba can be found in the contribution by Agbamu in this volume.

[67] See, e.g., Petrarca, *Africa* V, 534 sqq.: "Cara michi nimium, uita michi dulcior omni, | 535 Sophonisba, uale: non te, mea cura, uidebo | Leniter ethereos posthac componere uultus, | Effusosque auro religantem ex more capillos; | Dulcia non celum mulcentia uerba deosque | Oris odorati secretaque murmura carpam" (...) (Sophonisba! You are all so much loved by me and sweeter to me than all life! [535] Farewell! My darling, from now on I will see you no more, how gently you wear a heavenly expression and how you tie your spread hair with gold as you are used to! No more will I pluck sweet words that enchant heaven and gods, and secret whispers from your fragrant mouth! Trans. JB & JP).

[68] Petrarca, *Africa*, V, 540-45: "Solus ero, gelidoque insternam membra cubili. | Atque utinam socio componar, amica, sepulcro, | Et simul hic uetitos illic concorditer annos | Contingat duxisse michi! sors optima busti, | Si cinis amborum commixtis morte medullis | Van Nieuwelandtus erit …" ([540] Alone will I be, stretching out my limbs on a freezing bed. Oh, if only I could be laid with you, beloved!, in a common grave and spend there with you in harmony the years that we are denied here! No fate is better than the pyre, when the ashes of both of us join our bodies in death [545] and become one! Trans. JB & JP).

[69] See Livy, *Ab Vrbe condita* XXX, 12, 17: "forma erat insignis et florentissima aetas" (she had a wonderful beauty and a flourishing age). Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, XVII, 51 (Dio Cassius 1914. 222-223): Ὅτι τῆς Σοφωνίδος ἰσχυρῶς ἤρα Μασινίσσας, ἣ τό τε κάλλος ἐπιφανὲς εἶχε, καὶ γὰρ τῇ … (Masinissa became deeply enamoured of Sophonisba, who not only possessed conspicuous beauty), and a fragment of Dio Cassius' history in Zonaras, IX, 11 (Dio Cassius 1914, 222-225): ἡ δὲ τό τε κάλλος ἐπιφανὴς ἦν καὶ συμμετρίᾳ τοῦ σώματος καὶ τῷ ἄνθει τῆς ὥρας ἤκμαζεν (She was conspicuous for beauty, had received that symmetry of body and bloom of youth).

descriptions of her stupefying beauty began with Petrarch's *Africa* and were disseminated to later writers either through Petrarch directly, or even more likely through Bandello's prose account in the French adaptation by Belleforest.[70] Thanks to Petrarch, Sophonisba is portrayed with golden-blonde hair, an attribute subsequently underscored by many later writers along with her exquisitely radiant eyes. Whereas Petrarch referred to the golden fillets that bound Sophonisba's tresses, by the time of Montchrestien's *La Carthaginoise* (1601), the golden fillets have been transformed into golden locks, and from Montchrestien, the hair and eyes enter into the later Dutch versions.

From these few physical features, Montchrestien and van Nieuwelandt construct an elaborate discourse of inflamed sexual desire before, during, and after its consummation, expanding its use even beyond the lovers themselves. In Montchrestien's *La Carthaginoise* (1601), Lélie (Laelius), a Roman commander under Scipio, describes Sophonisba's beauty when he disapprovingly observes Masinissa's infatuation (Act III), just after a Furie (Fury) has threatened to disturb his and Sophonisba's happiness:[71]

> Mais vraiment plus que toi l'on doit fuir encor,
> Ces cheveux frisottés, ces tresses de fin or,
> Ces sourcils ébenins, et ce beau front d'ivoire,
> Ces doux yeux où l'Amour a son trône de gloire,
> Cette bouche vermeille, et ces charmes coulants,
> Ces agréables traits, et ses attraits brûlants :
> Car ce sont les engins, qui notre forteresse,
> Font rendre malgré nous au gré d'une maîtresse.
>
> (Montchrestien, *La Carthaginoise* 951-958)

> But really even more than you we must flee this curly hair, these tresses of fine gold, those ebony eyebrows, and that beautiful ivory forehead, those sweet eyes where Love has his throne of glory, this vermilion mouth, and these flowing charms, these pleasing features, and her burning attractions: for these are the engines, which make our fortress yield, despite ourselves, to please a mistress. (Trans. JB and JP)

Masinissa responds with equal fervour:

> Cet oeil aussi, Lélie, en flammes nonpareil,
> Combattait de clarté les rayons du Soleil:
> Amour qui fait dedans l'Arsenal de ses Armes,

[70] Petrarch's *Africa* appeared in the *editio princeps* of his Latin writings: Petrarca 1501 and again in the 1503 Venetian edition. His works were even more widely distributed, especially in northern Europe, with the publication of his *Opera quae extant omnia,* Petrarca [1554]). Book V of *Africa* appears in the Basel printing on pp. 1293-99.

[71] Montchrestien, *La Carthaginoise*, ll. 831-82 (Furie) and ll. 833-976 (Lélie).

> Y forgeait tous les traits, et les trempait de larmes.
> (De Montchrestien, *La Carthaginoise* 1003-1006)
>
> This eye too, Lélie, in unparalleled flames, fought the rays of the Sun with its brightness: Love which makes inside the Arsenal of its Arms, forged there all the features, and soaked them with tears.
> (Trans. JB and JP)

Van Nieuwelandt's *Sophonisba Aphricana*, then, deviates from earlier plays by greatly expanding the historical context in which the Masinissa-Sophonisba love affair unfolds, but at the same time representing the lovers' sexual desire in the erotic discourse of Petrarch.

Final Remarks

In keeping with the glorification of Scipio in the *Africa,* French Renaissance playwrights along with van der Eembd and van Nieuwelandt present him as the conqueror of passion, a formidable paragon of near-inimitable virtue, wisdom, generosity, and military prowess. Scipio's character and reputation remain unsullied while the undisciplined Masinissa succumbs to despair and even death. But amidst this glorification of Rome, there are lingering undertones of discontent: In both Dutch plays, Sophonisba curses the Roman Empire—here again following Petrarch—for Rome's consolidation of its power has led to the enslavement of smaller, vulnerable kingdoms such as Numidia for the sake of world domination. Rome may be a philosophical and cultural model, but its militaristic ethos deprives weaker states and their citizens of liberty. In the young Dutch Republic still embroiled in a conflict with imperial Spain, sympathy for the imprisoned Syphax and especially his noble queen would have resonated among a populace all-too-familiar with the vicissitudes of near-constant warfare. During the 1620s when there was a debate in the Dutch Republic about negotiating a peace with the Spanish Habsburgs or continuing the war, van der Eembd and van Nieuwelandt implicitly presented their audiences with reasons to prolong the conflict and liberate their people from the imperial yoke.[72] As in the plays of Montchrestien and Montreux in which characters debate the qualities of kingship and prudent political behaviour, van der Eembd and van Nieuwelandt reflect on the legitimacy of Roman – and implicitly, Spanish – rule. The ambiguous representation of Rome, inherent in the Sophonisba story itself, hints at the growing divide between an increasingly centralized polity and smaller

[72] On this political aspect of early seventeenth-century drama in the Low Countries, see Eyffinger 1987 and Noak 2002, where van der Eembd and van Nieuwelandt are not mentioned. On political aspects of drama, see also Bloemendal & Smith 2016 and Parente 1996.

independent regions ruled by ancestral customs and local dynasties. The recently conjoined provinces of the Dutch Republic were especially sensitive to, and proud of, their loosely federated structure.

The tension between Rome and its expansive incorporation of other states under its rule was especially pronounced in the *Sophonisbe* tragedy of the Silesian German playwright Daniel Casper van Lohenstein.[73] The German writer, who had visited Leiden in 1655, may well have discovered van Nieuwelandt's plays there, or through copies sold in the German states, for he composed tragedies on Sophonisba, Cleopatra and Mark Antony, and on Nero and his mother Agrippina, all of whom had appeared in the Flemish writer's works. Besides his *Sophonisbe* (written 1665; performed privately in 1665 and publicly in 1666; published in 1680[74]), Lohenstein used the subject matter of van Nieuwelandt's *Aegyptica* in his *Cleopatra* (written 1655-60, published 1661), and of *Claudius Domitius Nero* in his *Agrippina* (1665).[75] But as a proud Silesian politically active in Breslau, a confessionally mixed community, Lohenstein was also particularly aware of the harshness of the Habsburg re-catholicization plan for his homeland. Since the Habsburgs imagined themselves as the heirs to the Roman empire, it is not surprising that Lohenstein would be attracted to works that question the desirability and legitimacy of Roman rule. As Breslau's representative to the imperial court in Vienna in the 1670s, he worked diplomatically to negotiate a rapprochement between the Habsburgs' overly zealous ambitions and local interests, in much the same way as van Nieuwelandt's Scipio had first sought a balance between Rome, Numidia, and Carthage.

Building on multiple linguistic traditions from antiquity to the Renaissance, then, van der Eembd and van Nieuwelandt used the love affair between Sophonisba and Masinissa not only to impart valuable moral instruction, but through the historicization of that relationship, to explore the workings of Divine Providence and human agency in shaping political behaviour amidst the unrelenting turmoil of war. [76]

[73] For a discussion of Lohenstein's complex representation of Sophonisba and Rome, see, e.g., Newman 2000, esp. 58-69 and Loos 2000.

[74] See Schönle 1968, 112-120, who lists some parallels between Lohenstein's and Van Nieuwelandt's tragedies. See also Axelrad 1956, 59-65; Skrine 1966, and Vangshardt 2023.

[75] See Schönle 1968, 111-113.

[76] This article has been written within the scope of the project *TransLatin: The Transnational Impact of Latin Theatre from the Early Modern Netherlands*, funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) and led by Jan Bloemendal (https://translatin.nl).

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LA FIERTE D'EMPIRE :

Sophonisbe (1663) de Pierre Corneille

By Guðrún Kristinsdóttir-Urfalino

In his Sophonisbe, *Pierre Corneille makes the protagonist the grounds for political and moral reflection by exploring the implications of her pride in choosing death over dishonor. To do this, Corneille articulates two poetic processes: the leitmotif of jealousy which underlines the two dimensions of this passion as both individual and political, and the invention of a character, Éryxe, who, by comparison and contrast, highlights the dark side of the glory of Sophonisbe. The play thus indicates a possible detachment with regard to political greatness.*

Lorsque Pierre Corneille s'empare du personnage de Sophonisbe en 1663, il emprunte le thème tragique le plus utilisé depuis la renaissance de la tragédie en France au seizième siècle. Nul doute que son usage de la matière historique et que sa conception de la structure poétique de la pièce ont été précisément pensés en lien avec certaines des tragédies antérieures inspirées de la même héroïne carthaginoise. La différence entre la *Sophonisbe* de Corneille et celles de ses prédécesseurs, en particulier celle de Jean Mairet (1634) mais aussi des traductions françaises de la tragédie de Trissino, celle d'Antoine de Montchrestien (1596) et celle de Nicolas de Montreux (1601), est clairement documentée[1]. Dominique Descotes a souligné que la tragédie de Mairet et la harangue de Sophonisbe dans *Les femmes illustres, ou les harangues héroïques de Mr de Scudéry* (1642) peuvent être considérées comme des contre-modèles de la pièce de Corneille[2]. Ces deux principaux adversaires de Corneille du temps de la querelle du *Cid*[3] ont choisi des partis, concernant l'éthos des personnages et les paramètres de l'histoire antique, dont Corneille s'est nettement démarqué. Mairet a privilégié l'histoire amoureuse entre Sophonisbe et Massinisse et a fait mourir les deux rois numides en héros, Syphax et Massinisse, contre les sources, en but de « l'embellissement de la

[1] Voir par exemple Thouret 2009.
[2] Descotes 2008.
[3] Civardi 2004.

pièce », en vertu de la règle aristotélicienne de la vraisemblance ainsi que de la nouvelle règle dramatique de la bienséance[4]. De son côté, Georges de Scudéry a opposé, dans sa harangue de Sophonisbe, la *lâcheté* de Massinisse à la *générosité* de sa protagoniste[5]. À l'opposé, Corneille revendique la fidélité à l'histoire :

> …j'aime mieux qu'on me reproche d'avoir fait mes femmes trop héroïnes, par une ignorante et basse affectation de les faire ressembler aux originaux qui en sont venus jusqu'à nous, que de m'entendre louer d'avoir efféminé mes héros par une docte et sublime complaisance au goût de nos délicats, qui veulent de l'amour partout[6].

Corneille dresse des portraits peu flatteurs des deux rois numides, souligne que l'amour de l'héroïne pour ses époux est indexé sur la recherche et la préservation de sa gloire et, enfin, ménage une part d'ombre dans la manifestation de la grandeur de Sophonisbe.

Bien que Corneille souligne sa fidélité à l'histoire, il ne suit pas complètement les sources antiques. Rappelons que l'histoire de Sophonisbe, comme de nombreux thèmes tragiques, est un *exemplum* antique, soit une structure narrative composée d'un éthos et d'une histoire : c'est une « histoire courte qui rappelle un fait passé de la vie d'un grand homme[7] », ici, une grande femme. Chez Tite-Live, l'*exemplum* met en avant un éthos et deux faits remarquables : Sophonisbe, fille du grand général Asdrubal, frère d'Hannibal, préfère mourir plutôt que de tomber entre les mains des Romains ; le roi numide Massinisse épouse Sophonisbe quand Syphax, autre roi numide et premier mari de Sophonisbe, a été vaincu par les Romains[8]. Chez Appien, on lit en plus que Sophonisbe était passionnément attachée à sa patrie[9]. Alors que Corneille respecte les évènements historiques rapportés par les sources, il introduit deux innovations en vertu de la liberté du poète[10].

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[4] « Il est vrai que j'ai voulu ajouter pour l'embellissement de la pièce, et que j'ai même changé deux incidents de l'histoire assez considérables, qui sont la mort de Syphax, que j'ai fait mourir à la bataille afin que le peuple ne trouvât point étrange que Sophonisbe eût deux maris vivants, et celle de Massinisse, […] je fais faire à Massinisse ce qu'il devait avoir fait », dans « Au lecteur », Mairet 2004, 103-104.

[5] « …ce lâche préféra son intérêt et l'amitié des Romains à la vie de cette généreuse personne », dans « Effet de cette harangue », Scudéry 2008, 108.

[6] Corneille 1987, 384.

[7] David 1980.

[8] Tite-Live, *Histoire romaine*, XXX, 11-15.

[9] Appien, *Histoire romaine*, VIII, 27, 114.

[10] « Cette liberté du poète se trouve encore en termes plus formels dans le vingt et cinquième chapitre [de la *Poétique* ...] où [Aristote] lui donne le choix, ou de la vérité historique, ou de l'opinion commune sur quoi la fable est fondée, ou de la vraisemblance » dans « Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter selon le vraisemblable ou le nécessaire », Corneille 1987, 162.

D'abord, il modifie l'éthos du personnage historique en poussant à l'extrême sa haine des Romains, déjà accentuée dans la tragédie de l'Italien Trissino. Ensuite il invente un personnage-miroir de Sophonisbe, la reine Éryxe dont nous verrons qu'elle a une fonction importante dans l'économie de la pièce. Ces écarts par rapport aux sources permettent d'avancer que la poétique de la pièce de Corneille exprime une pensée politique : la critique de l'esprit de conquête indissociable de l'empire.

Sophonisbe fait partie d'un sous-ensemble au sein des tragédies romaines de Corneille que la metteuse en scène Brigitte Jacques-Wajeman a appelé « le théâtre colonial de Corneille[11] ». Ce cycle compte les tragédies *Polyeucte* (1642), *La mort de Pompée* (1643), *Nicomède* (1650), *Sophonisbe* (1663) et *Suréna* (1674). Une approche post-coloniale où il est question d'une vision du monde différente selon le point de vue du dominateur ou du dominé est possible pour ces pièces. Pierre Laurens a ainsi noté que l'histoire et le personnage de Sophonisbe sont actuellement l'objet d'un attrait renouvelé, notamment parce que l'héroïne peut incarner la résistance africaine contre les puissances coloniales[12]. Le cycle colonial de Corneille peut être considéré comme une critique de la conquête face à la politique coloniale française au dix-septième siècle. Cette dernière a connu un essor au sortir des guerres de Religion alors qu'elle avait 150 ans de retard par rapport à l'Espagne et l'Angleterre. L'histoire de Sophonisbe offre une situation où deux empires s'arrachent les populations autochtones et leurs terres, quelque peu comme en Nouvelle France. De fait, Corneille mobilise dans sa pièce des concepts ayant trait à la légitimité de l'attachement à la patrie.

Il est remarquable que la pensée politique repérable dans la *Sophonisbe* de Corneille s'exprime dans la seule description du caractère du personnage éponyme et dans sa passion pour sa patrie et pour sa gloire. L'intransigeance de Sophonisbe et son refus de se soumettre lui valent le respect de ses ennemis, autochtones comme romains : « Une telle fierté méritait un Empire » (V, VII, v. 1804) et « Une telle fierté devait naître romaine » (*id*., v. 1812), disent d'elle, admiratifs, Éryxe, sa rivale, et Lélius, le lieutenant romain. Si l'on accorde à Sophonisbe une âme romaine, elle en a peut-être aussi les défauts. On doit se demander s'il est possible de dissocier chez elle la vertu romaine de la violence et la domination romaines. La fierté de Sophonisbe est peut-être aussi trop romaine, parce que fierté d'empire : elle est « jalouse seulement de la grandeur royale » (Acte V, sc. VI, v. 1735), dit encore d'elle Éryxe.

[11] Jaques-Wajeman 2009.
[12] Laurens 2021, 142.

Nous allons en premier lieu montrer comment le thème de la jalousie court tout au long de la pièce, Corneille soulignant les deux dimensions, tour à tour individuelle et politique de cette passion. Nous verrons ensuite que Sophonisbe subordonne une autre passion connexe, l'amour, à sa seule gloire ou grandeur politique. En troisième lieu, les mésaventures des époux de Sophonisbe exhibent les aspects peu reluisants de la politique extérieure conquérante de l'Empire romain. Enfin, le personnage inventé par Corneille, la reine africaine Éryxe, dont le caractère est le pendant de celui de Sophonisbe, permet d'affirmer le possible détachement à l'égard des grandeurs politiques, produits contingents de l'histoire.

La dimension politique de la jalousie

Éryxe est un personnage inventé par Corneille : « une reine de ma façon de qui ce poème reçoit un grand ornement », précise-t-il dans l'adresse au lecteur[13]. Elle est princesse de Gétulie, pays au sud des royaumes numides. Son peuple, nomade, était le plus ancien sur le territoire au sud de l'actuelle Tunisie. Il avait dans l'Antiquité la réputation d'être le plus primitif de la région[14]. Cette réputation antique n'est pas exploitée par Corneille qui au contraire dépeint leur princesse comme sûre d'elle, posée et lucide. En grand connaisseur de la tradition rhétorique, Corneille sait qu'un « ornement » n'est pas une simple décoration ou embellissement du discours[15]. Pourtant, sa « Préface » ne donne explicitement au personnage qu'une fonction de soutien, produisant un effet accélérateur à l'action et fournissant des motivations vraisemblables aux personnages historiques. En effet, Corneille écrit que la présence d'Éryxe incite Sophonisbe à épouser Massinisse[16]. Ainsi, le poète fait de la jalousie un moteur de l'action. De plus, Éryxe a une fonction encore plus importante au sein de la structure poétique et politique de la pièce. Ses propos servent à souligner la domination brutale de Rome sur ses alliés et à relativiser la valeur de l'attachement de Sophonisbe à sa patrie. Prisonnière de Syphax, puis des Romains, elle subit l'action des vainqueurs. Mais sa contribution, au-delà de ce qu'en dit explicitement Corneille, est d'apporter un regard démystifiant aussi bien sur la reine Sophonisbe que sur Rome, un regard aiguisé par la jalousie.

En effet, en adjoignant « une reine de [s]a façon » à la fable historique, Corneille complique la donne. Au triangle amoureux formé par Sophonisbe, Syphax et Massinisse, il en crée un second, formé par Sophonisbe, Massinisse

[13] Corneille 1987, 385.
[14] Voir Salluste, *Jugurtha*, XVIII, cité par Descotes 2018.
[15] Goyet 2014.
[16] Éryxe « sert tout ensemble d'aiguillon à Sophonisbe pour précipiter son mariage, et de prétexte aux Romains pour n'y point consentir », Corneille 1987, 385.

et Éryxe. Il dédouble d'autant la chaîne amoureuse pastorale : à la chaîne « Syphax aime Sophonisbe qui aime Carthage (plus que Massinisse) », il superpose la chaîne « Éryxe aime Massinisse qui aime Sophonisbe qui aime Carthage ». Le public parisien contemporain était habitué au décryptage politique des amours des bergers[17]. Ici, Corneille place la jalousie amoureuse au cœur des affaires politiques.

Dans un numéro récent de la revue *Dix-septième siècle* (avril 2022), dirigé par Hélène Merlin-Kajman, un groupe de chercheurs a constaté la place prépondérante de la jalousie dans la littérature et dans la société de cour françaises du XVIIe siècle. Dans le domaine amoureux, la jalousie survient comme la conséquence d'une *irruption*, quand « [q]uelqu'un surgit, qu'on n'attendait pas, et qui vous déloge, ou risque de vous déloger, en vous volant vos liens[18] ». Dans le domaine politique, la jalousie – trait de caractère de Louis XIII comme de Louis XIV – concerne le soin permanent et impératif de sa gloire personnelle, voire, parfois, aux dépens du bien public[19]. Que la jalousie amoureuse soit « une sous-catégorie » de la jalousie politique au sommet de l'État était établi par le traité du jésuite Nicolas Caussin, *La Cour sainte* : elle est « d'abord une passion politique, un 'feu' qui consume les grands[20] ». Ainsi, la jalousie au sommet de l'État est une « [p]assion souveraine », la marque de « [l]a mélancolie du pouvoir à l'âge baroque [...] qui ne discerne pas les hommes de leurs fonctions[21] ». Enfin, l'étude des inscriptions accompagnant le tableau central de Charles Le Brun dans la voûte de la Galerie des glaces à Versailles, haut lieu de la communication politique, notamment en direction des ambassades étrangères, permet de qualifier la jalousie comme étant « d'une certaine manière, constitutive de l'absolutisme lui-même[22] ».

La *Sophonisbe* de Pierre Corneille, met en avant la jalousie en tant que passion qui oriente aussi bien les décisions au sommet de l'État que les relations intimes. La jalousie est un leitmotiv de la tragédie : trois moments clés de la pièce sont des scènes de jalousie ; les deux reines rivales livrent, à des moments différents de la pièce, des réflexions sur les subtilités de cette émotion ; enfin, le mot « jalousie » et ses dérivés apparaissent 20 fois dans la pièce. Le tableau ci-dessous en recense les occurrences :

[17] Giavarini 2010.
[18] Merlin-Kajman 2022, 318.
[19] Amstutz 2022, 276.
[20] Caussin 1624, rééd. 1653, cité par Amstutz 2022, 275.
[21] *Ibid*., 277-278.
[22] Bjørnstad 2022, 263.

Locuteurs	*Emplois du mot « jalousie »*	*Significations du terme*
Sophonisbe à sa dame d'honneur (I,2, v. 57)	**« nos destins jaloux »**	Gloire personnelle et politique de Sophonisbe
Id. (v. 89)	« reste d'amour … jaloux »	Amour pour Massinisse
Éryxe à Sophonisbe (I,3, v. 215)	« pareille jalousie »	Reconquête territoriale (rejet des royaumes africains des Empires romain et carthaginois
Syphax à Sophonisbe (I,4, v. 263)	Scipion (Rome) et Asdrubal (Carthage) « jaloux de mon suffrage »	Conquête territoriale (des deux empires face aux royaumes numides)
Sophonisbe à Syphax (I,4, v. 345)	« Massinisse, et voisin et jaloux »	Rivalité politique et amoureuse
Éryxe à sa dame d'honneur (II,1, v. 503)	« jalousie / dont … mon âme s'est saisie »	Amour pour Massinisse
Id. (v. 508)	« Une femme jalouse »	Jalousie amoureuse comme une *dégradation* **TRAITÉ**
Éryxe à Massinisse (II,2, v. 549)	« nos amis jaloux »	Conquête territoriale (des Romains)
Herminie à Sophonisbe (II,5, v. 748)	« âme jalouse » d'Éryxe	Rivalité en amour
Sophonisbe à sa dame d'honneur (II,5, v. 750)	« sentiments jaloux »	Annonce un exposé sur la jalousie **TRAITÉ**
Id. (v. 758)	« dépit jaloux »	La jalousie est liée à *l'orgueil* et le vrai jaloux fait tout pour cacher sa *faiblesse* **TRAITÉ**
Mézétulle à Massinisse (III,1, v. 777)	« jalouse colère » d'Éryxe	Dépit amoureux
Massinisse à Sophonisbe (III,4, v. 942)	« jalousie … faible » d'Éryxe	Amour pour Massinisse
Sophonisbe à Massinisse (III,4, v. 951)	« l'emportement jaloux » de Syphax	Dépit amoureux et son danger
Lélius à Syphax (IV,2, v. 1183)	**« astre … jaloux »**	Le destin (ou folie)
Lélius à Massinisse (IV,4, v. 1404)	« sans en être jaloux »	Autorité politique de Scipion
Sophonisbe à sa dame d'honneur (V,1, v. 1553)	« Tout mon orgueil disait à mon âme jalouse »	Rivalité en amour
Éryxe à Lélius (V,6, v. 1735)	« Jalouse seulement de la grandeur royale »	Gloire personnelle et politique de Sophonisbe
Lélius à Éryxe (V,6, v. 1748)	« Nos dignes alliés régner sans jalousie »	Reconquête territoriale (absence supposée de rejet des états alliés du pouvoir romain)
Éryxe à Lélius (V,7, v. 1807)	**« La fortune jalouse et l'amour infidèle »**	Privent (Sophonisbe) d'un bien, la *délogent* du pouvoir

La répartition du mot jalousie/jaloux/jalouse paraît, à peu de choses près, égale sur les cinq actes. D'abord, le tableau montre que la moitié des occurrences concerne la jalousie amoureuse, laquelle, dans le cas des protagonistes au sommet de l'État, est subordonnée au pouvoir. L'autre moitié des occurrences concerne la jalousie comme soin de sa gloire politique et comme désir de conquérir et de régner. Ensuite, le tableau montre (en gras) les évocations de la jalousie éprouvée par les destins (Acte I), par un astre (Acte IV) ou par la fortune (Acte V) comme dispensatrice des victoires et des défaites. L'astre jaloux est capable de pousser les hommes à commettre des actes inconsidérés :

> LÉLIUS
> Quel Astre, de votre heur et du nôtre jaloux,
> Vous a précipité jusqu'à rompre avec nous ?
> Acte IV, sc. I, v. 1183-1184.

Ces trois occurrences du thème de la jalousie ne renvoient ni à l'amour, ni au pouvoir. Leur distribution dans la pièce mérite mention. En effet, la première évocation de la jalousie est celle des destins (Acte I), la dernière est celle de la fortune (Acte V) et la troisième concerne un astre (Acte IV). Corneille semble ici encadrer les jalousies humaines par celles de trois forces supérieures[23], soulignant ainsi le caractère aléatoire du pouvoir, comme le rappelle également Éryxe.

Enfin, le tableau marque les moments à l'Acte II où les deux reines s'adonnent à des analyses de la jalousie. Ces moments de suspension de l'action, mis bout à bout, forment les deux volets d'une étude sur la jalousie (marqués en gras dans le tableau par le mot « TRAITÉ »). Éryxe souligne l'érosion de la réputation que déclenche la jalousie. Elle craint l'humiliation à laquelle s'expose la femme jalouse et fait un effort sur elle-même pour surmonter la jalousie qu'elle éprouve. Quant à Sophonisbe, elle explique que la jalousie a l'orgueil pour racine. Or, l'orgueil ou l'hybris est au cœur du tragique. Ainsi, l'ensemble de l'analyse livrée séparément par les deux reines annonce et éclaire l'issue tragique : « les destins jaloux » sont voués à la chute. Remarquons que, des deux « âme(s) jalouse(s) » d'Éryxe et de Sophonisbe, seule sera épargnée de la chute tragique celle qui s'attache à brider sa passion.

[23] Ces forces sont d'ailleurs partiellement héritées des historiographes antiques, cf. Tite-Live, « Scipion compara la fortune, naguère brillante, de ce prince [Syphax], à sa fortune présente », *Histoire romaine*, XXX, 13, 8, traduction de Désiré Nisard ; et, Appien, « Scipion interrogea Syphax : 'Quel mauvais génie t'a troublé l'esprit…' », *Histoire romaine*, VIII, 27, 113, traduction de Paul Goukowsky.

Qu'est-ce qu'aimer Sophonisbe ?

En accentuant la caractéristique principale du personnage, tel qu'il est décrit par Tite-Live et Appien et tel qu'il avait été repris par Trissino[24] – la haine des Romains – et en l'augmentant par la passion de régner, Corneille propose une Sophonisbe aux antipodes du personnage tel qu'il avait été présenté sous les plumes de Mairet et de Scudéry. La reine carthaginoise de Corneille subordonne l'amour au pouvoir politique ainsi qu'elle s'en explique à l'ouverture de la pièce :

SOPHONISBE
Et l'ordre ambitieux d'un Hymen politique
N'a rien que ne pardonne un courage héroïque.
Acte Ier, sc. II, v. 71-72.

Son engagement politique au service de la patrie, qui ne doit pas tomber entre les mains des Romains, prévaut sur ses sentiments amoureux. De plus, Sophonisbe met l'amour au service de la politique. Quand Syphax lui soumet la proposition de paix faite par les Romains, il apparaît que c'est un traité tentant puisqu'il dispose que Syphax recouvre ses terres à la seule condition de se tenir hors du conflit entre Carthage et Rome. Or, cette solution est irrecevable pour Sophonisbe qui mobilise, dans un morceau d'éloquence, accusations, menaces et promesses pour lui faire refuser cette paix[25]. L'exorde de Sophonisbe réussit pleinement son objectif d'appeler l'attention et la bienveillance de son unique auditeur :

SOPHONISBE
Mais, Seigneur, m'aimez-vous encor ?
SYPHAX
Si je vous aime ?
SOPHONISBE
Oui, m'aimez-vous encor, Seigneur ?
SYPHAX
Plus que moi-même.
SOPHONISBE
Si mon amour égal rend vos jours fortunés,
Vous souvient-il encor de qui vous le tenez ?
SYPHAX
De vos bontés, Madame.
SOPHONISBE
Ah ! cessez, je vous prie,

[24] Zaiser 2008.

[25] L'exposé de Sophonisbe respecte les étapes du discours décrites dans le *De Inventione* de Cicéron avec, en premier lieu, l'exorde, puis la narration, puis la confirmation qui comporte les différents arguments et enfin la péroraison.

De faire en ma faveur outrage à ma Patrie.
Acte I, sc. IV, v. 283-288.

La question qui entame le discours de l'héroïne a un ressort puissant : une potentielle offense[26]. La question « m'aimez-vous encor ? » est énigmatique parce qu'elle semble mettre en doute une évidence. Mais la question porte sur l'amour qui convient. Syphax l'aime-t-il comme elle le mérite ? Aimer Sophonisbe, c'est se mettre au service de son ambition et de sa grandeur, en l'occurrence refuser la paix et tenter la victoire. Dans le discours qui suit, la reine fait déferler en *crescendo* ses accusations :

SOPHONISBE
Quoi ! vous, qui lui devez [à Carthage] ce bonheur de vos jours,
Vous, que mon hyménée engage à son secours,
Vous, que votre serment attache à sa défense,
Vous manquez de parole, et de reconnaissance.
Et pour remerciement de me voir en vos mains,
Vous la livrez [Carthage] vous-même en celles des Romains !
Vous brisez le pouvoir dont vous m'avez reçue,
Et je serai le prix d'une amitié rompue !
Moi, qui pour en étreindre à jamais les grands nœuds,
Ai d'un amour si juste [pour Massinisse] éteint les plus beaux feux !
Moi, que vous protestez d'aimer plus que vous-même !
Ah ! Seigneur, le dirai-je ? est-ce ainsi que l'on m'aime ?
Acte I, sc. IV, v. 297-308.

L'effet d'amplification rhétorique est obtenu par la symétrie formelle des anaphores d'une part et par leur opposition sémantique d'autre part : « Vous qui » + traître – « Moi qui » + trahie. Cette tirade qui commence par « M'aimez-vous encor ? » et se termine par « Est-ce ainsi que l'on m'aime ? » et la réaction de Syphax révèlent leurs conceptions opposées de l'amour. Pour l'une, il est subordonné à la dignité, à la patrie et à la gloire ; pour l'autre, il a une valeur intrinsèque.

Ainsi, à l'Acte III, lorsque Syphax aura été vaincu par les Romains, Sophonisbe se détache de lui en vertu de la loi qui dispose que l'esclavage dissout les liens du mariage (« Et sa captivité qui rompt cet hyménée / Laisse votre main libre et la sienne enchaînée », dit Massinisse à l'Acte II, sc. IV, v. 643-644). Elle conseille au roi vaincu de mourir :

SOPHONISBE
Le crime n'est pas grand d'avoir l'âme assez haute
Pour conserver un rang que le Destin vous ôte :

[26] Telle l'exorde de Don Diègue : « Rodrigue, as-tu du cœur ? » dans *Le Cid*, Acte I, sc. VI, v. 263.

Ce n'est point un honneur qui rebute en deux jours ;
Et qui règne un moment aime à régner toujours :
Mais si l'essai du Trône en fait durer l'envie
Dans l'âme la plus haute à l'égal de la vie,
Un Roi né pour la gloire et digne de son sort,
À la honte des fers sait préférer la mort,
Acte III, sc. VI, v. 1033-1040. Nos italiques.

Sophonisbe décrit ici le *cupido regni* comme une valeur des « âmes hautes ». Dès lors, d'admirable dans sa dignité royale, le personnage s'approche d'une ligne de crête dont il risque de basculer, la passion de régner étant une forme d'hubris et un sujet de tragédie depuis l'Antiquité[27], rendant celui qui la subit insensible à la douleur d'autrui.

L'implacable domination de Rome sur ses États alliés

La politique extérieure des Romains est un thème récurrent dans les pièces de Corneille. Dans l'avertissement au lecteur de sa tragédie *Nicomède* (1650-1651), à laquelle *Sophonisbe* est parfois comparée au titre de la relation coloniale face à Rome, il explicite sa vision de la politique extérieure de l'Empire romain :

> Mon principal but a été de peindre la politique des Romains au dehors, et comme ils agissaient impérieusement avec les rois leurs alliés, leurs maximes pour les empêcher de s'accroître, et les soins qu'ils prenaient de traverser leur grandeur, quand elle commençait à leur devenir suspecte à force de s'augmenter et de se rendre considérable par de nouvelles conquêtes[28].

Alors que Corneille exprime volontiers dans ses œuvres une admiration pour « l'âme romaine », pour une disposition d'esprit caractérisée par la grandeur et la fierté et par des actes généreux, il n'approuve pas la politique conquérante de Rome. La tension entre l'admiration de l'âme romaine et la critique de l'exercice du pouvoir romain vers l'extérieur est au cœur de ses pièces romaines[29].

C'est par la bouche d'Éryxe que Corneille fait énoncer la nature de la relation entre Rome et ses alliés. Elle reproche à Massinisse, roi de Numidie, son attitude servile face à Rome :

ÉRYXE
Vous allez hautement montrer notre faiblesse,
Dévoiler notre honte, et faire voir à tous

[27] Voir par exemple le personnage de Néron dans *Octavie* du Pseudo-Sénèque.
[28] Corneille 1984, 641.
[29] Voir aussi Jacques-Wajman 2009.

Quels fantômes d'État on fait régner en nous.
Oui, vous allez forcer nos Peuples de connaître
Qu'ils n'ont que le Sénat pour véritable maître,
Et que ceux qu'avec pompe ils ont vu couronner
En reçoivent les lois qu'ils semblent leur donner.
Acte III, sc. II, v. 902-908.

Éryxe aura correctement estimé la situation puisque les Romains refusent de reconnaître le mariage de Massinisse avec Sophonisbe ou plutôt ne vont pas souffrir que le roi, leur allié, épouse une Carthaginoise connue pour sa haine des Romains. La scène III de l'Acte IV où le projet du roi numide, allié aux Romains, est anéanti par le lieutenant de Scipion, consul de Rome, est d'une grande brutalité. Massinisse, qui entre sur scène en roi et époux courroucé, est réduit au désespoir, mis au pas comme un simple soldat, voir comme un enfant. En effet, Lélius parle au roi numide en maître ou en père et cette attitude d'appropriation démontre clairement l'annexion par Rome de toute la Numidie – terres, hommes et rois. Par la suite, lorsque Lélius propose à Éryxe de la marier avec Massinisse et de leur confier à tous deux un État composé des deux Numédies et la Gétulie, elle lui oppose la réalité d'un tel règne :

ÉRYXE
Et de quel front, Seigneur, prend-il [Massinisse] une couronne,
S'il ne peut disposer de sa propre personne,
S'il lui faut pour aimer attendre votre choix,
Et que jusqu'en son lit vous lui fassiez des lois ?
Un Sceptre compatible avec un joug si rude
N'a rien à me donner que de la servitude,
Acte V, sc. VI, v. 1727-1732.

Loin de s'en dédire, Lélius expose le modèle des relations extérieures recherchées par Rome : il propose que les États alliés à Rome règnent *sans jalousie*. Or, nous l'avons vu, si l'on règne vraiment, c'est *avec* jalousie :

LÉLIUS
Détrompez-vous, Madame, et voyez dans l'Asie
Nos dignes Alliés *régner sans jalousie*,
Avec l'indépendance, avec l'autorité
Qu'exige de leur rang toute la Majesté.
Regardez Prusias, considérez Attale,
Et ce que souffre en eux la dignité Royale.
Massinisse avec vous et toute autre moitié,
Recevra même honneur et pareille amitié.
Acte V, sc. IV, v. 1747-1754. Nos italiques.

Les exemples fournis par Lélius, malgré ce qu'en dit ce dernier, illustrent une relation de soumission et de dépendance, rigoureusement peinte par Corneille dans *Nicomède*. Dans cette pièce, Prusias, roi de Bythinie (actuelle Turquie), craignait les Romains et, pour leur plaire, envoyait son fils Attale à Rome pour y recevoir une éducation romaine. Ainsi, père et fils étaient attachés à Rome et mettaient en œuvre une politique dictée par Rome tout en conservant le trône. Le prince Nicomède combattait la servitude de son père en lui enjoignant d'assumer son règne :

NICOMÈDE
[Soyez] Roi.
Reprenez hautement ce noble caractère,
Un véritable Roi n'est, ni mari, ni père,
Il regarde son trône, et rien de plus. Régnez.
Rome vous craindra plus que vous ne la craignez.
Malgré cette puissance et si vaste, et si grande,
Vous pouvez déjà voir comme elle m'appréhende,
Combien en me perdant elle espère gagner,
Parce qu'elle prévoit que je saurai régner.
Nicomède, Acte IV, sc. III, v. 1318-1326.

Nicomède professait une intransigeance face aux Romains que partage Sophonisbe. Les exemples de Prusias et d'Attale sont particulièrement savoureux dans la bouche du lieutenant romain eu égard au message de la pièce *Nicomède* qui, comme *Sophonisbe*, met en scène l'écrasement par Rome des États de la périphérie et constitue un bel exemple de l'ironie mordante de l'auteur dans la mesure où il fait de Lélius un orateur peu convaincant et un négociateur pernicieux.

Dans cette logique et suivant ce même schéma, Lélius tient à Éryxe un discours de maître alors que les Romains viennent tout juste de prendre la ville de Cyrthe (à l'emplacement de la ville de Constantine en Tunisie). Pour Lélius, il est impensable qu'un roi allié ne consulte pas Rome avant de conclure un acte aussi politiquement significatif que de prendre épouse et il est tout aussi impensable de laisser à une ennemie déclarée de Rome la possibilité d'acquérir le statut d'une reine alliée :

LÉLIUS
Mais quant à Sophonisbe, il m'est permis de dire
Qu'elle est Carthaginoise, et ce mot doit suffire.
Je dirais qu'à la prendre ainsi sans notre aveu,
Tout notre ami qu'il est, il nous bravait un peu ;
Mais comme je lui veux conserver notre estime,
Autant que je le puis je déguise son crime,
Et nomme seulement imprudence d'État

Ce que nous aurions droit de nommer attentat.
Acte V, sc. VI, v. 1755-1762.

Lélius révèle ici que les Romains sont prêts à négocier les termes des règnes alliés. D'un point de vue pratique, il est plus aisé de laisser agir les rois en place. Le lexique de Lélius est révélateur à cet égard. En effet, un *attentat* ne peut être commis qu'au sein d'un État ou d'une institution ; ce n'est guère un terme qui entre dans un champ sémantique impliquant un conflit entre deux États souverains[30]. Ainsi, dans son vocabulaire comme dans son attitude, Lélius prend acte de l'annexion de fait de la Numidie par l'Empire romain.

Massinisse est l'ami des Romains de longue date. Lélius connaît ses forces et ses faiblesses[31]. Comme allié de Rome, Massinisse s'est employé en son temps pour asseoir le pouvoir de Rome en Afrique. Dans la scène où il sera forcé de se dédire et de renoncer à sa nouvelle épouse, il fait valoir ses services rendus :

MASSINISSE
Que j'ai mal employé mon sang et mes services,
Quand je les ai prêtés à vos Astres propices,
Si j'ai pu tant de fois hâter votre destin,
Sans pouvoir mériter cette part au butin !
LÉLIUS
Si vous avez, Seigneur, hâté notre fortune,
Je veux bien que la proie entre nous soit commune ;
Mais pour la partager, est-ce à vous de choisir ?
Est-ce avant notre aveu qu'il vous en faut saisir ?
Acte IV, sc. III, v. 1333-1340.

Massinisse apparaît ici comme le serviteur de Rome à qui l'on a promis le trône de Numidie une fois l'Afrique soumise, ce que confirme Lélius :

LÉLIUS
Nous en avons ici les ordres du Sénat,
Et même de Syphax il y joint tout l'État ;
Acte IV, sc. III, 1315-1316.

Cependant, le rôle de Massinisse est toujours subordonné à Rome qui se réserve la part du lion, comme l'en avait prévenu Éryxe :

ÉRYXE
Ils vous nommeront Roi ; mais vous devez savoir

[30] Selon la définition du *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, édition de 1694 : « Entreprise contre les Loix. »

[31] « Je connais Massinisse, et ne vois rien à craindre / D'un amour que lui-même il prendra soin d'éteindre » dans *Sophonisbe*, Acte IV, sc. II, v. 1229-1230 .

Qu'ils sont plus libéraux du nom que du pouvoir,
Acte III, sc. I, v. 871-872.

La domination impérialiste passe, le cas échéant, par l'écrasement des alliés rebelles. La faiblesse des arguments de Lélius contre ceux d'Éryxe ou de Massinisse révèlent le peu de cas que les Romains font de leurs alliés africains. Là où s'exerce la domination, la parole cherche peu à persuader comme en témoigne la pauvreté des arguments de Lélius qui sont basés sur le mensonge (cf. v. 1747-1754 cités *supra* « voyez dans l'Asie / Nos dignes alliés régner sans jalousie » etc.) quand ils ne sont pas le dehors plus acceptable d'une pure admonestation (cf. v. 1337-1340 cités *supra* « est-ce à vous de choisir ? » etc.). C'est le contraire de l'effort argumentatif qui n'a de sens que dans le contexte d'une certaine communauté des esprits et la suspension de la violence[32]. La menace de la violence est présente à chaque instant dans la pièce, du début jusqu'à la fin et au-delà, jusqu'au sac de Carthage, annoncé indirectement dans la pièce et qui demeure à ce jour une tache noire dans l'histoire de l'Antiquité.

La déliaison

Éryxe ne critique pas Sophonisbe, au contraire, elle l'admire et affirme même qu'elle agirait comme elle face à la perspective de subir le triomphe romain. Pour autant, son regard décale légèrement l'image de la Sophonisbe admirable. L'attachement absolu de cette dernière à sa patrie paraît quelque peu excessif quand on a écouté la leçon d'histoire d'Éryxe.

Le patriotisme de Sophonisbe est absolu puisqu'elle sacrifierait sa vie pour l'amour de son pays :

SOPHONISBE
J'immolai ma tendresse au bien de ma Patrie,
Pour lui gagner Syphax j'eusse immolé ma vie.
Il était aux Romains, et je l'en détachai,
J'étais à Massinisse, et je m'en arrachai,
Acte I, sc. II, v. 43-46.

Plus qu'un patriotisme, l'amour de Sophonisbe pour son pays va vers une identification viscérale à sa patrie. Ainsi, elle espère regagner Massinisse à la cause africaine :

SOPHONISBE
Peut-être avec le temps j'en aurai l'avantage
De l'arracher à Rome et le rendre à Carthage.
Je m'en réponds déjà sur le don de sa foi,

[32] Perelman et Olbrechts-Tyteca 1992, 73.

Il est à mon Pays puisqu'il est tout à moi.
Acte II, sc. V, v. 715-718.

Sophonisbe se propose d' « arracher » Massinisse aux Romains comme elle en avait déjà « détaché » Syphax, pour le « rendre » à Carthage, terre africaine. Ces deux termes, *arracher* et *détacher*, traduisent sa vision de la lutte pour le pouvoir entre les deux empires qui se disputent les rois numides comme autant de butins. Le verbe *rendre* quant à lui révèle sa conception de la nature de la relation d'appartenance organique entre les hommes et leurs terres. Les derniers mots de Sophonisbe attestent également de ce lien intime et exclusif qui lie la reine à son pays : « Et n'étant plus qu'à moi, je meurs toute à Carthage » (Acte V, sc. VII, v. 1792).

Suivant cet élan patriotique, Sophonisbe œuvre de toutes ses forces pour que les rois numides et l'Empire punique s'allient afin de repousser les Romains hors de l'Afrique. C'est à ce titre qu'elle blâme Éryxe pour aimer Massinisse car il a trahi sa patrie pour s'allier aux *étrangers* :

SOPHONISBE
Si l'honneur vous est cher, cachez tout votre amour,
Et voyez à quel point votre gloire est flétrie
D'aimer un ennemi de sa propre Patrie,
Qui sert des Étrangers, dont par un juste accord
Il pouvait nous aider à repousser l'effort.
Acte I, sc. III, v. 202-206.

La réplique d'Éryxe donne l'occasion à Corneille d'esquisser une réflexion sur les peuples et le droit des conquêtes. Cette réflexion tend à relativiser et à historiciser l'attachement légitime d'un peuple à une terre. Éryxe fait remarquer à Sophonisbe que son peuple était autrefois étranger à la terre africaine puisqu'il venait de Tyr au Liban et que les Numides et les Gétuliens, peuples autochtones, pouvaient autant se plaindre de l'annexion de leur terre par les Phéniciens, dits Carthaginois, que de celle des Romains. Cette généalogie des conquêtes nourrit sa défense de Massinisse :

ÉRYXE
Dépouillé par votre ordre, ou par votre artifice,
Il sert vos ennemis pour s'en faire justice,
Mais si de les servir il doit être honteux,
Syphax sert comme lui des Étrangers comme eux.
Acte I, sc. III, v. 207-210.

Ici, les deux rois sont mis en parallèle : Syphax s'est allié avec les Carthaginois, Empire punique, présent sur le sol africain depuis six cents ans, et Massinisse s'est allié avec les Romains dont l'avancement sur le sol

africain paraît très sûr. Éryxe continue son raisonnement sur le droit des conquêtes et les migrations des peuples :

ÉRYXE
Si nous les voulions tous bannir de notre Afrique,
Il faudrait commencer par votre République,
Et renvoyer à Tyr, d'où vous êtes sortis,
Ceux par qui nos Climats sont presque assujettis.
Nous avons lieu d'avoir pareille jalousie
Des peuples de l'Europe, et de ceux de l'Asie,
Acte I, sc. III, v. 211-216.

Éryxe démontre, face à la patriote Sophonisbe, qu'elle pourrait faire valoir sa légitimité en tant que reine d'un peuple autochtone pour qui les Phéniciens (« de l'Asie ») seraient des envahisseurs au même titre que les Romains (« de l'Europe »). Au lieu de cela, elle met en avant la contingence des appartenances et des liens entre les peuples et les territoires qu'ils occupent :

ÉRYXE
Ou si le temps a pu vous naturaliser,
Le même cours du temps les peut favoriser.
Acte I, sc. III, v. 217-218.

Le terme « naturaliser » signifiait « Rendre joüissant des mesmes droits & privileges que les naturels du pays[33] ». Georges Couton explicite ainsi les propos d'Éryxe : « [d]e la même façon que les Tyriens ont été naturalisés Africains, les futurs colons romains le seront[34] ». Le terme pouvait avoir une résonance actualisante pour le public de Corneille, contemporain de l'abandon du droit d'aubaine médiéval, restrictif à l'égard des étrangers[35]. Il était invité à réfléchir à la relation de la France coloniale avec la Nouvelle France. En effet, les habitants du Nouveau Monde étaient massivement naturalisés français en vertu du droit du sol et d'une prétendue relation personnelle avec le roi de France[36]. Notons qu'en cela, la monarchie française avait recours à des moyens juridiques similaires à ceux qui ont assuré la domination de l'Empire romain : la citoyenneté accordée aux natifs des pays conquis permettait de les requérir comme soldats et main-d'œuvre. Ici, l'usage du mot « naturaliser » exprime la transformation d'une contingence de l'histoire en une seconde nature :

[33] *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, édition de 1694.
[34] Dans Corneille 1987, 1474.
[35] Wells 1995, 15-30.
[36] *Ibid*., 111.

ÉRYXE
J'ose vous dire plus. Si le Destin s'obstine
A vouloir qu'en ces lieux leur victoire domine,
Comme vos Tyriens passent pour Africains,
Au milieu de l'Afrique il naîtra des Romains,
Et si de ce qu'on voit nous croyons le présage,
Il en pourra bien naître au milieu de Carthage,
Pour qui notre amitié n'aura rien de honteux,
Et qui sauront passer pour Africains comme eux.
Acte I, sc. III, v. 219-226.

Éryxe présage l'empire futur des Romains sur la terre africaine et l'assimilation des populations préexistantes sous domination romaine, dont la légitimité sera assise avec le temps et le droit que donne la coutume, comme cela avait été le cas avec les Carthaginois. La naturalisation est donc une institution. Éryxe ne met pas en cause la légitimité des liens entre un peuple et une terre ; elle explique que ce lien est institué. Elle soulève à la fois la contingence des actions humaines, celle de l'histoire qui en découle et la valeur stabilisante conférée par le temps et l'usage[37].

Corneille a conféré à Éryxe une capacité à mettre à nu la violence et la domination de l'Empire romain et, dans le même temps, à relativiser la valeur de l'attachement de Sophonisbe à sa terre. Le sens critique est rendu plausible par la distance du personnage par rapport à l'action. Ni romaine, ni carthaginoise, ni numide, Corneille en a fait la reine du peuple gétule, un peuple africain différent des peuples auxquels appartiennent les autres protagonistes. Pourtant, Éryxe n'est pas à distance des affaires qui se trament. Captive de Syphax, puis des Romains, amoureuse de Massinisse et destinée à l'épouser selon le vœu des Romains, elle subit les aléas des alliances et des batailles. Si distance il y a, elle est intérieure. Tout au long de la pièce, on la voit égale, sobre, patiente plus que passive, mais interlocutrice active et sans concession de Sophonisbe d'abord et de Lélius ensuite.

Dans un ouvrage récent, Noémie Ndiaye a montré que le concept de race, dans les acceptions variées du terme, a toujours pour effet de « hiérarchiser la différence au service du pouvoir en place[38] » et que la France du dix-septième siècle « a appréhendé l'expansion transatlantique à travers l'expérience ibérique, laquelle impliquait l'esclavage basé sur la couleur depuis un siècle et demi[39] ». Prenant à la fois acte et le contre-pied de cette

[37] Sur l'institué, sa contribution à la stabilité politique et son articulation avec le jeu symbolique des statuts, voir Merlin-Kajman 2000, 315. Toute cette partie sur la contingence des attachements nous a été inspirée par le thème de la « déliaison » qui court tout au long de cet ouvrage.

[38] Ndiaye 2022, 6.

[39] *Ibid*., 13-14.

hiérarchie, Corneille donne une voix des plus dignes à Éryxe. Dans les derniers vers de la tragédie, il livre discrètement le ressort de sa personnalité. À la fin de la pièce, Lélius invite Éryxe à accepter d'épouser Massinisse malgré les réserves qu'elle avait émises dans la scène précédente :

> LÉLIUS
> Allons voir Scipion, allons voir Massinisse,
> Souffrez qu'en sa faveur le temps vous adoucisse,
> Et préparez *votre âme* à le moins dédaigner,
> Lorsque vous aurez vu comme il saura régner.
> ÉRYXE
> En l'état où je suis, je fais ce qu'on m'ordonne,
> Mais ne disposez point, Seigneur, de *ma personne*,
> Acte V, sc. VII, v. 1815-1820. Nos italiques.

Le terme « personne » renvoie ici au « votre âme » de Lélius. Captive, elle suit les ordres, mais l'on ne peut espérer dicter ses pensées et ses inclinations. L'âme est sa « citadelle intérieure », pour reprendre l'expression de Pierre Hadot[40]. Le personnage que Corneille a inventé reproduit donc le schéma stoïcien de la liberté intérieure, soit d'une certaine forme de détachement.

Sophonisbe est certainement admirable par son courage, son sacrifice au service de sa dignité de reine, mais son attachement absolu à la terre, comme l'identification absolue à toute cause[41], est porteur de violence. À l'opposé, Éryxe joue son rôle social et garde sa dignité de reine jusque dans la captivité ; sa conception de la dignité suppose le respect des rôles institués et, en même temps, la conscience de leur contingence comme de leur fragilité, soit une certaine déliaison.

Conclusion

Corneille a revendiqué la liberté du poète face au sujet historique et face à la tradition littéraire. De fait, sa Sophonisbe est aussi loin du personnage décrit par les historiographes antiques que du personnage dessiné par les adversaires de Corneille lors de la querelle du *Cid* : l'amoureuse de Mairet et la généreuse de Scudéry. Corneille exacerbe le patriotisme de Sophonisbe, souligné par Appien. Pour ce faire, il articule deux procédés poétiques : d'une part, le jeu avec le leitmotiv de la jalousie et, d'autre part, l'invention d'un personnage-pendant, Éryxe, qui par comparaison et contraste fait ressortir l'envers de la grandeur de Sophonisbe.

La pièce de Corneille est une tragédie de caractère. Le poète ne modifie pas l'action et les péripéties restituées par les historiographes antiques. Son

[40] Hadot 1992.
[41] Merlin-Kajman 2000, 341.

intervention a trait au seul portrait moral de Sophonisbe. Corneille préserve l'idée d'une héroïne admirable et admirée mais ménage une part d'ombre. La fierté exemplaire de Sophonisbe est qualifiée de *romaine*. Sophonisbe, la reine de l'Empire carthaginois, est représentée comme l'équivalent féminin du lieutenant Lélius, à défaut du général Scipion l'Africain, consul de Rome. Elle est victime de ce à quoi elle participe : l'esprit de conquête et la violence implacable qui sont tous deux indissociables de l'empire. La fierté romaine est une fierté d'empire.

Cette fierté se manifeste par une ferveur patriotique qui est comme l'envers de l'amour-propre. Le numéro consacré aux « Liens jaloux au XVIIe siècle » de la revue *Dix-septième siècle* a montré combien le thème de la jalousie comme passion à la fois amoureuse et politique était présent dans la littérature et dans le langage politique du XVIIe siècle. Dans sa pièce, Corneille fait ressortir le contraste entre deux manières d'articuler les dimensions « privée » et « publique » de la jalousie, jouant avec l'épaisseur sémantique du langage des passions de son époque.

« Jalouse seulement de la grandeur royale » (Acte V, sc. VI, v. 1735), Sophonisbe subordonne l'amour et ses époux, qu'elle détruit, à sa propre gloire et à son propre honneur. Elle ne se soucie ni de leur intérêt ni de l'intérêt du peuple carthaginois. Elle a de l'amour mais elle « règne sur lui », dit-elle à Massinisse à l'Acte IV (sc. V, v. 1455). La jalousie sentimentale est strictement contenue et contrôlée par la jalousie de gloire. À l'opposé, Éryxe préserve sa passion amoureuse de toutes interférences politiques. Elle ne subordonne pas ses sentiments à son destin politique. Elle ne veut pas épouser Massinisse s'il ne l'aime pas et ne cherche donc pas à l'épouser pour s'assurer un rang. Pour Sophonisbe, son honneur personnel et la gloire de Carthage sont une même chose. Pour Éryxe, l'honneur de sa personne ne dépend pas des aléas des guerres et de la politique. Sophonisbe incarne la jalousie au sommet de l'État. Cette passion politique lui assure la gloire et la postérité mais au prix de la chute des États existants et la sujétion des peuples.

Delphine Amstutz explique que la jalousie au sommet de l'État est une « [p]assion souveraine [...] qui ne discerne pas les hommes de leurs fonctions[42] ». Avec le personnage d'Éryxe, Corneille formule la possibilité d'un discernement, d'une déliaison entre la fonction ou le statut politique et la vie passionnelle de la personne, ici une femme. Comme nous l'avons souligné, la possibilité d'une telle déliaison est associée avec la conscience de la contingence historique des frontières et de l'attachement d'un peuple à une terre. Elle tend donc à rappeler la violence fondatrice de l'empire et à questionner sa légitimité.

[42] Amstutz 2022, 277-278.

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LOVE AND WAR:

Court Politics in Nathaniel Lee's *Sophonisba, or Hannibal's Overthrow* (1676)

By Beth Cortese

Nathaniel Lee's Sophonisba, or Hannibal's Overthrow *(1676) translates the themes of love, war, and divided loyalty from the original narrative of the Carthaginian political martyr Sophonisba into the context of the tensions in Charles II's Court. Massinissa's difficult position of divided political and romantic allegiance exhibited through his unpopular love for Sophonisba, engages with questions of authority, government, and political and religious allegiance that dominated Charles II's reign. In particular, the influence of Charles II's French mistress Louise de Kéroualle—to whom Lee's tragedy is dedicated—whose loyalty was cause for concern because of her ties to Louis XIV's Court.*

Nathaniel Lee's tragedy *Sophonisba* was first performed in 1675 and published in 1676 during the wake of King Charles II's unpopular relationship with his French mistress Louise de Kéroualle and promises made to Louis XIV to secretly ally with France and swear Catholic allegiance, though the latter was more of a bargaining tool to gain Louis' favour than a serious commitment as Hutton has observed.[1] The promises that Charles made to Louis were in exchange for financial aid to resolve Charles's debt from military expenditure and to have Louis halt building warships. The financial aid that the English King received from France was a strategy that meant that England would have military funds in the case of a conflict with the French or the Dutch. Charles II negotiated with France in order to curb French naval power so as to preserve the peace promised between Spain and France by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1668) and in doing so, maintain his allyship with Spain, the Netherlands, and Sweden despite the ongoing tension between England and the Netherlands over trade. Charles's ambiguous and shifting European alliances created political and religious uncertainty in England because of France's growing power. Nathaniel Lee dedicates *Sophonisba* to Louise de Kéroualle, the Duchess of Portsmouth, praising her beauty, stating that her eyes are "more attractive than those of Rosalinda," the love-interest of the General Hannibal in the tragedy, who is a new character introduced to create a parallel plot-structure. Though beautiful and

[1] Hutton 1989, 264.

courageous, Rosalinda in Lee's *Sophonisba* contributes to Hannibal's downfall in the play as he prioritises romantic over martial interest: the parallel plot enhancing the theme of conflicted alliances present in the original story. That Lee dedicates *Sophonisba*—and also his *Gloriana* (1675)—to Louise de Kéroualle is significant for several reasons. From a theatrical perspective, the dedication to Louise acknowledges the earlier French adaptations of Sophonisba's story by Jean Mairet and Pierre Corneille that the Duchess would have been aware of, paying homage to Mairet, Corneille and to Louise de Kéroualle's nation. From a political perspective, Louise was at this time established in Charles's Court, having had a son with the King in 1672, and Lee perhaps shows political support for her by dedicating the play to her. Indeed, Lee's tragedy takes the tripartite relationship between Sophonisba, Syphax and Massinissa from Sophonisba's story and paints a sympathetic portrait of women caught up in different political and romantic allegiances. The parallel plots serve to contrast the pairs of lovers, namely the way in which Rosalinda inspires violence and war in the King's nephew Young Massinissa and Hannibal, while Sophonisba inspires peace, honour, and pity in King Massinissa and spectators. In light of Lee's parallel plot of Hannibal and Rosalinda and Sophonisba and Massinissa, this article discusses the way in which Lee's adaptation of Sophonisba reflects the anxieties between England and France and Charles II's relationship with his mistresses. This article reads Lee's adaptation of Sophonisba in view of what has been described as political ambivalence that characterizes his group of Roman plays,[2] to explore the relationship between Lee's adaptation and the political anxieties present in Charles II's Court during the decade of the 1670s. The article will also examine the changes Lee made in his adaptation compared with earlier versions of Sophonisba's story.

English adaptations of Sophonisba's story

Sophonisba's story of martyrdom, in which she displayed her loyalty to Carthage in the second of the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage by committing suicide to reject becoming a Roman captive, was popular throughout the Early Modern period.[3] Compared with the myriad depictions of Sophonisba in French and Italian Art, Literature and Drama, there are just four English dramatists who took inspiration from her story and adapted it:

[2] Lee 1986, 51; Hume 1977, 313.

[3] Sophonisba is praised in Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus* Claris (Concerning Famous Women) (1361-62, translation from Italian to English published in 1374), in Petrarch's Epic *Africa* (1397), in Gian Giorgio Trissino's play *Sofonisba* (1515), Jean Mairet's play *Sophonisbe* (1634), Pierre Corneille's tragedy *Sophonisbe* (1663), and the Venetian opera *Scipio Africano* (1664) by Nicolò Miato.

John Marston, Thomas Nabbes, Nathaniel Lee, and James Thomson. Nabbes's tragedy uses a split-plot structure to contrast Hannibal's military fall with Scipio's success, with the romantic plot secondary to the play's exploration of leadership and power. While Marston and Thomson continue the tradition of celebrating Sophonisba's virtue, bravery, and patriotism, Lee's adaptation is surprisingly ambivalent toward Sophonisba. Marston, Nabbes and Thomson remain faithful to celebrating Sophonisba's patriotism. John Marston's *The Wonder of Women; or, The Tragedy of Sophonisba* (1606) celebrates Sophonisba as placing Carthage before her marriage to Massinissa—who, though initially aligned with Carthage, becomes allied to Rome—and her heroism in taking the decision to become a martyr for her homeland, declaring eloquently before the senate that "What's safe to Carthage shall be sweet to us" and "'Tis less disgrace to have a pitied loss, / Than shameful victory."[4] Marston's Sophonisba is praised for her virtue and bravery, as "the more cold fate, the more thy virtue burn'd" becoming a "loved creature of a deathless fame."[5] Marston further romanticized Sophonisba's story by having the separation of Sophonisba and Massinissa on their wedding night as the catalyst of the action, while their reunion in the final Acts of the play is the point at which Sophonisba is pleading to be spared from Roman captivity.

Lee builds on Marston's focus on the romantic plot, yet his version stresses the interconnectedness of political and romantic tensions through its split-plot structure that connects Hannibal's and Massinissa's conquests in love and war. The opening Act contrasts Hannibal's victory with Massinissa's retreat from his martial duties to grieve the loss of Sophonisba's love as he learns that she has married Syphax. Hannibal's and Massinissa's fates are reversed in Act 5 when Massinissa recovers his heroic spirit and allies with Rome and Hannibal's army, by contrast, is forced to retreat, rendering the Roman allies victorious. The two Generals' fates also parallel one another in the romantic plot as Hannibal's love, Rosalinda, is captured and dies, while Sophonisba, Massinissa's love, is saved from capture as she and Massinissa drink poison to save her from capture by the Romans and Massinissa from a lifetime of grief. While Nabbes's *Hannibal and Scipio* (1635) also introduces a love-interest for Hannibal, a lady of Salapia, listed in the playtext as Lady 2, she disappears from the plot after Act 1. In contrast, Lee makes Hannibal's concerns over Rosalinda's fate (also a captive, like Sophonisba) part of the reason for his downfall in battle. Hannibal consults an oracle about Rosalinda's fate in Act 4 after being warned not to delve into his own fate

[4] Marston 1606, 2.1.111-120.
[5] Ibid, 5.1.51-53.

and Rosalinda's death on the battlefield causes him to lose his courage during the battle, costing him the victory predicted by the oracle. Hannibal's love story is not present in Classical sources and appears to be Lee's own addition. The parallel love stories also share a similar theme, that of the dangers of mixing private and public life: Rosalinda cross-dresses to participate in the battle, her death distracting Hannibal, while Sophonisba is accused of being an "incendiary" whose "griefs renew'd the War."[6] In both plots, the women are presented as stepping into a political or martial sphere that should be a male domain in the mind of the characters while military leaders lose sight of their duties because of their love-interests—a theme that Lee continues in *The Rival Queens* (1677).

Nathaniel Lee's *Sophonisba; or Hannibal's Overthrow* (1675)

Sophonisba; or Hannibal's Overthrow (1675) was the second play of Lee's performed on the public stage, following *The Tragedy of Nero, Emperor of Rome* (1674), the first of his Roman plays. *The Rival Queens* (1677), which succeeded *Sophonisba*, became Lee's most popular play. Nevertheless, *Sophonisba* was a moderate success: six performances are recorded between April 1675 and November 1676 during its debut, and the play was revived between 1680 and 1681 during the exclusion crisis.[7] Lee, however, does not afford the heroine the same presence as earlier French and English adaptations of her original story. Rather than providing certainty that celebrates heroic leadership skills, the dual plot structure of Hannibal and Massinissa's conflicts of love versus duty emphasizes the male leaders' lack of political direction. Lee downplays the patriotism and heroics expressed in other dramatisations of of Sophonisba's life, to present a sympathetic yet ambivalent view of the conflicting political and romantic allegiances and forms of authority that characterized Charles II's reign.

Susan Owen has argued that Nathaniel Lee's *Sophonisba* draws on the earlier style of English heroic drama that was adapted from French drama and developed by William Davenant and John Dryden in seventeenth-century England. English heroic drama was characterized by its focus on the "greatness" of monarchs and leaders in their pursuit of fame, military glory, or love, along with the genre's use of rhymed verse.[8] Massinissa pursues love and fame, Sophonisba pursues fidelity to Carthage, while Hannibal pursues military glory. *Sophonisba*, along with Lee's other Roman tragedies, emphasizes the greatness and virtue of the play's protagonists when confronted with an overwhelming ethical dilemma that centres on choosing

[6] Lee, 1675, Act 4, 43; Act 2, 13.
[7] Lennep, Avery, and Scouten 1965, 232, 290.
[8] Owen 2002, 34-35, 86; Hume 1976, 193-194.

between one's personal inclinations and public duty or the greater good; in Lee's *Sophonisba* this takes the form of Massinissa's promise to Scipio to assist him in the war and his promise to protect his love Sophonisba—only one of which is possible to keep given Scipio's alliance with Rome.[9] Douglas Canfield refers to the conflict present in the tragedies of the 1670s as based on the "premise that the nobility have great souls capable of great passion" and argues that Lee and Dryden "mold heroes whose conflicting passions destroy them and ruin their states."[10] Canfield argues that the dramatic tension between private inclinations and public duty present in tragedies of the 1670s was part of these plays' focus on romantic constancy as a symbol of political stability that ensured patrilineage. The conflict between desire and duty, emotion and reason was increased by the theatrical practice of typecast performers paired in opposing roles, referred to as the virtuous and passionate pairing for actors and actresses.[11] Many of Lee's heroic tragedies as well as his horror tragedies, such as *The Rival Queens* (1677), capitalize on and augment this practice,[12] with the company pairing Michael Mohun as the general Hannibal with Charles Hart as King Massinissa in *Sophonisba*, reprising the same stock types of soldier and leader they played in Lee's *Tragedy of Nero, Emperor of Rome* (1674). Similar pairings occurred in the casting for Lee's *The Rival Queens* (1677), with Elizabeth Boutell as the virtuous Queen Statira and Rebecca Marshall as the passionate Queen Roxana, with Mohun as Clytus Master of Horse and Hart as Alexander the Great. The ongoing theme in the play and indeed in Lee's *Gloriana*, *The Tragedy of Nero*, and *The Rival Queens* as Canfield has noted, is "the figure of the hero in decline" and "the transience of glory and the value of love", acknowledging the elevation of love over war in these tragedies that has been referred to as a conflict of Roman values of fame and glory pitted against "Oriental values of effeminate passion."[13] The dilemma of love versus duty that characterises both Massinissa's and Sophonisba's position in the various portrayals of the Second Punic Wars is at the core not only of Lee's plot, but also in his use of language. The parallel plot structure of Sophonisba's martyrdom and Hannibal's overthrow contains a tension between romantic, political, and public interest, and does not display a sense of political pride or patriotism, but of political ambivalence which dominates the play. Unlike Lee's tragedy *The Rival Queens*, in which Alexander the Great's fall into sexual intrigue and desertion of military conquest is the subject of tragedy,

[9] Chua 2014, 10, 22.
[10] Canfield 2000, 60.
[11] Howe 1992, 15.
[12] Danby 2016, 191-207.
[13] Canfield 2000, 60-63.

the boundaries of passion and reason and of love and war are less well defined and morally demarcated in Lee's *Sophonisba*. In this sense, the repeated use of language that contrasts love and war is a product of both the casting and conventions of 1670s tragedies, but also the tense political atmosphere between England and France and within the Court during the time that Lee's tragedy was written and staged as I shall discuss.

Lee's Source Material

There are subtle differences between the various Classical writings about Sophonisba to do with her relationship with Massinissa and the representation of Sophonisba's and Massinissa's deaths that may account for the varied representation of Sophonisba in dramatic adaptations of her story. In terms of source material, Lee's adaptation generally follows Livy's interpretation laid out in his history of Rome, which provides a sympathetic account of Sophonisba's and Massinissa's relationship in contrast to Appian's more sceptical attitude toward Sophonisba's marriage to Massinissa in his account of Rome's foreign wars. Lee enhances the love story by drawing on Siculus' account, which mentions that Sophonisba and Massinissa were betrothed prior to her marriage to Syphax.

Of the early modern adaptations of Sophonisba, the romantic plot in Lee's version follows a similar focus to Jean Mairet's adaptation from 1634 and John Marston's *The Wonder of Women* (1606), which also focused more on the love story between Massinissa and Sophonisba, along with Mairet's decision to have Massinissa commit suicide due to grief over Sophonisba's death. The main and noteworthy innovation of Lee's adaptation is his dual plot structure of the love story which introduces the character Rosalinda as the lover of Hannibal, enhancing the themes of love versus war and conflicted allegiance in the story. Like Corneille's addition of Eryxe, Lee adds Rosalinda to develop the political plot. Pierre Corneille's *Sophonisbe* (1663) introduces the character of Eryxe as a rival to Sophonisba for Massinissa's attention to express opposing political viewpoints through the women's rivalry as Susan Read Baker observes.[14] In contrast, the result of Lee's innovation of the dual political plot that compares Hannibal and Massinissa through their love-interests, is the sense of political and romantic ambivalence that pervades his adaptation through the sympathetic, yet somewhat ambiguous treatment of Sophonisba's political motivations and judgement of Massinissa's leadership. In this way, Lee's Sophonisba offers a more ambivalent political take on the leadership and alliances in the story when relating it to his own political context. Lee's ambivalence persists in his

[14] Baker 1990, 97-99.

treatment of Sophonisba's character; while other versions, such as Corneille's *Sophonisbe* clearly portray Sophonisba as a heroic martyr, Lee's version focuses more on Sophonisba's forced marriage, the love between her and Massinissa, and Sophonisba as a political pawn, thus drawing on the anxieties present in Charles II's Court in his interpretation of her story.

Lee's adaptation reflects the suspicion of the political motives of Charles II's different mistresses. While in other versions, such as Appian's account, Sophonisba's first husband, jealous Syphax, is the character who cautions Massinissa about Sophonisba's motives for marrying him, in Lee's version, Scipio, the consul of Rome and friend to Massinissa, is the character who most articulates suspicions toward Sophonisba and her motives: "Yet for a Woman, and a false one too, / Your Fame, your Faith and Friendship you forego. / Still let the Great of Favourites beware; / They most deceive us, who most trusted are."[15] This is significant because Scipio in Livy's account is framed as a trusted and heroic friend to Massinissa, so placing these doubts in Scipio's mouth, increases the suspicion against Sophonisba. She is even blamed for the war itself: "Whose subtile working Wit wrought all this care, / And with her beauteous griefs renew'd the War."[16] Scipio's lines belie a deep distrust of women's involvement in the political sphere, one that runs throughout Lee's adaptation and relates to the attitudes toward Louise de Kéroualle.

Court Politics at Home and Abroad

The political situation between England and France was an ambivalent one during the 1670s. Indeed, there are elements of the plot of Sophonisba that allude to Charles II's current political situation in subtle ways. An example of this is the political intrigue of the historical events in which allegiances shift: Syphax is initially allied with Rome, before becoming an ally to Carthage after being persuaded by Sophonisba. Lee's play begins with Massinissa's uncertainty about Sophonisba's allegiance and unresolved tensions which mean that Massinissa cannot stop thinking about Sophonisba who forgot "all her vows" and holds resonance for the suspicion allotted to the King's newest mistress in 1671.[17] In the following passage, Sophonisba outlines her loyalty to Massinissa, defending her trustworthiness:

> Think me not false, though I did Syphax wed,
> Who was ever a stranger to my Bed.
> Forc'd by my Father's positive command,
> I must confess I suffer'd him my Hand:

[15] Lee 1675, Act 2 scene 1, 12.
[16] Ibid, Act 2 scene 1, 13.
[17] Lee 1675, Act 1, 7.

> Heaven curse me if I ever granted more;
> Cou'd I be his, having been yours before? [18]

She argues that her marrying Syphax was a matter of duty imposed upon her rather than an act of love and refers to an earlier engagement between her and Massinissa. Continuing Lee's focus on the romantic plot and on the suspicions of Sophonisba's motive, Sophonisba's first lines focus more on her individual predicament than that of Carthage, a predicament in which she is the victim of tyranny as she is caught up in the "frighted Senators Decree" as "Rome, and the World, against my life combine."[19] The arrival of Louise de Kéroualle sparked anxieties and suspicions within Charles's government because Louise was a member of Louis XIV's Court, as a lady-in-waiting to Charles's sister Minette. Within the Court feelings were mixed due to a concern that Louise would act as a spy for Louis XIV and that she would somehow manipulate the King, as expressed by the lexicographer and French exile Philibert-Joseph Le Roux[20] in his account of Louis XIV'S reaction to La Chaise's plan to manage King Charles and England through intrigue:

> ["]I [Louis XIV] should rather choose to employ the Dutchess of Portsmouth, who has hitherto serv'd me faithfully in several little Affairs, that I have entrusted to her Management; and I am persuaded, she will be no less useful to me in great Ones. She is very nimble, and dexterous in Business, and possesses altogether the very Heart and Soul of the King; and frankly to tell you a Mistress has a Hundred Opportunities, and Tricks, to improve Persuasion, which the most cunning Ministers can never meet with.["] ["]Sir,["], (reply'd La Chaise with a Smile) ["]your Majesty may speak knowingly in that particular: I have nothing to object against it. I am also convinc'd, That the Dutchess of Portsmouth is now the only Person that can undertake this Affair with Success.["][21]

Scipio's caution about Sophonisba to Massinissa that "they deceive us who most trusted are" carries echoes of the association of women as political manipulators in court settings.[22] The anxiety over political allegiance that occurs in the plot of Sophonisba has particular parallels with the current concerns over the King's political and religious allegiance. The Secret Dover Treaty of 1670 drawn up between England and France outlined that Louis would halt his naval campaign, lend England both money and ships, and in

[18] Ibid, Act 3 scene 3, 34.
[19] Lee 1675, Act 3 scene 3, 29.
[20] Le Roux was exiled for criticizing François de La Chaise who was the confessor to Louis XIV.
[21] Le Roux 1693, 132.
[22] Lee 1675, Act 2 Scene 1, 12.

exchange, Charles pledged to ally with the French against the Dutch, offering support in case of war and to openly declare himself a Catholic. Hutton has argued that this was a strategic "attempt to achieve complete security and open options, by being secretly allied to France and openly allied to the Dutch", a move that would improve Charles's financial problems and enhance his "domestic prestige."[23] Indeed, England had lost more in terms of trade and capital from the Dutch Wars than it had gained. Beauclerk has pointed out that Louise was in some ways used as a bargaining tool by Charles to maintain the façade that Charles would uphold his pledge made in the Secret Dover Treaty of 1670 to publicly confirm his Catholic allegiance because of his Catholic mistress and her connection to Louis.[24]

The conflicted soliloquies from Massinissa in Lee's tragedy on the bind he finds himself in because of his promise to Scipio to give Sophonisba to the Romans would have had resonance for the current political situation because of the foreign and domestic pressures of political and religious allegiance that Charles II faced: "O Rome! Oh Heaven! Both equally my Foes. Was ever Heart thus miserably torn?" Massinissa exclaims when confronted with the dilemma of choosing between fulfilling his promise to his military ally or his love.[25] Soliloquies such as the above, augment the themes of personal honour and national duty in Sophonisba's story. Though present in Livy's account, these take on further poignancy given the criticism of the King's balancing of his mistress', his ministers' and the country's interests. An example of such a rumour about fear of romantic bias is detailed in Beuclark's book which mentions an anecdote in which Louise de Kéroualle is said to have asked the King whether he would prefer to rule without parliament and also which European King was the best, persuading him to answer Louis XIV.[26] Le Roux recounts a conversation between Louise and Charles in which she allegedly advises his majesty that Louis XIV's "Alliance would be most advantageous for your Majesty" with the King giving his "ear to the Duchess in such a manner, as to make her think that he was no way displeased with her Discourse."[27] As Hutton outlines, while Charles's mistresses were not involved in state matters, they had the potential to influence the King's opinion and, in the case of Louise, were used by government ministers in this way, arguing that she had aspired to be a Queen and a wife.[28] The King's treatment of Louise, who was given expensive

[23] Hutton 1989, 264, 271.
[24] Beauclerk 2005, 172.
[25] Lee 1675, Act 5 55.
[26] Beauclerk 2005, 224
[27] Le Roux 1693, 153.
[28] Hutton 1989, 279

presents, did not improve the public's opinion of her.[29] Indeed, when Charles II gave Louise's infant son the title of Duke of Richmond—a rank not given to Barbara Castlemaine's sons until they were much older—it was perhaps surprising that a mistress of the King, particularly a French one, was given such privileges. Such anecdotes are representative of the way in which Charles II's mistresses were looked upon with suspicion.

Lampoons and poems from the period portray rivalry between Charles II's mistresses and use this subject as a means to express rivalry between the different nations the mistresses were from. John Wilmot's poem 'Portsmouth's Looking Glass' comments on Louise de Kéroualle's studied airs, and Edmund Waller's poem about Nell Gwyn, Louise de Kéroualle, and Hortense Mancini entitled 'The Triple Combat' equates Hortense Mancini with a fight between Italy, France and Britain against a return to Catholicism, with each mistress representing a nation:

> Hither at length the Roman eagle flies,
> As the last triumph of her conquering eyes.
> As heir to Julius, she may pretend
> A second time to make this nation bend;
> But Portsmouth, springing from the ancient race
> Of Britons, which the Saxon here did chase,
> As they great Caesar did oppose, makes head,
> And does against this new invader lead.
> That goodly nymph, the taller of the two,
> Careless and fearless to the field does go.
> [. . .]
> For Little Britain these, and those for Rome.
> Dressed to advantage, this illustrious pair
> Arrived, for combat in the list appear.
> [. . .]
> The lovely Chloris well-attended came,
> A thousand Graces waited on the dame;
> Her matchless form made all the English glad,
> And foreign beauties less assurance had […].[30]

"The Triple Combat" refers to Hortense Mancini, Charles's Italian mistress, as a "Roman Eagle" and presents Louise de Kéroualle as an ally to Britain, referring to Brittany, while Nell Gwyn, a native Englishwoman, is cast as the nation's favourite mistress. Louise formed a close working relationship with the minister Danby who was responsible for the Treasury and as Beauclerk

[29] The King spent large sums on Kéroualle in particular, amounting to over 36,000 pounds in gifts and she had been awarded the title Duchess of Portsmouth in 1673. Hutton 1989, 335.
[30] Waller 1690, 48-49.

has argued, the "cabal" that formed between Montagu, Arlington and Harvey in support of bringing Hortense and the King together was to weaken the control of Louise, who along with other ministers was influencing policy at home and abroad.[31] Waller had been an MP for various constituencies. In 1624 Edmund Waller became MP for Ilchester and MP for Hastings in 1661. Waller, as a good friend of Buckingham's, would have been informed of matters in the Court. The ancient Roman context is referred to in the poem, with the battle being a battle between the beauties overseen by the Gods, emphasising the influence of Charles's mistresses in the penultimate line: "Beauty the Sceptre sways." The poem's title is rather fitting considering European political relations during the 1670s and perhaps refers to the Triple Alliance between England, Sweden and the Dutch Republic. This alliance was created in 1668 to end hostilities with France and Spain in response to France's growing power in Europe. Relations between France and England at this time were a balancing act of trade and power designed to safeguard against France's growing influence that was an anxiety in this period: "France, which (not many years since) was so weak and feeble, that it trembled at the very Name of the Dukes of Burgundy, should now be so potent, as to contrast the mightiest Powers of Europe."[32] Slingsby Bethel, who had previously been an MP in the Long Parliament and a member of the Commonwealth's Council of State, commented on Charles's situation, "as the French King striveth for the Protectorship of the Romish profession, so it is surely the King of England's Interest, to render himself (wherein he can have no opposition) the General Protector of the Protestant Religion; whereby he will become more formidable, and glorious, then he can by other means."[33] Poems such as Waller's, along with the writings of political commentators at the time, demonstrate the way in which the private reputations of Charles II's mistresses became part of the public, political discourse. The anxiety about France's political influence coupled with fears about a return to Catholicism as the dominant faith were displaced onto Charles's mistresses. It is perhaps no coincidence that while the situation of "The Triple Combat" between mistresses had been occurring at Court, Lee chooses the tripartite conflict of love and war between Carthage, Numidia, and Rome from Sophonisba as his subject.

[31] Beauclerk 2005, 259.

[32] Bethel 1679, 1.

[33] Bethel 1671, 33-34. Bethel was critical of both Cromwell's policies and those of Charles II's supporters.

Representing Sophonisba: Continuities and Differences

Yet, in Nathaniel Lee's treatment of the themes of love and war and his adaptation of the events of the Second Punic War, the characters are not particularly heroic. The public discourse of suspicion expressed toward women in the Court at the time may explain Lee's ambiguous portrayal of Sophonisba's motivations for marrying Massinissa and his decision to focus more on Sophonisba's martyrdom as a nuptial gift than as a heroic and politicized act. The final Act places much more emphasis on her marriage, as she toasts her husband before her death: "Undaunted to my Lips the Draught I lift, /'Tis to my Lord, this is his Nuptial Gift."[34] In Lee's version, Massinissa is the one who instigates and supplies the poison for the act of martyrdom that Sophonisba performs. In contrast, Corneille's version has Sophonisba send the poison back to Massinissa and suggest that he take it, showcasing her strength and pride. The framing of Sophonisba's death in Lee's adaptation ultimately magnifies the love between Sophonisba and Massinissa, positioning Sophonisba as both a tool and victim of political alliances (especially when she references her "forced marriage" to Syphax). Sophonisba's hatred of Rome and her independent heroism expressed in other versions of the story by Corneille and Thomson are not present in Lee's play.[35] This important distinction generates sympathy for Sophonisba who becomes the focus of the conflicts and anxieties about monarchs who prioritise romantic interest over the duty to govern, as Massinissa laments the burden of kingship but is content to withdraw from its responsibilities. Warren Chernanik has argued that Lee's political stance was "far from straight-forward", while Laura Brown has observed that Lee's works express an attitude of uncertainty towards monarchical power, and Anne Hermanson argues that Lee's tragedies are concerned with "the pathology of kingship", a perspective that comes through in the play's discussion of war and sympathetic treatment of Massinissa's political effeminacy.[36] In this way, Lee's adaptation engages with the anxieties faced by the country about whether future monarchs would be loyal to their subjects' interests, but ultimately, does not question the monarch's authority or elevate the political rebellions of allegiance from Sophonisba and Rosalinda in the war.

[34] Lee 1675, Act 5, 58.

[35] Morcillo has commented on the prevalence of Sophonisba's hatred of the Romans in Corneille's tragedy. Morcillo 2020, 74.

[36] Chernaik 2010, 95. Chernaik argues that after 1682 Lee showed loyalist sympathies, while his earlier works displayed Whig sympathies; Brown 1981,76; Hermanson 2014, 84.

Comparing Lee's Sophonisba with earlier adaptations of her story reveals his different portrayal of the heroine. The following extract, taken from Act 5 scene 3 of John Marston's *The Wonder of Women*, helps to show how Lee downplays the glorification of Sophonisba. Each extract treats the moment that precedes Sophonisba's martyrdom differently:

MASSINISSA. Bondage—Roman bondage!
SOPHONISBA. No, no!
MASSINISSA. How then have I vow'd well to Scipio?
SOPHONISBA. How then to Sophonisba?
MASSINISSA. Right, which way?
Run mad!—impossible!—distraction!
SOPHONISBA. Dear, lord, thy patience; let it maze all power,
And list to her in whose sole hear it rests
To keep thy faith upright.
MASSINISSA. Wilt thou be slaved?
SOPHONISBA. No, free.
MASSINISSA. How then keep I my faith?
SOPHONISBA. My death
Gives help to all.
From Rome so rest we free;
So brought to Scipio, faith is kept in thee.

As we can see in Marston's version, Sophonisba is the hero of the piece; it is she who saves Massinissa's word and reputation, whilst becoming a martyr for Carthage, offering her own death as the solution to their situation. Sophonisba puts her loyalty to Carthage before her marriage, yet displays her love for Massinissa by protecting his honour. The play's closing lines reinforce Sophonisba's heroism and exceptional nature, referring to her as "Women's right wonder, and just shame of men" as her body is placed on display as a moving spectacle.[37]

Similarly, in Corneille's version, Sophonisba's bravery and patriotism comes across strongly:

SOPHONISBA (to Massinisse).
Quoi? J'irais mendier jusqu'au camp des Romains
La pitié de leur chef qui m'aurait en ses mains ?
J'irois déshonorer, par un honteux hommage,
Le trône où j'ai pris place, et le sang de Carthage ;
Et l'on verrait gémir la fille d'Asdrubal
Aux pieds de l'ennemi pour eux le plus fatal ?

What? That I should go begging to the Roman camp

[37] Marston 1606, Act 5, Scene 3, no page number.

for the pity of their Chief, who would hold me in bands?
That I should dishonor, by paying shameful homage,
The throne that I possess, and the blood of Carthage;
And that Asdrubal's daughter should weep, wail and moan
At the feet of their enemy, their mortal foe? [38]

Corneille communicates Sophonisba's disgust at the thought of begging in front of the Romans along with her pride as a Carthaginian. As Susan Read Baker has observed, Corneille's Sophonisba "loves Carthage more than any husband."[39] The clarity of Sophonisba's political motivations and the play's political commentary in Corneille's adaptation, along with Sophonisba's strong love for Massinissa as presented in Marston's tragedy both become more ambivalent in Lee's play.

In stark contrast, Lee's depiction of this moment in the story is framed quite differently, with less focus placed on Sophonisba as the hero:

MASSINISSA. Thou must, oh that I live to speak it! die.
SOPHONISBA. Blest sound! We shall not then to *Rome* be led; […]
Speak Death again, my Guard and sure Defence;
It bears a mighty sound, and mighty sense.
MASSINISSA. O keep thee there, now while thy Virtues glow,
And dart Divinity, I'll give the blow.
Come forth, *Menander,* with those fatal Bowls,
Whose Juice, though it be the Body's force Controls,
Revives the Mind, and slakes the thirst of Souls.
Enter Menanader with two Bowls
SOPHONISBA. What means my Royal Love?
MASSINISSA. By your bright self, by all the Powers above,
No Angel's Eloquence my Soul shall move
To die with thee, and thy dear honour save.[40]

In Lee's version, the solution to the problem is determined by Massinissa rather than Sophonisba. In Acts 3 and 5 Massinissa mentions her death as a last recourse to avoid Sophonisba being captured by the Romans. Yet before this, Sophonisba's confidante is petitioned by Sophonisba to poison her if she is captured, it is Sophonisba's friend then in Lee's version, who urges her to ask for Massinissa's mercy.[41] When Sophonisba asks him to "Speak [of] Death again", she refers to this earlier conversation and shows her courage

[38] Corneille 1663, 4.5. Translation supplied by Guðrún Kristinsdóttir in the department of French Literature at the University of Iceland and rhyming in English carried out by myself.

[39] Baker 1990, 104.

[40] Lee 1675, Act 5 scene 3, 57-58.

[41] Lee 1675, Act 3, 29.

through her willingness to die. The emphasis is placed on the couple's relationship: Massinissa's misunderstanding of why Sophonisba had to marry Syphax and this scene inspires sympathy for two lovers who express their devotion through a suicide pact. The death of the two lovers differs from Marston's version in which Massinissa is alive at the end of the play and regains his fame, while praising Sophonisba and ensuring that she will be remembered. The pact in Lee's version, however, downplays Sophonisba's sacrifice and bravery because Massinissa is the one who will her "dear honour save" instead of Sophonisba preserving Massinissa's honour and her own as in Marston's version. While this scene is consistent with the desire for more sentimental scenes in tragedies, which grew extremely popular in the 1680s and 1690s, it is a curious choice to have Massinissa overshadow Sophonisba's heroic moment—the one she was most famous for in Classical and Early Modern Literature—in this scene. The brave women in Lee's *Sophonisba*: Rosalinda and Sophonisba are more contained and domesticated in his play, Rosalinda's and Sophonisba's stories are framed as ones of primarily romantic love in which the loyalty between husband and wife is to be admired.

When compared with the political discussion that occurs between Eryxe and Sophonisba in Act 1 scene 3 of Corneille's *Sophonisbe* about the authority of Kings compared with the Roman Senate, Lee's women are less politicized. Lee's focus on domestic relationships rather than politics is also part of a more general distaste for war that is expressed by the heroes throughout the play. Hannibal and Massinissa emphasize the destruction caused by the war. Hannibal laments that "Heaven's high Wall / Each God look'd down, and shook his awful head, / Mourning to see so many thousands fall, / And then look'd pale to see us look so red" prompts a reflection on the trauma and bloodshed of the Civil War.[42] Indeed, Anne Hermanson in her study of English horror tragedies, observed that the trauma of the Civil War was expressed in tragedies from 1670s and 1680s.[43] Lee's *Sophonisba* displays a clear reticence towards war:

> KING MASSINISSA. Yet War contracts a guilt;
> And the brave grieve when many Lives are spilt:
> Love like a Monarch, merciful and young,
> Shedding no Blood, effeminates the strong;
> But War does like a Tyrant vex us more,

[42] Lee 1675, Act 1 scene 1, 2.
[43] Hermanson 2014, 33.

And breaks those Hearts, which Love did melt before.[44]

Massinissa is haunted by the damage done to young men and their families by war and is keen to retire from power, referring to lust for power turning men into "Murderers of the Field."[45] While Douglas Canfield interprets lines such as these and Massinissa's retreat from public life in the tragedy's closing lines as part of the aristocracy's "leisure to retire from public life and contemplate the transcendence of its values," there is more at work here in Lee's discussion of war.[46] Discussion of Lee's *Sophonisba* has tended to focus more on the representation of Kingship and Lee's political stance, rather than the portrayal of war and its relationship with the events at the time.[47] The situation in England following the Restoration was by no means settled in terms of opposition to Charles II's authority, which came from the Whig party who distrusted Charles' Catholic leanings and feared a return to the absolutist form of monarchical government the country had experienced under his father. Matters were not improved by the general distaste for further European wars that Charles II entered into, namely the Dutch wars in 1664, 1672 and 1674. Charles II's difficulty in balancing his finances, his misguided hope that England would ultimately benefit from an alliance with France against the Dutch, and his penchant for proroguing parliament were recipes for uncertainty in foreign and domestic relations, with England losing more than it gained from the Dutch Wars.

Adapting Sophonisba's Story for different Political Contexts

The main reason for the different portrayal of the women in Lee's adaptation, namely, the downplaying of their role in politics is part of Charles's relationships with his mistresses at the time. The ambivalence surrounding Sophonisba's motivations combined with a dual plot structure in which courageous women are treated with suspicion in Lee's adaptation speaks to the suspicion surrounding Louise de Kéroualle and Charles II's other mistresses. Indeed, Sophonisba's story has signified different things to different nations at different times; Marston's adaptation in 1606, which introduced the witch figure of Erictho appealed to James I's paranoia about witches and the witch fever that gripped Europe, while Corneille's *Sophonisba* was produced at a time when France was expanding its power and colonies, with the French rebelling against the moves that made the

[44] Lee 1675, Act 1 scene 2, 9.
[45] Ibid, Act 1 scene 2, 4.
[46] Canfield 2000, 63.
[47] Owen has discussed Lee´s political leanings, while Canfield, Brown, and Hermanson have focused on the portrayal of the monarchy in Lee's tragedies. Owen 1996; Canfield 2000; Brown 1981; Hermanson 2014.

monarchy more absolutist under Louis XIII and Louis XIV's reigns, meaning Sophonisba would perhaps have been a powerful figure, one that raised questions about authority. Politically, we can see very different resolutions at the end of the tragedy between Marston's *Sophonisba* and Lee's version; while Massinissa is alive at the end of Marston's play, Lee has Massinissa's nephew and heir killed in a jealous battle, reflecting the very different political climates, with Marston writing at the beginning of the Stuart line and Lee writing during a period of political and religious anxieties surrounding succession. It is therefore no coincidence that Lee's play, with its discussion of allegiance and the destruction of war, was revived in 1680 when the country was gripped by concerns about a Catholic rebellion along with fear of another Civil War. We can see how Lee appropriates Sophonisba from other European dramatists and translates her story into his own national context.

Sophonisba's story becomes a vehicle for different dramatists to comment on their nation because of the celebration of Sophonisba's rebellion, virtue, bravery and loyalty to her country against the power of the Romans, particularly in periods in which relations between monarchs and subjects were more unstable as when Corneille and Lee are writing. As a female exemplar in Classical and Renaissance writings, Sophonisba's role in the Punic Wars is a timely subject for Lee during an age in which women were obtaining more public power: actresses gaining popularity as celebrities, along with the King's mistresses' influence on ministers and on public feeling. What we see in Lee's version is a much more uncomfortable relationship with influential women positioned in the public sphere of politics and this may be a reason why ultimately Lee's version of Sophonisba focuses more on Massinissa's devotion to Sophonisba and Hannibal's love for Rosalinda, rather than patriotism and heroism, knowing that conflicted love would be more likely to arouse pity in spectators than patriotism. The situation is of course very different in James Thomson's portrayal of Sophonisba who rails against the Romans, her language full of hatred for them and patriotism for her country in a period of greater political stability, with Britain as a colonial and trading power. Lee's version of Sophonisba is interesting for the way in which he draws more on the romantic plot from Livy, Mairet and Marston, yet leaves the judgement of how the King should govern ambiguous, along with the extent to which Sophonisba truly loves Massinissa or is motivated more by her own desire to avoid becoming a Roman slave. Reading Lee's *Sophonisba* in light of Charles II's relations with France and the anxieties that gripped England sheds light on Sophonisba's muted portrayal and the distaste toward war displayed in the play when compared with the other English adaptations of Sophonisba.

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THE SECOND SOPHONISBA:

Figurality and Counterfactuality in Calderón's *The Second Scipio*

By Sofie Kluge

The Spanish dramatist Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681) never engaged directly with the figure of Sophonisba. However, in his late play about the elder Africanus' Spanish campaign he exploited the Golden Age conflation of the different Scipios into a single, polysemous 'Roman commander' figure to suggest a number of thought-provoking parallels not only between two historical events and locations but also, I argue, between the play's "beautiful African"– Arminda – and Sophonisba. The outcome of this intriguing procedure, relying on figural historiography, is a history play about the Roman siege on Carthago Nova in 209 BC that is simultaneously a counterfactual history play re-writing the events that transpired in Carthago in 203 BE. Thus, I argue that The Second Scipio *suggests an alternative Sophonisba story where virtuous action secures a happy ending, imparting a useful lesson of kingship to its royal audience.*

Sophonisba in Spain

Considering the contemporaneous popularity of the Sophonisba figure in other major European dramatic cultures, it is striking that there should not be a single extant sixteenth or seventeenth-century Spanish play about the ill-fated Carthaginian noblewoman. None of the numerous Golden Age dramatists apparently looked her way even as they wrote plays about the Scipiones and were presumably familiar with Trissino's groundbreaking 1524 tragedy.[1] Miguel de Cervantes' *Numancia* (1585) and Francisco de Rojas Zorilla's *Numancia sieged* (*Numancia cercada*, c. 1630), for example, both favoured the Scipiones' role in Spanish history over their North African exploits, dramatising Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus Minor's Iberian campaign in the 140-130s BCE.[2] Indeed, it seems

[1] A fragment of Trissino's poetry was translated by Fernando de Herrera in the introduction to his commentary on Garcilaso de la Vega's famous third eclogue in *Obras de Garci Lasso de la Vega con anotaciones de Fernando de Herrera* (1580), suggesting the familiarity of Spanish authors with the Italian humanist and his work.

[2] For a discussion of these two plays in their European context, see Gil-Osle 2017.

Sophonisba did not appear on Iberian stages until the late 18th century when she featured in today little known neo-classicist pieces by Antonio Furmento Bazo (*Sofonisba*, 1772), José Joaquín Mazuelo (*Sofonisba: Tragedia española*, 1784) and Luciano Francisco Comella (*Sofonisba*, 1795).

Pedro Calderón de la Barca's little studied Scipio play, *The Second Scipio* (*El segundo Escipión* first performed 1677 and published 1683) changes this picture, albeit in an oblique and intriguing way.[3] For one thing, it focuses on the 'right' Scipio, that is on Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus Major – the first of the Scipiones to earn the appellation "Africanus" because of his defeat of Hannibal at the battle of Zama and the one involved in the Sophonisba affair. Furthermore, it approaches the North African setting, staging the Roman siege on New Carthage or Carthago Nova (present-day Cartagena) in Southern Spain in 209 BCE. Like Cervantes and Rojas Zorilla before him, Calderón thus combines 'Scipiography' with a domestic perspective. Unlike his predecessors, however, he gestures time and again toward that other Carthago, variously suggesting his play as a veiled Sophonisba play. In this sense, despite its title, *The Second Scipio* aligns with the dramatist's 'exotic female plays'.

Indeed, as plays such as *The Great Cenobia* (*La gran Cenobia*, 1624), *The Sibyl of the Orient and the Great Queen of Saba* (*La Sibila del Oriente y gran reina de Sabá*, 1659) and *The Daughter of the Air* (*La hija del aire*, 1653) demonstrate, Calderón was no stranger to exotic females. Yet he refrained from engaging directly with Sophonisba whom so many of his contemporaries courted. Instead, he exploited the Golden Age conflation of the different Scipios into a single, polysemous 'Roman commander' figure to suggest a number of thought-provoking parallels not only between two historical events and locations but also, I argue, between his play's "beautiful African", Arminda, and Sophonisba.[4] The outcome of this intriguing procedure, relying on figural historiography, is a history play about the Roman siege on Carthago Nova in 209 BC that is simultaneously a counterfactual history play re-writing the events that transpired in Carthago in 203 BE. Thus, in this article, I argue that *The Second Scipio* suggests a

[3] As a matter of fact, besides Valbuena's two-page introduction, I have been able to find only three critical essays that mention *The Second Scipio* (Arellano 2014; Gil-Osle 2017; Herreros Gonzáles 2002). Seeing that none of these provide interpretations of the play, which they use to illustrate themes such as staged violence (Arellano) and imperialistic ideals (Herreros González), I will not enter into a detailed discussion of their findings.

[4] On the "Escipiones históricos que se solapaban en una sola alegoría usada didácticamente en espejos de virtudes, galerías de hombres ilustres y celebraciones" [historical Scipios who merged into a single allegory used didactically en mirrors-of-virtues, galleries of illustrious men and celebrations] in European Renaissance theatre, see Gil-Osle 2017.

"second Sophonisba", or a Sophonisba story where virtuous action secures a happy ending.

Figural Historiography

In his 1938-essay "Figura", the twentieth-century literary scholar Erich Auerbach (1892-1957) discussed "figural" interpretation, or the perception of historical persons and events as duplications of other historical persons and events, previous and posterior. As the German *Literaturwissenschaftler* explained, in figural interpretation, an historical event or person is either presaging something or someone that will come after or "fulfilling" something or someone that came before:

> Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life.[5]

Figural interpretation thus links historical persons and events to each other across time and space in a complex network of correspondences. Yet, historical persons and events are not merely figures of other historical persons and events in an eternal return of archetypical occurrences. They are also prefigurations of the "actual, real, and definitive" person or event that will eventually end the chain and reveal the deeper meaning of all the echoes and reflections, recurrences and duplications. Thus, while it relies on recurrence, the conception of history underlying figurality is not cyclical but linear and "prophetic":

> Figural prophecy implies the interpretation of one worldly event through another; the first signifies the second, the second fulfills the first. Both remain historical events; yet both, looked at in this way, have something provisional and incomplete about them; they point to one another and both point to something in the future, something still to come, which will be the actual, real, and definitive event. […] Thus history, with all its concrete force, remains forever a figure, cloaked and needful of interpretation. In this light the history of no epoch ever has the practical self-sufficiency which, from the standpoint both of primitive man and modern science, resides in the accomplished fact; all history, rather, remains open and questionable, points to something still concealed, and the tentativeness of events in the figural interpretation

[5] Auerbach 1984, 53.

> is fundamentally different from the tentativeness of events in the modern view of historical development.[6]

In Auerbach's account, figural interpretation connects historical persons and events in order to suggest a larger picture: History seen from its end point, or the point when the transcendental significance of the historical world is finally disclosed and the underlying divine masterplan becomes clear. Thus, the Christian reinterpretation of the Jewish tradition as a prefiguration of the New Testament is the classic example of figural reading. The "Figura" essay accordingly presents a theory of the pre-modern view of historical development or, at least, of a historical paradigm "fundamentally different" from the modern ditto. Yet, although it was conceived in dialogue with pre-modern literature, and more particularly with Dante, Auerbach's concept of figural interpretation finds deep resonance also in Spanish Golden Age drama and in that of Calderón in particular, steeped as it is in figural or allegorical interpretation of physical and historical reality.

As discussed by James Porter, Auerbach distinguished "allegorical" reading, which by his account erased the concrete historical event in favor of its symbolic and extra-temporal meaning, and "figural" reading, which purportedly maintained the reality of the historical event while reframing it as the symbolic announcement of some later event.[7] In the present context, however, I use these terms interchangeably. For one thing, Calderón in various places specifically used the term "allegory" to describe his own symbolic interpretation of historical reality.[8] Second, in Calderón scholarship, the accepted term for his view of the historical world as shot through with transcendental significance is "allegorical".[9] Finally, while figural and allegorical interpretation may have marked two distinct hermeneutical approaches in pre-modern periods, their categorical distinction applies rigorously neither to the Renaissance nor to the Baroque.[10] Indeed, following Auerbach's contemporary and compatriot, Walter Benjamin, who in his 1928 book about seventeenth-century drama famously emphasized the historical side to Baroque allegory, the hypothesis could even be advanced

[6] Auerbach 1984, 58-9.

[7] Auerbach 1984, 49-60.

[8] Calderón explicated his understanding of allegory in the *loas*, or theatrical prologues, to *La segunda esposa y triunfar moriendo* [The Second Wife and Triumph in Death, 1649] and *El sacro Parnaso* [The Sacred Parnassus, 1659], among other places.

[9] Parker 1943 and 1962; Arellano 2001; Kluge 2010 and 2022.

[10] Though it cannot be tested in this context, the hypothesis may be ventured that Auerbach formed his pejorative concept of allegory under the influence of Goethe who, in *Maximen und Reflexionen* (pub. 1833), memorably juxtaposed symbol and allegory to the disadvantage of the latter emphasizing the conceptual and moralistic qualities of allegorical interpretation. See Goethe, 128 et al.

that figural reading eventually developed into allegorical interpretation or at least fused with it, as allegory gradually became less notional and more sensual or more secular.[11] Thus, writing about Calderón's *autos sacramentales*, epitome of his engagement of this technique, Barbara Kurtz has proposed their "secularization of typology", a point taken up by Stephen Rupp in his examination of the Madrid playwright's allegorical representation of historical kings in his secular drama.[12]

The long and short of it, Auerbach's theory applies very well indeed to *The Second Scipio*. As I will try to demonstrate, Calderón paradigmatically rehearses what the German scholar termed the figural reading of history, linking the (purported) first and the second Scipio Africanus with each other and eventually with the "actual, real, and definitive" person who fulfills them both: The last Habsburg ruler Carlos II "The Bewitched" of Spain before whom the play was performed in the Royal Palace in Madrid on 6 November 1677.[13] However, while Calderón's Scipio play can plausibly be understood as complex allegory of kingship and, more particularly, as a piece of advice to "the second Carlos" addressed in the dying lines of the play, I believe that it is simultaneously a covert engagement with the figure of Sophonisba. What follows thus tests the hypothesis that *The Second Scipio* is also a "second Sophonisba". I begin with a brief glance at the historiographical traditions forming the basis of Calderón's sophisticated cryptogram.

Scipio, Good and Bad

The plot of Calderón's play is based on Livy's account of Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus Major's Hispanic campaign in *History of Rome* 26.42-50. More particularly, it focuses on the episode in chapter 50 which shows the Roman general magnanimously returning a beautiful female captive to her fiancée, the Celtiberian prince Allucius. The Roman historian recounts this episode, which subsequently gave rise to the widely branched moral-historiographical tradition known as the Continence or Magnanimity of Scipio, in the following manner:[14]

> […] then there was brought to him as a captive by the soldiers a grown maiden of a beauty so extraordinary that, wherever she went, she drew

[11] As Benjamin formulates it, in the 17th century, "Die Geschichte wandert in den Schauplatz hinein" (1996, 271), suggesting a close connection between this 'historical turn' in seventeenth-century drama and allegory.

[12] Kurtz 1991: 147-55. Rupp 1996.

[13] See Valbuena Briones' "Nota preliminar" in Calderón 1969: 1411.

[14] To the Continence or Magnanimity of Scipio tradition, see Kunzle 2002. Besides Livy, another important source for the post-antique life of this tradition was Valerius Maximus' *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 4.3 (1st century CE)

> the eyes of everyone. Scipio, upon enquiring about her native city and her parents, learned among other things that she had been betrothed to a leading man of the Celtiberians. The young man's name was Allucius. Accordingly he at once summoned parents and fiance from home, and as soon as he had arrived, Scipio, having heard meantime that he was desperately in love with his betrothed, addressed him in more studied language than he had used towards the parents. "[…] Your betrothed has been in my camp with the same regard for modesty as in the house of your parents in law, her own parents. She has been kept for you, so that she could be given you as a gift, unharmed and worthy of you and of me. This is the only price that I stipulate in return for that gift: be a friend to the Roman people […]". The young man, overcome by embarrassment and at the same time by joy, holding Scipio's right hand, called upon all the gods to compensate him on his own behalf, since he was far from having sufficient means to do so in accordance with his own feeling and with what the general had done for him. Whereupon the parents and blood relations of the maiden were summoned. They began to entreat Scipio, because the maiden, for whose ransom they had brought, as they said, a considerable weight of gold, was being restored to them without price, to accept that gift from them, assuring him that they would feel no less gratitude for his acceptance than for the restoration of the maiden unharmed. Scipio, since they so earnestly besought, promised that he would accept it, ordered the gift to be laid before his feet, and calling Allucius to him, said: "in addition to the dowry which you are about to receive from your father in law, this will be added by me as a nuptial gift to you." And he ordered him to take up the gold and keep it. Delighting in this gift and courteous treatment he was sent away to his home, and he filled his countrymen with the well-earned praises of Scipio, saying that there had come a most godlike youth, conquering everything by arms and especially by generosity and favours. And so, after conducting a levy among his clients, he returned within a few days to Scipio with fourteen hundred picked horsemen.[15]

Though immensely popular with contemporaneous poets and musical composers, who found in it a positive example of sexual restraint and mercy during warfare, the Continence or Magnanimity of Scipio was, however, not the only Scipio tradition which flourished in Renaissance Europe. As testified by the numerous dramatic and artistic adaptations of the events recounted in *History of Rome* 30.12.11–15.11 – the passage about the Second Punic War and the death of Sophonisba – there was also a more equivocal Scipio figure in circulation. This was the military and political mastermind who destroyed African opposition through a *divide et impera* tactic which not only alienated

[15] Livy, 26.50. Unpaginated internet text quoted at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/

the local princes Syphax and Massinissa but also the lovers Massinissa and Sophonisba, resulting in the latter's suicide when Massinissa chose the alliance with Rome over his relationship with her. All the way from Livy, the elder Africanus was thus a complex and versatile figure. In the siege of Carthago Nova, he was the vehicle of 'comedy' in the broad understanding of this term as a story which ends in marriage and laughter. In the Second Punic War, he furthered tragedy provoking tears and death.[16] Thus, Renaissance dramatists could put Scipio into play to create a variety of dramatic plots according to their own artistic ideas and the demands of their different audiences. The general could be both a good, gallant, princely, sometimes indeed Christ-like saviour; and a morally ambiguous, controlling, cynical character willing to sacrifice everything to achieve his own military and political ends.[17]

Of these two Scipios Calderón primarily based his play on the former, presenting the general as the perfect gentleman and a paragon of princely virtue.[18] However, as I understand the play, a one-sidedly 'comic' reading of *The Second Scipio* is reductive. The 'bad' Scipio and the tragedy of Sophonisba must be understood as hovering everywhere in the background, adding depth and an understated element of ambiguity to the play's immediately jubilant message about kingship.

Second Scipio and Second Carthago

The title *The Second Scipio* in combination with the opening stage direction "[the scene is within and outside the city walls of Carthago Nova]" kindles curiosity.[19] Why did Calderón call his Scipio the "second" when it was actually the first Scipio Africanus who laid siege on Cartagena? Did he simply ignore the details of the – admittedly bewildering – Scipiones family tree (appendix 1)? Had he not read his Livy carefully enough? While answers to these questions remain essentially speculative, what can be said for certain is that, through his emphatic use of the ordinal adjective "second", Calderón draws

[16] Whether Renaissance poets and dramatists accentuated 'comic' or 'tragic' aspects of the Scipio-material likely depended on their use of additional sources other than Livy. Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca historica* 27.7), Appian (*Punic Wars* 27–28), and Cassius Dio (*Zonaras* 9.11), Polybius (*Histories* 14.4), and Boccaccio (*De casibus virorum illustrium*, bk. 5), for example, all wrote about the Second Punic War emphasizing tragic elements. The Continence or Magnanimity of Scipio tradition, on the other hand, rested largely on Livy and Valerius Maximus.

[17] While *The Second Scipio* provides a Spanish example of the 'comic' Scipio tradition, Cervantes' *Numancia* can be seen as an example of the tragic. To the relation between the Scipio of this play and tragedy, see De Armas.

[18] To Calderón's use of the Continence or Magnanimity of Scipio tradition in *The Second Scipio*, see Valbuena.

[19] Calderón 1969, 1413: "[La escena pasa dentro y fuera de los muros de Cartago Nova]".

attention to the recurrence of historical events and persons, stimulating figural interpretation and historiographical speculation of the kind proposed here.

Confirming this impression that the dramatist means his audience to engage in figural interpretation of the historical persons and events represented, the character Flavia – a local woman who has been expelled from Carthago Nova following the "severe law of war" that "whosoever does not fight, does not eat" and should therefore "leave the premises" to spare the food for those who must fight[20] – soon explicitly links not only the (purported) two Scipios but also the two Carthagos:

FLAVIA atiende,	FLAVIA listen,
Segundo Escipión […]	Second Scipio […],
Segundo Escipión, segunda	Second Scipio, I say a
vez digo, sin ofenderte,	second time with no offense,
pues ser segundo a tu padre	for being second to your father
es ser primero a tus gentes:	is being first to your people:
esa inmensa población	this immense city
que entre villajes silvestres	which among small forest towns
yace por su planta altiva,	lies upon this high field,
por sus abundancias fértil,	fertile in its abundances,
por su puerto inexpugnable	unassailable because of its port,
y por sus murallas fuerte,	and strong in its city walls,
es la segunda Cartago; […]	is the second Carthage; […][21]

As can be seen in this quote, *The Second Scipio* first confuses the two Africani (who, furthermore, were adoptive grandfather/grandson, not father and son as claimed in the quoted passage) placing Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus Minor, or the second Scipio, outside the city walls of Carthago Nova. Then it goes on to suggest their interconnection as presage respectively fulfilment of each other: Whereas the "first" Scipio "could triumph so gloriously/ in Africa over the first Carthage/ […]", the "second" Scipio comes "to conquer in Spain/ the new Carthage […]/ wanting that Fame should/ celebrate you as the Spanish Scipio/ after his example".[22] All through the play, this idea of Scipio being "second" but simultaneously "first" is

[20] Calderón 1969, 1415.

[21] Calderón 1969, 1414. Here as subsequently my translation.

[22] Calderón 1969, 1414-1415: "FLAV. pues si él en Africa pudo/ triunfar tan gloriosamente/ de la primera Cartago/ [...] / a conquistar en España/ la nueva Cartago vienes,/ queriendo con su ejemplar/ que la fama te celebre/ por español Escipion."

repeated over and over again, turning into a virtual refrain chanted by ALL (and, subsequently, by SOLDIERS):

TODOS	¡Viva el valiente Escipión,	ALL	Long live the valient Scipio
	Que a honor del romano imperio		Who to the honour of the Roman Empire
	Nació segundo para ser primero!		Was born second to be the first![23]

Judging by modern standards, Calderón's historiography is certainly staggering. Yet, bearing Auerbach's notion of figural historiography in mind, its blatant inaccuracies after all make a certain sense. As already mentioned, one reason why the dramatist may counterfactually have insisted on calling his Scipio "the second" could be to make the reference to Carlos clear and secure that his primary audience – the young king – would decode his allegory of kingship correctly. Yet, there may be an additional motive.

As the American historian Katrina Olds noted of contemporaneous "invented histories", these belonged to a historiographical paradigm where individual historical detail was not of paramount importance and where "moral exemplarity" took "precedence over factual accuracy sensu stricto".[24] To the eyes of a contemporaneous public, the most important thing for a historical account to convey was in other words moral edification, not – as we would expect today – precise knowledge of historical persons and events. Seen in this light, the play's counterfactual use of the Scipio figure comes to exemplify the interplay of malleability or elasticity of historical fact and moral edification that was the basis for Golden Age writers' and dramatists' sometimes wildly creative interpretations of historical persons and events: As long as their conjectures had an edifying purpose, they could manipulate historical details as they found best.

Following this train of thought, the "second Scipio" may mean the 'improved' or 'morally superior Scipio': The better version of the general, as opposed to the morally ambiguous person involved in the Sophonisba affair. And if this understanding of "second" is accepted, then *The Second Scipio* everywhere presupposes the (alleged) "first" and morally ambiguous Scipio as the negative backdrop against which the proposed ideal of virtuous princely conduct embodied in the "second" Scipio shines all the brighter. Thus, with his emphasis on a good "second" form of kingship and implicit suggestion of a bad "first", the dramatist conjures up a virtual Herculean cross-roads before the eyes of his young sovereign who, like the mythological hero, must choose his path wisely.[25]

[23] Calderón 1969, 1441.
[24] Olds 2015, 25.
[25] Cf. Xenophon's biographical anecdote about Hercules in *Memorabilia* II.1.21–34.

This overall interpretation of the play as an 'improved' Scipio play may appear somewhat fanciful and speculative. However, there is more evidence in the play that Calderón actually wanted his audience to activate their imagination and play with links between historical persons and events; that he wanted them to sense the Sophonisba story as an ominous exemplum hovering in the background of his *comedia*. Thus, the play's striking emphasis on images and more particularly portraits of the female protagonist, Arminda, elicits figural speculation in the same way that the recurrence of the ordinal adjective "second" suggested there was more to Scipio than just Scipio.

Second Sophonisba

In accordance with Livy's account of the siege on Carthago Nova, *The Second Scipio* narrates the story of a beautiful maiden taken hostage by the Roman troops but subsequently handed over to her betrothed by the famous general in a marvellous display of magnanimity. Building on the proposed figural and moral interpretation of the "second" Scipio and second Carthage, I suggest that this "African" princess be construed as a figure of the Carthaginian noblewoman, her amorous alliance with the Celtiberian prince Luceyo reflecting Sophonisba's union with the Numidian king Massinissa.

Several elements back this reading of Arminda as a second Sophonisba. For one thing, Arminda is repeatedly celebrated as "the beautiful African" even though the ancient sources do not talk about a provenance other than Iberian.[26] Moreover, different portraits, mirror images and statues of her proliferate suggesting the theme of confused identities, first and second, original and copy, presage and fulfilment or, in short, figurality. First, there is the statue of Venus that Luceyo invents to have created when he lies to Scipio about who he really is for fear that his kinship with Hannibal will be held against him, and which is finally revealed as Arminda herself.[27] Then there is the portrait "in a mirror" of Arminda kept by one of Scipio's trusted soldiers, Lelio, who has purchased it at an auction in Rome and fallen in love

[26] Calderón 1969, 1425. In the quote above, Valerius Maximus described her as "an adult maiden of most surpassing beauty" whereas Livy called her "a female captive, a grown-up virgin, of such exquisite beauty, that whichever way she walked she attracted the eyes of every body" (26.50).

[27] Calderón 1969, 1424: "LUCEYO […] labrar intenté una estatua/ […]/ Tan hermosa, tan perfecta/ salió […]". ["LUCEYO I wanted to make a statue/ […]/ So beautiful, so perfect did it/ turn out […]". Cf. 1449: "Y, en fin, si dije que era/ aquí mi venida a efecto/ que con Arminda vendría,/ para llevarla a mi templo,/ de Venus la hermosa imagen,/ ¿en qué te mentí, supuesto/ que con Arminda ha venido/ la hermosa imagen de Venus?" [And so, if I said that/ I came here with Arminda/ to take her to the temple,/ beautiful image of Venus,/ in what did I lie, given/ that I have come with Arminda,/ beuatiful image of Venus?"]

with it.[28] This portrait not only becomes the centre of rivalry between Lelio and his friend and fellow soldier, Egidio, who is also in love with Arminda after he has captured her at sea at the beginning of the play. It is furthermore coveted by Scipio who is secretly aflame with desire for the African beauty from the moment he lays eyes on her but nobly suppresses his passion and in the end canalises it into virtuous action.[29] All through the play, numerous reflections and duplicates of Arminda thus circulate stimulating the audience's figural interpretation of her character.

As already anticipated, I believe the young female captive in *The Second Scipio* can be read as a "second" Sophonisba in the same sense that Calderón's Scipio is "second": A figure which presages and/or fulfills Sophonisba, reversing her tragic destiny and revealing her full potential. Had Sophonisba not encountered the "first" Scipio but instead the "second" one, her life could very well have turned out otherwise. Then perchance her story might not have been a tragedy but instead a comedy. Instead of forcing Massinissa to choose between his loyalty to Rome and his love for Sophonisba, Scipio might have married the two off, magnanimously disregarding his own interests. Indeed, following this train of thought, *The Second Scipio* may be seen to illustrate Aristotle's brief but acute account of the relation between history and poetry in *Poetics* 1451 b which famously prioritised poets' potentialistic or hypothetical writing of history over the historian's factual account of what the person actually did say or do.[30] In this interpretation, Calderón's play is simultaneously a history play dramatising what did happen (as far we know), and a counterfactual history play meditating what might have happened.

Thus far, Calderón's allegory of kingship would seem to have been decoded. However, with its roots in the Christian prophetic conception of history, figural historiography not only implied a link between different historical figures but also their eventual fulfilment in the "actual, real, and definitive" person ending the chain of duplications and figurations. I have proposed to see Scipio I and II as prefigurations of Carlos II. But does

[28] Calderón 1969, 1427: "LELIO. Un extranjero pintor/ murió en Roma: y yo, por ver/ cuánto el pueblo encarecía/ el primor de su pincel,/ fui a su almoneda, y entre otras/ curiosidades noté/ en un espejo el retrato/ de una divina mujer". ["LELIO A foreign painter/ died in Rome, and when I saw/ how people valued/ the delicacy of his brush,/ I went to the auction and among other/ curisosities noted/ in a mirror the portrait/ of a divine woman".

[29] Calderón 1969, 1429: "ESCIPIÓN ¡Otro torcedor, fortuna,/ a una pasión tan cruel,/ que yo solo he de sentir/ y nadie la ha de saber!" ["SCIPIO Another twist, Fortune,/ to that cruel passion/ that I only feel/ and noone must know!"]

[30] Cf. Aristotle's words that the poet explores what Alcibiades "would or could have said or done" (*τὰ ποῖα συμβαίνει λέγειν ἢ πράττειν*), being the kind of person that he was, rather than what he "actually did say or do" (*τί Ἀλκιβιάδης ἔπραξεν ἢ τί ἔπαθεν*).

Arminda, as Sophonisba II, also point to some historical woman from the playwright's own time?

A 'Feminist' Reappraisal?

There may be several reasons why the Spanish playwright would covertly re-write Sophonisba's tragic destiny, counterfactually giving the Carthaginian princess the happy ending denied her in history. One explanation could be the so-called Golden Age "tragic taboo".[31] However, though this is clearly pertinent, especially given the ominous and omnipresent resonance of the events of the Second Punic War in the background of the Carthago Nova play that I have been tracing here, it is a very big question to take up in such short space. My final remarks therefore go in a different direction. For there is another, somewhat surprising element of *The Second Scipio* which could provide us with the final clue to solving Calderón's allegory of kingship that I will now briefly consider, rounding off this discussion with some conjectures on Calderón's 'feminist' Scipiography.

As already intimated, the play presents its Scipio in a thoroughly positive light as an exemplum of gentlemanly behaviour, all in accordance with the Continence or Magnanimity of Scipio tradition. Thus, when he learns about his soldiers' abuse of the group of local women who have been expelled from Carthago Nova by their compatriots, for example, the general reacts with violent indignation and rebuke.[32] Like a knight in shining armour, he comes to the rescue of the local women thereby securing their loyalty toward himself and explicating what appears to be a cardinal point in the play, namely that whosoever acts respectfully with women will be duly rewarded.[33] Indeed, the

[31] See the description of this taboo in Kluge 2014, 184, as "the systematic, conscious, and critical confrontation and even repression of deterministic and pessimistic patterns of thought."

[32] Calderón 1969, 1415: "ESCIPIÓN […] Pues ¿como, villanos, cómo,/ infames, viles, aleves,/ ignoráis el natural/ respeto que se les debe/ a las mujeres en todo/ trance, sean las que fueran?" ["SCIPIO How, villains, how/ wretches, despicables, traitors,/ can you ignore the natural/ respect owed to/ women at any cost whoever they are?"]. Cf. also 1416: "ESCIPIÓN […] pues no puede ser valiente/ con los hombres quien no es/ cobarde con las mujeres." ["SCIPIO For he who is not a coward with women / cannot be valiant with men."]

[33] Calderón 1969, 1433-1434. This is a longer passage of which I will only quote the last part: "FLAVIA […] y todas en tu defensa/ moriremos; porque el mundo/ […]/ vea cuánto miente quien,/ de cobardes nos moteja/ y de desagradecidas;/ pues verá cuánto resueltas,/ ya fieramente apacibles,/ ya apaciblemente fieras,/ damos asunto a la fama/ para que en plumas y lenguas/ diga en nuestro manifesto/ a las edades eternas/ que en favor de quien nos honra/ y contra quien nos afrenta/ hubo mujeres que lidien/ y mujeres que agradezcan." ["FLAVIA. […] and we all will die defending/ you, so that the world/ […]/ may see how that person lies who/ labels us cowards/ and ungrateful;/ for they will see how decisive,/ sometimes fiercely peaceful,/ sometimes peacefully fierce,/ we give Fame things to report/ so that in feathers and in tongues/ she will proclaim/ to the eternal ages/ that in favour of those who honour us/

local women saved by Scipio in various ways prove essential in his final taking of Carthago Nova. Slighted by king Magón, who underestimated not only their strategic perceptiveness but also their physical power and not the least their vindictiveness, Flavia and her female companions provide Scipio with the local know-how he needs in order to set in just the right attack. Yet this victory is not enough for the women of Carthago Nova. After the surrender of their city, they presumably attack and kill their male compatriots in a state of frenzy:[34]

TODAS	¿Dónde vais, cobardes?,	WOMEN	Where are you going, cowards?
MAGÓN	Adonde puestos a los pies de Escipión, queremos que su real pecho a merced nos dé las vidas.	MAGÓN	To place ourselves at the feet of Scipio, hoping that his royal chest will mercifully save our lives.
FLAVIA	Pues nosotras no queremos sino que todos muráis a nuestras manos, primero que sus piedades escuchen vuestros míseros lamentos.	FLAVIA	Well, we women want that all you men die at our hands, before his piety listens to your miserable laments.
MAGÓN	¡Vosotras contra la patria!	MAGÓN	You against the fatherland!
TODAS	No es patria la que del seno nos arroja.	WOMEN	That which cast us from its bosom is no fatherland.
FLAVIA	Ahora veréis si somos para el manejo de las armas.	FLAVIA	Now you will see if we can manage arms.
TODAS	Mueran todos.	WOMEN	Let them all die.
FLAVIA	A ellos, Libia.	FLAVIA	Take them, Libia.
LIBIA	Flavia, a ellos.	LIBIA	Flavia, take them.[35]

Like wild Amazons, the women of Carthago Nova revenge themselves on the men who thought little of them and instead they assist the enemy in his imperial enterprise. Scipio in turn repays them by raising their social and political status, declaring that "from this day, the women of Carthago shall have

and against those who insult us/ there were women who battled/ and women who were thankful."]

[34] I say "presumably" because there is no stage direction describing such a massacre yet the Carthaginian men do not appear on stage after this point.

[35] Calderón 1969, 1440.

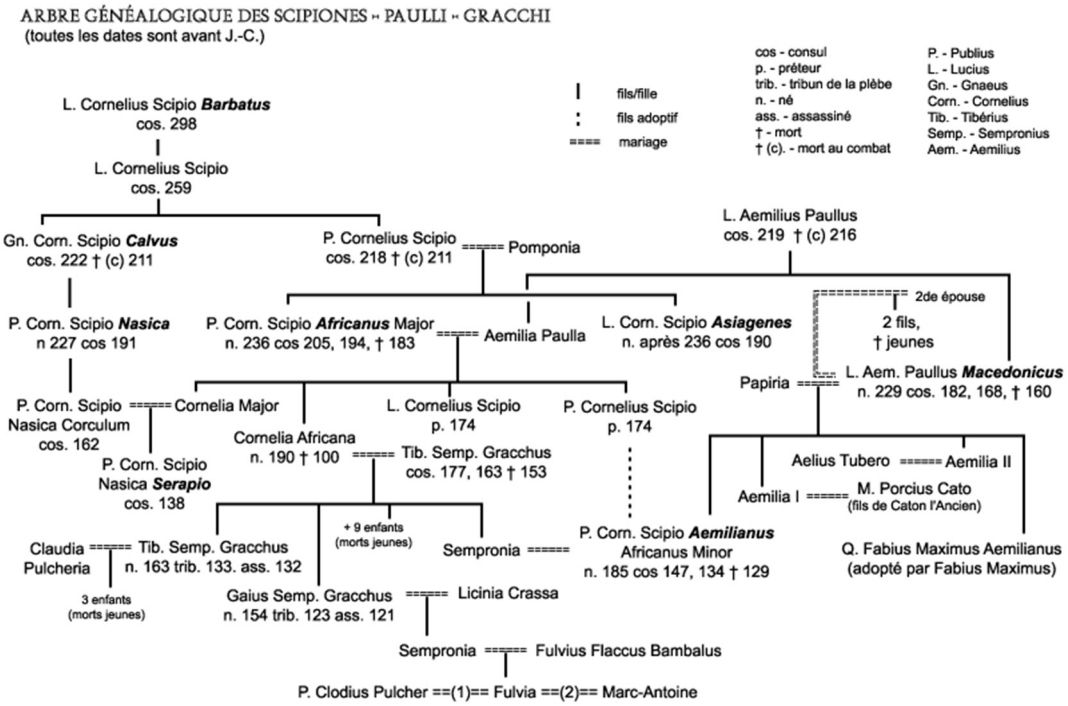
special privileges".[36] In *The Second Scipio*, the courtesy and magnanimity toward women that was a central element of the Continence or Magnanimity of Scipio tradition thus goes hand in hand with a mind-blowing vindication of women's significance which, in turn, ties in with the play's covert engagement with the destiny of Sophonisba.

For though it does not once mention this great tragic female character by name, the play's figural-counterfactual historiography and 'feminist' reappraisal of the place of women in history surreptitiously vindicates the ill-fated Carthaginian. Whereas other European dramatists feasted on the suffering and death of the magnanimous but helpless African heroine, variously holding her up as an example to be pitied or despised, Calderón's figural and counterfactual take on the Scipio-material allowed for a potential re-potentiation of the figure, not only redeeming her presage – Arminda – but also investing her sisters with the power to take charge of history. In *The Second Scipio*, the message to the royal audience seems to be that male decision-makers should take heed of the women surrounding them. With this recognition, we may at long last have the final clue to decoding Calderón's fascinating allegory of kingship: The "actual, real, and definitive" person presaged by the first and the second Sophonisbas.

Carlos II – who had just turned 16 when the play was performed before him in the Royal Palace in Madrid on a November evening in 1677 – would certainly have been expected to marry soon and indeed he did, tying the knot with the daughter of the French king, Marie Louise d'Orléans, in 1679. As a piece of advice to the young man, the elderly dramatist may have wished to suggest to him that he look to the "second" Scipio's noble behaviour toward women in order to have the "second" Sophonisba, the one with the happy ending. Calderón most likely did not know whom Carlos' elder brother, Juan José of Austria, who conducted the marriage negotiations, projected as the future queen of Spain, but with his sophisticated court play he delivered this essential coming-of-age message.

[36] Calderón 1969, 1441: "ESCIPIÓN […] tendrán desde hoy/ especiales privilegios/ las mujeres de Carthago".

Appendix 1



Source: Wikimedia Commons

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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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A Fickle Power-crazed Seductress:

Misogyny and Republicanism in Late Seventeenth-century Venetian Representation of Sophonisba[1]

By Enrico Zucchi

Sophonisba was a sort of cult figure in sixteenth-century Venetian literature since the publication of Trissino's tragedy, in which she appears a heroine of liberty, ready to sacrifice everything in order to be kept in Rome as a slave. The long afterlife of Trissino's Sofonisba *undergoes a drastic change in the second half of the seventeenth-century Venice, when theatric plays and novels began to shape her as a very different character: in that framework the Carthaginian noblewoman suddenly becomes a fickle seductress and a power-crazed woman. This article addresses the political and aesthetical reasons that lie behind this upheaval.*

The *Fortleben* of the myth of Sophonisba in Renaissance Venice, and in Italy more generally, is closely linked to Gian Giorgio Trissino's first regular tragedy, *Sofonisba*. Conceived between 1514 and 1515 by Trissino—a humanist born in Vicenza, on the mainland of the Venetian Republic— and published in July 1524 and reprinted more than twenty times in the subsequent century, *Sofonisba* pivoted upon the story of the Carthaginian noblewoman. The tragedy saw great success in the entire Venetian domain, despite being originally published in Rome and devoted to the Pope Leone X. Between 1529 and 1609 four editions of the tragedy appeared in Vicenza,[2] with twelve reprints in Venice during the same time.[3] Testifying to the work's appeal in sixteenth-century Venice, these figures also help explain why the

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[2] They were published in 1529 by the publisher Ianiculo; in 1585 by Brescia; in 1606 again by Brescia; and by Lori and Cescato in 1609.

[3] The Venetian editions were published in 1549 by Bindoni; in 1553, 1562, 1585, 1586 by Giolito; in 1562 by Rampazetto; in 1569 by Maggio and Salicato; in 1576 by Guglielmo; in 1582 by Salicato; in 1585 and 1587 by Cavalcalupo; and in 1595 by Bonibelli.

image of Sophonisba it outlined—a heroic virago embodying an inflexible *libido libertatis*—suddenly became the prototypical, iconic depiction in Renaissance Venetian literature. Indeed, the heroic veneer Trissino assigned his heroine perfectly suited the cultural and political agenda of the Serenissima Republic. In contrast to Livy's historical account, in which Sophonisba figures as a minor character and spoil of war over which Syphax, Massinissa and the Romans contended, and to the fourteenth-century versions of the characters created by Boccaccio, who depicts her as a symbol of feminine strength,[4] and Petrarch, who depicted her as an archetype of the troubled lover,[5] Trissino's protagonist conveyed a political message ideally aligned with one of the cornerstones of Venetian propaganda. Indeed, Trissino's heroine, a brave woman represented as ready to do whatever it takes, even committing suicide to defend her liberty and avoid being taken to Rome as a slave, stands out as one of the most celebrated symbols of the Republic, which considered liberty its principal key-value. Yet, Sophonisba was ready to sacrifice everything *but* her liberty, embodying a cornerstone of the Venetian ideology, based on the defense of political liberty and independency at all costs.[6]

Something drastically changed between 1620 and 1723: Trissino's *Sofonisba* stopped being reprinted, the tragedy was no longer staged,[7] and the protagonist of Livy's tale saw a sudden metamorphosis, taking on a gloomier shade in the Venetian context, for instance, in Gaudenzio Brunacci's successful 1661 novel *Sofonisba, o vero le vicende del fato* [Sophonisba, or rather the events of Fate][8], where the Carthaginian heroine appears as a fickle, lustful, power-crazed seductress. What shifted Sophonisba away from the center of the Venetian literary pantheon? What motivated this complete

[4] Chapter 68 of Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (1361) is devoted to "Sophonisba, queen of Numidia". On Boccaccio's Sophonisba as a heroine of liberty and model for the humanistic woman, see Filosa 2012, 168-172; González Rolán 2014. On the *Fortleben* of this genre of depictions of illustrious women in the Medieval and Renaissance Italian literary tradition, see Caputo 2008.

[5] Petrarch introduced Sophonisba in three of his major works: in the fifth book of the epic poem in Latin *Africa*, written between 1337 and 1343; in the Latin treatise *De viris illustribus*, finished in 1351, and in his *Trionfi*, an Italian poem in *terzine*, modeled on Dante's *Commedia*, written between 1356 and 1374. On the relevance of Sophonisba in Petrarch's poetry, see Bartuschat 2000.

[6] On the myth of original liberty, on which Venice's republican power was established in the Medieval and early modern period, see Bouwsma 1968; Venturi 1978; Zanetto 1991; Infelise 2002.

[7] Trissino's tragedy was represented at the Castle of Blois in 1556, in Vicenza in 1562 and then in 1710, at the Teatro San Luca in Venice by Luigi Riccoboni's theatric company; on this point see Castorina 2016, 133-134.

[8] All the translations of Italian texts into English here published are mine.

revision of a character which, until the end of the sixteenth century, had fully embodied the struggle for liberty characterizing the political self-representation of the Republic?

My essay addresses precisely these questions by investigating the reasons for this radical change in the image of Sophonisba in seventeenth-century Venice, when Syphax's wife was transformed from the emblem of republicanism to a symbol of the fragility of power—evidence that even the rich and powerful can become impoverished slaves—of the inconstancy of women, and of the divine punishment for immoderate political ambition.

Sophonisba in seventeenth-century Venice

Few texts in seventeenth-century Italian literature are devoted to the story of Sophonisba. Those that do address this figure belong mostly to the theater and were all published in the second half of the century, mainly in Venice and Rome. The first, and probably the most original among them, is the above-mentioned novel by Brunacci, *Sofonisba, o vero le vicende del Fato*, which was published in Venice in 1661. Brunacci was born in Monte Nuovo in the Marche in 1631 and studied medicine at the Università la Sapienza in Rome. As a physician he moved to Venice in 1660 and became the friend of several scholars and poets belonging to the local academy, the Accademia degli Incogniti. It was probably thanks to the encouragement of these new Venetian friends, and in particular of the prince—that is to say the leader—of the Accademia, Giovan Francesco Loredan, that Brunacci wrote his first novel, which centered on the story of Sophonisba as depicted by Livy.

From its foundation, the Accademia degli Incogniti was characterized by particular interest in the genre of the novel, which it conceived as a perfect tool for appealing to contemporary literary taste while also offering readers moral teachings.[9] If this aim of *miscere utile dulci* had been taken up in the past by the Aristotelian genre of tragedy, or more generally by classicist literature—such as the epic or heroic poetry, which were relaunched in sixteenth-century Italy[10]—the *Incogniti* considered the *romanzo*, written in prose and without any restrictions in the choice of the topic, more suited to this task. Authors such as Maiolino Bisaccioni, Girolamo Brusoni and

[9] On the relaunch of the genre of the novel by the Academy of the Incogniti, see Mancini 1982; Lattarico 2012, 121-152.

[10] The classicist epic tradition was re-established in sixteenth-century Italy, by Trissino himself – who authored the epic poem *L'Italia liberata dai Goti* (1547) – but mainly by Torquato Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberata* (1575-1581), which adapted classicist tensions to the mannerist taste of his time. On the Renaissance Italian epic, see Javitch 1999; Jossa 2002.

Loredan himself not only wrote original novels but also translated contemporary novels by French and Spanish authors.[11]

These novels, based on the Bible or on ancient or contemporary history,[12] put ethics at the heart of fiction. Before the outbreak of the War of Candia (1645-1669), during which the Turks conquered the rich Venetian settlement on the Mediterranean, the academy's novels had been characterized by the breaking of moral rules: plots were full of erotic episodes demonstrating a philosophy of libertinism and a strong, political anti-papalism. At that time the Republic of Venice was a leading force in the Mediterranean and in Europe too, but when the Turks started to attack the Venetian possessions in the Greek sea—besieging Cyprus and the city of Candia, that were part of the Venetian dominion—to become the only policy able to control the commerce in the Mediterranean, Venice faced a slow decline, ending with the fall of the Republic in 1797. Venice's strength and richness was based mainly on its commercial expansion in the Mediterranean, and the war that led to the loss of Candia, conquered in 1669 by the Turks, was catastrophic for the republican economy, and downsized the political ambitions of the Serenissima.

With the advent of war even the cultural framework rapidly changed. Venetian authors were asked to be more engaged in that conflict, conceived also as a religious clash, and Loredan and his colleagues started publishing novels very different to the past, inspired by a rigidly sententious moralism, condemning any transgression of the ethic and religious tradition.[13] Brunacci's work stands out within this period, which has been brilliantly defined, in a label that underlines the intrinsic ambiguity of the Accademia's cultural program, as the penitential phase [*fase penitenziale*[14]] of the

[11] Maiolino Bisaccioni translated several French contemporary novels by Madeleine de Scudéry, Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, and Gauthier de La Calprenède whereas Loredan translated novels by Jean-Pierre Camus and Jean Le Maire.

[12] For instance, Loredan's celebrated novel *Adamo* (1640), focused on the story of the first man as depicted in the book of *Genesis*, but the same author also published novels centered on early modern and contemporary history, including the epistolary work *Ribellione e morte del Volestain* (1634) and an account of the military leader Albrecht von Wallenstein, who had died a few months earlier. On the connection between history and the novel in the seventeenth-century Italian literature, see Carminati – Nider 2007, and Lattarico 2012, 79-120.

[13] Matteo Casini describes this period, going from the war of Cyprus in 1570 to the war of Morea (1699), passing from the conflict of Candia, as a time in which took place "vast and complex forms of exaltation and autocelebration of the Most Serene Republic and her men, through public festivals, prints, paintings, booklets, poems and architecture", Casini 2010, 177. Indeed, in the years of Candia literature and theater were particularly encouraged by the Venetian politics to establish a new representation of the Republic, aimed to be displayed not only to the Venetian citizens but also outside of the republican borders.

[14] Metlica 2011, 8.

Incogniti. Modeled on the moral novels belonging to Loredan's late work, *Sofonisba* was originally devoted to the prince of the Incogniti, but when he died suddenly, a few months before the publication of the book, Brunacci chose to dedicate his volume to the nobleman Giuseppe Ganassa. In his *Avviso al lettore* [Notice to the reader] Brunacci argues that his novel is more remarkable for the moral lesson it offers than for its style, since the author was more interested in the reader's good than his pleasure.[15]

Though in the preface of the novel Brunacci considers Sophonisba a heroic character who proves that some women can manifest bravery,[16] since she chooses suicide at the end of the story, the female protagonist of the work is often described negatively: indeed, Brunacci's heroine becomes associated with the opposite of the renowned virago celebrated by Trissino's tragedy. Endowed with outstanding beauty, Sophonisba—who is described in detail with the author pausing not only on her face but also on her breasts[17] with the typical erotic allusions employed by the Incogniti—is presented as a Carthaginian Helen of Troy: all the citizens of Africa are enamored with her, and people fall in love even just looking at her portrait.[18] Both Syphax and Massinissa, two of the most powerful African kings, are strongly charmed by her: the latter, after having seen her portrait, moved to Carthage to meet her and once their eyes met, the two fell in love.

Here Brunacci introduces the first twist in the story: contrarily to what happened in Livy's *Ab urbe condita*, in his account Sophonisba was already engaged to the Carthaginian nobleman Hanno, and when she met Massinissa, she leaves Hanno without compunction, choosing the new suitor due to her ambition to become queen of the great Numidian kingdom. Sophonisba's

[15] "Non tutti scrivono per mostrare l'altezza de' concetti e la singolarità del suo stile. Non si può dilettare e avvertire. Ho più preteso, Lettore, che il tuo gusto, il tuo bene. Non si possono preparare gli antidoti per genio della gola, e per salute del Corpo" [Not every author writes to show the heights of his ideas and the originality of his style. It is impossible to amuse and teach at the same time. Dear reader, I looked more to your good, than to your taste. It is impossible to prepare medicines which are as tasty as they are healthy] Brunacci 1661, 12.

[16] "Fu anch'ella un'Heroe, a cui si diè l'esser di virile la magnanimità, e la constanza. Ad onta della natura, che formolla femina, mostrò che anche in un petto di donna regnano le risoluzioni di huomo. La delicatezza delle membra, e il lusso barbarico, non poterono renderla sì effeminata che temesse la morte" [She was a hero too, since she had the typical masculine magnanimity and constancy. In spite of Nature, which created her as a woman, she proved to the world that even in a feminine breast can be found a virile bravery. The delicacy of her limbs did not forbid her from being brave enough not to fear death] Brunacci 1661, 13.

[17] Brunacci 1661, 22.

[18] This is a typical Baroque literary feature, that leads the author to prove his rhetorical competence through the use of ekphrasis. On the literary exploitation of the ekphrasis in the seventeenth-century Italian literature, see Daskas 2019, 51-52; De Min 2021.

inconstancy and the unreliability of women in general, is condemned by Brunacci for hundreds of pages. Indeed, as soon as Syphax arrives in Carthage, displaying his exceptional riches to win the heart of the beautiful lady, Sophonisba seems prone to switch yet again to a new lover. In Brunacci's story, both Syphax and Massinissa are victims of Sophonisba's fickleness and ambition: just like Helen in Troy, she causes conflicts and betrayals that lead the various African governments into ruin.

Brunacci's novel thus refocuses the type of attention given to Sophonisba and inspired several rewritings in subsequent years. Though it is not clear whether Pierre Corneille read Brunacci's novel while writing his play, in which Sophonisba appears with several of the negative features already introduced by *Sofonisba*, it is more certain that other Venetian texts took Brunacci's work as a primary source of inspiration. For instance, in 1664 Nicolò Minato, the famous author of *drammi per musica* who debuted on the Venetian stage in 1650 with the play *Orimonte*, wrote a play entitled *Scipione Affricano*, set to music by Francesco Cavalli. In this *dramma*, Minato celebrated not only the virtue of Scipio, who appears the prototype of the perfect ruler, able to overcome his personal feelings for the good of the community, but also introduced Sophonisba as the protagonist of a secondary subplot. Here, after Syphax, conquered by Massinissa's army, is abducted and jailed in a high tower, the Carthaginian noblewoman, though still in love with Syphax, agrees to live as a concubine of Massinissa in exchange for protection from the fury of the Romans. Minato's version presents Sophonisba less negatively than Brunacci, but in his play she is far less heroic than in Trissino's tragedy. In order to avoid falling into the hands of Scipio, she is ready to forget her husband and accept the dishonorable condition of concubine: she is not brave enough to commit suicide—Minato's happy ending, due to the theatrical convention of the genre, made this action unnecessary—and does not even express a strong desire for liberty. Once she understands that Syphax is still alive, she is so happy that she agrees to relinquish her freedom and go to Rome as a slave together with her husband.[19]

[19] "Mentre vivo ti trovo amato sposo / al vincitor romano / cedo la libertà, nulla resisto, / che perdita non fò, ma dolce acquisto" [Finally I found you still alive, my beloved husband! Now I can give up my freedom to the Roman winner, I won't resist, since with you this is not a loss, but a sweet recovery], Minato 1664, 72. For a literary and musicologist interpretation of Minato's play and of his plays based on Roman history, see Stangalino 2019; now the text can be read also in a recent new edition: Cavalli – Minato 2022. A political interpretation of Minato's play is given by Schulze 2008, according to whom Minato re-uses the Roman heritage to boost the republican identity of baroque Venice. His considerations about Venetian dramaturgy as programmatically anti-monarchical seem less convincing: there is not, in seventeenth-century Europe, a strong ideological opposition between monarchical and republican politics, see on this point Zucchi 2022.

A third Venetian rewriting of the story appeared in 1708: Francesco Silvani, a Venetian dramatist who published more than forty *libretti* between 1682 and 1718, published a play version of *Sofonisba* set to music by Antonio Caldara which was performed in the renowned Teatro Grimani. Silvani's text blended elements drawn from Brunacci's novel with others taken from Minato's *dramma per musica*. Here Sophonisba is still considered a temptress, a Carthaginian Helen who caused the ruin first of Syphax and then of Massinissa, driving them in a hopeless conflict with the far more powerful Roman army. Still, as in Minato's play, there is a happy ending: Sophonisba does not commit suicide, and Scipio displays his great clemency and generosity, and the Roman consul splits the African kingdom in two, making Massinissa and Syphax kings of the two governments provided they swear allegiance to the Roman Senate.[20] At the conclusion of Silvani's play, Sophonisba turns out to be a secondary character, even if the play is titled *Sofonisba*: both Syphax and Massinissa are highly rewarded by Scipio, whereas the female protagonist obtains nothing from Scipio's liberality, nor does the author clarify whether she stays with Massinissa or returns to Syphax.

Brunacci's novel thus emerges as the real driving force that allowed Venetian culture to reclaim the character of Sophonisba, relaunching a female literary myth that had been disregarded for over a century. Yet, adaptation of the figure of Sophonisba to the cultural program of the Incogniti entailed a totally different conceptualization of the African heroine, which was introduced to symbolize the inconstancy of women, teach the reader that everything in the world is precarious—even great queens can suddenly lose all their possessions—demonstrate that following political ambition without limits can be dangerous.

Venetian musical theater fully exploited the figure of Sophonisba relaunched by Brunacci, and examining the plays, it is clear that they were looking to the seventeenth-century novel and not to Trissino's celebrated tragedy. Though these theatrical renderings of the heroine are not as negative as Brunacci's text, she still loses both her heroic bravery and her passion for liberty that characterized the sixteenth-century version of the story. The plays, following the policy that governed Venetian musical theater at the time and staying within the rigid conventions of the genre, eschewed any gloomy allusion to suicide or political rebellion, making Sophonisba a secondary character, the protagonist of an erotic subplot, and organizing the plot around the character of Scipio. These Venetian rewritings of Sophonisba's narrative suggest that in the late seventeenth-century the Carthaginian noblewoman

[20] Silvani 1708, 69-70.

figured as only a background figure in the story of the great Roman general, who becomes the only positive character in both Brunacci's novel and theatrical plays. Compared to her previous Italian version, somehow this later Sophonisba has lost her identity, since her thirst for liberty and bravery has disappeared. Yet she has lost also her relevance: even when her name appears in the title of these texts, in fact she is only the protagonist of an erotic subplot.

Sophonisba beyond Venice

In the last decades of the seventeenth century, Italian literary works migrated the recently refashioned character of Sophonisba beyond Venice: still the Venetian models—and in particular those from Brunacci's novel and Minato's play—had a strong impact on the following plays published in other areas of Northern Italy and in Rome. Vibrant proof of the success of Venetian literature on Sophonisba is the 1671 publication of a libretto in Rome, devoted to Queen Christina of Sweden—the most influential theater patron in Rome at the time—which fully reproduced Minato's text, though the author of the Venetian play is never mentioned.[21]

Although Brunacci's and Minato's works are the models for the rewritings of Livy's story published outside Venice, not all the plays centered on Sophonisba merely replicate that Venetian literature. On the contrary, two plays published between 1674 and 1677 attempt to undermine the negative, or at least ambiguous representation of Sophonisba offered by Brunacci and Minato: Ettore Bonacossi's libretto *Il Massinissa*, which appeared in Ferrara in 1674, and Father Valcerca's *Gli sventurati sposi*, a tragedy in prose printed in Brescia in 1677. These literary works, authored by two minor authors—Bonacossi published two librettos in Ferrara, and Valcerca was a little-known priest whose only published work was this tragedy, aimed to restore the image of Sophonisba challenging the Venetian rewriting of the story. It was Petrarch's account, both in the Latin epic poem *Africa* and in the Italian *terzine* of the *Trionfi*, that drove this reaction against the representation of the Carthaginian noblewoman as an opportunistic seductress. So, it seems that also privileging certain sources rather than other, Petrarch in lieu of Livy, bears some clear differences in the representation of Sophonisba's character.

Once again, seventeenth-century authors seem to have ignored Trissino's tragedy. Indeed, unlike in the pages of Livy and Trissino, in Bonacossi's and in Valcerca's dramatic works Sophonisba is not represented as the wife of Syphax, forced by Fate to marry Massinissa against her will, but as the

[21] The libretto, titled *Scipione Affricano*, was published by the editor Mascardi. On the theater patronage of Christina of Sweden, see Morelli 1997; Zucchi 2017; Zucchi 2020.

miserable lover of Massinissa, compelled to marry Syphax to comply with the *raison d'état*.

Already in her first appearance on stage in Bonacossi's *Massinissa*, Sophonisba pleads that she is victim of the state, in that her father Asdrubal is obliging her to marry Syphax—even though she is still married to her beloved Massinissa—in order to break up the Masaesyli's alliance with the Romans.

> De la Patria a politici interessi
> per mantener Cartago è dunque d'uopo
> ch'io sia lassa lo scopo?
> Per quai falli commessi,
> per qual severa legge, e non più udita,
> Donna ammogliata ancora
> ad un nuovo amator si rimarita?[22]
>
> So, to preserve Carthage, it is necessary that I sacrifice myself, pandering to the political interests of my homeland? Which fault have I committed to deserve such a rigid punishment? Which law so strict and inconceivable compels a still married woman to re-marry with another man?

In Bonacossi's play Massinissa and Sophonisba are true lovers: Massinissa refuses to marry Syphax's sister in compensation for his loss, and Sophonisba does not accept her new husband, to the frustration of Syphax. The Carthaginian noblewoman often vents her anger toward her father and her homeland, considering herself as an object of trade in strategic alliances or for men attempting to ingratiate themselves with their enemies. When she asks for Massinissa's pardon, after having explained that her father forced her to re-marry Syphax, Sophonisba argues that she has been raped by her homeland:

> Massinissa a tuoi piedi ecco colei,
> che da contraria sorte
> rea fatta vien, non dagli errori suoi,
> rimproverar mi puoi,
> che tua pria stata sia, doppo d'altrui;
> ma qual colpa è la mia
> se da la patria violentata fui?[23]
>
> Massinissa, after an unfavorable Fate and not my actions, made me guilty, I am here at your feet. You can reproach me, because I have been first yours, and then of someone else: but where is my fault, if I have

[22] Bonacossi 1674, 10-11.
[23] Bonacossi 1674, 31.

> been raped by my homeland and obliged to behave in such a mistaken way?

Unlike Minato's play, Bonacossi's ending is not happy at all. After Massinissa has defeated Syphax and reconquered his wife, Scipio demands Massinissa leave Sophonisba, arguing that he should not surrender to his passions and that love cannot be an obstacle for those looking for everlasting glory. Thus, the Numidian king sends a vial of poison to Sophonisba, who bravely commits suicide to avoid being taken to Rome as a slave. Here, contrary to Trissino's tragedy, Sophonisba's leading characteristic is not the struggle for liberty but her disappointment with her homeland. The freedom she claims is not that of eschewing servitude to the Roman senate but her personal liberty; the injustice is that of being forced to re-marry against her will.

Valcerca's tragedy *Gli sventurati sposi* also depicts true love between Massinissa and Sophonisba, a love that Asdrubal, the father of the noblewoman, is happy to endorse by giving Massinissa his daughter's hand. The major virtue which the author associates with the character of Sophonisba is her modesty: clearly alluding to Brunacci's novel, where the heroine is described as an African Helen, Valcerca instead fashions Sophonisba as an anti-Helen. When she hesitates and complains to her father and the Senate because they have forced her to marry Syphax, Asdrubal reproaches Sophonisba her modesty as exaggerated, trying to persuade her to sacrifice her body to the state:

> Vorrete voi dunque qual nuova Elena essere la ruina della vostra Patria? Quella perché troppo lasciva, voi perché troppo casta?[24]

> So, do you want to cause the ruin of our homeland, like a new Helen? She destroyed Troy because she was much too lustful, whereas you are much too modest!

Sophonisba refuses any compromise and is ready to go to war alongside Massinissa in order to be remembered as a model of feminine loyalty,[25] but her braveness cannot circumvent the tragic conclusion of the story: Massinissa, who wins the conflict and is an ally of the Romans, sends her a vial of poison, after learning that the Romans would never accept their marriage. Sophonisba, therefore, kills herself without fear.

What lies behind this second shift in the reception of Sophonisba? Certainly, far from Venice and from the influence of the Incogniti, these authors are not susceptible to its cultural agenda, which was underpinned not

[24] Valcerca 1677, 103.
[25] Valcerca 1677, 118.

only by misogyny but also by the search for originality. In line with the general features of Baroque poetics, the Incogniti academy, operating at the heart of the Italian Baroque period, strategically aimed to amaze and displace the reader. At the time, a conflict was arising between ancient and modern literature, especially in Italy,[26] and Brunacci's novel intended to overturn classical history by converting Sophonisba into a lustful woman.[27]

On the contrary, in the last quarter of the century, such poetics seemed outdated: Italian culture was moving toward the Arcadian age, establishing a new basis for a different literature inspired by Petrarch and the Renaissance *petrarchisti* and characterized by a much more classicist attitude.[28] In this sense, we can read Bonacossi and Valcerca as using Petrarch—and in particular the *Trionfi* version of the story of Sophonisba—to redeem the Carthaginian noblewoman from the unjustified inference of Brunacci, who was considered insolent and hostile towards Petrarch.

However, what is most striking in this survey of Italian late-seventeenth century rewritings of the story of Sophonisba, is the fact that there is not a coherent representation of the heroine. Turning to the last play of the century devoted to this subject we in fact find a text much more aligned with the story told by Brunacci than with the other non-Venetian works. This anonymous libretto titled *La Sofonisba* was published in Rome in 1681 for theatrical representation at the Collegio Clementino, an elite school established by Pope Clement VIII in 1595 for the young children of the Roman aristocracy which had a long tradition of putting on tragedies and musical plays written by teachers and performed by students, who learnt moral lessons from the staging of these works. This perhaps makes it less surprising that this *Sofonisba* staged at the Collegio Clementino contains several links to the Incogniti's novel, which also stressed moral attitudes.[29] The misogynic component of Incogniti culture also seems to have resonated in the context of that religious school for male only students.

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[26] On the quarrel between the Ancients and Moderns in Italy, in addition to the classical book of Fumaroli 2001, see Salvatore 1987.

[27] Lodovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* memorably portrays this literary tendency to revise history in its 35th canto, when Saint John argues that writers always betray historical truth in their fiction, since the war of Troy was actually won by the Trojans and Penelope was a prostitute and not a loyal wife: "E se tu vuoi che 'l ver non ti sia ascoso, / tutta al contrario l'istoria converti: / che i Greci rotti, e che Troia vittrice, / e che Penelopea fu meretrice" *Orlando Furioso* XXXV 27, 5-8 [If you want the truth, turn the story around: actually Greeks were defeated, and the Trojans won the war, and Penelope was in fact a whore].

[28] On Italian poetics at that time, see Quondam 1973; Viola 2001; Zucchi 2019.

[29] On the theatrical productions of the Collegio Clementino in the late seventeenth-century Rome, see Andreetti 2001.

In this play, Sophonisba is married to Syphax but accepts another marriage with Massinissa, in order to avoid being carried to Rome as a spoil of war. When Syphax comes back as a defeated king to Carthage, Sophonisba refuses to talk to him, informing him that he is unwelcome at her court. Syphax reproaches her for her inconstancy, but she gets angry, demanding more deference, since she is now a queen and he has been defeated.[30] The anonymous author describes Sophonisba as a mean seductress, an opportunistic woman driven only by ambition for the throne who easily forgets her first husband to marry another man more powerful than the first. Her words are exactly the opposite of those pronounced by Bonacossi's or Valcerca's Sophonisba: she is not a victim of the reason of state but rather exploits state power without regret.[31] Inspired by a Theodicean dramatic project, in the end of the play, Sophonisba, a Machiavellian character, is sentenced. She in fact remains the only truly negative character: after having ingested the poison, she falls dead on stage, whereas Syphax and Massinissa, understanding that they behaved unfairly to one another, make truce and hug in front of Sophonisba's cadaver.

Leaving aside the bizarreness of the conclusion, it is clear that the author of the Roman play was fascinated by Brunacci's version of the story and chose to reproduce the plot of the novel, finding it suitable instruction for young Roman students on the dangers of excessive ambition—which is always punished by God in the end—and as a cautionary tale about the female faithlessness and their shameful power of seduction.

Fate, Misogyny and Political Ambition: the reasons behind the seventeenth-century rewriting of Sophonisba

The survey conducted so far has demonstrated that there was room in the second half of the seventeenth century in Italy for a complete re-negotiation of the symbolical meaning of Sophonisba's story. This rewriting of the Carthaginian noblewoman in novels and the theater of the time was not guided by a single focus. Yet, after being forgotten for almost a century, the African heroine moved to the center of a wide debate which yielded multiple representations of Sophonisba in Venice and Rome as a seductress driven by exaggerated ambition, elsewhere in Northern Italy as a victim of the state forced by her homeland away from the man she loves.

While these two literary traditions differ greatly, all the seventeenth-century rewritings of Livy's tale have two things in common. The first is that

[30] Clementino 1681, 49.

[31] "Ragion di stato mi consigliò a farmi, e del Trono e del Talamo consorte di Massinissa" [The Reason of State recommended me to marry Massinissa and to become queen], Clementino 1681, 85.

they repudiate the text that deeply influenced the Italian *Fortleben* of the myth of Sophonisba, Trissino's tragedy. Trissino's play is never mentioned by any of these authors nor is its details reproduced. The second common element is that Sophonisba is no longer described as a *mulier illustris*, as in the Medieval tradition. According to Boccaccio she represented the perfect example of feminine virtue, able to demonstrate to his patriarchal society that women were able to behave as nobly and honestly as men. Against the radically sexist attitudes of the Christian Church, which considered Eve's descendants the archetype of human evil—vicious seductresses, too weak to resist the world's temptations—Boccaccio created a pantheon of noble women taken from classical history and literature who demonstrated precisely the opposite. However, seventeenth-century literature about Sophonisba rarely stresses this point of feminine virtue; more often, especially in Venice, the Carthaginian woman is staged as an example of female depravation. Yet, if seventeenth-century authors disregarded the category of the *mulier claris*, they all agreed that Sophonisba embodied another Medieval type: that of *casibus virorum illustrium*, the fallen nobleman.

This image recurs in Brunacci's novel, especially in the last section, which takes on a pedagogical tone in its description of the heroine's ruin. In opening this final section, the author pauses on Sophonisba as a case of the impact on human life of Fate's inclination to change the status of the great, warning readers with an ancient adage: "Saglia sovra di un trono chi vuol contemplare l'altezze maggiori delle cadute",[32] or, the more one ascends the social hierarchy, even if obtaining a throne, the more painful and noisy the downfall. Commenting on Sophonisba's misfortunes Brunacci, in his role as omniscient narrator, frames his heroine as a full embodiment of that Medieval axiom: "Ora scorgo che non per altro sei stata fatta regina, che per provare su' l colmo delle felicità l'ultimo grado dell'infelicità"[33] [Now I see that you [Sophonisba] have been made queen for no other reason than that of making you feel at the height of human happiness the worst degrees of unhappiness].

The supranatural entity guiding human events and distributing prizes and punishments, according to Brunacci, drew upon Sophonisba's life to show that wealth and power are only transitory values that can be taken away at any time. Such a moral was certainly in line with orthodox Christian views, but it also had a strong political content: the ambition of rising through the social ranks to obtain wealth and political privilege was highly risky and dangerous. Brunacci thus makes a clearly conservative statement representing the keystone of republican—and not only of the absolutist—

[32] Brunacci 1661, 131.
[33] Brunacci 1661, 142.

propaganda: the political *status quo ante* must be preserved at all costs.[34] Sophonisba's spectacular fall in this sense functions as a didactic tool. Brunacci's final words in the novel still focus on this point, reiterating the moral lesson for readers:

> Così passano in un punto le grandezze mortali, che solo ritrovano quiete ne' suoi moti. Così l'umana superbia è fatta ludibrio della fortuna, e gioco del tempo.[35]
>
> Thus, human heights, which are temporary and never solid, wear out in a moment. Thus, human arrogance is mocked by Fate and by the work of Time.

This moralistic warning, introduced by Brunacci in his version of Sophonisba's tale, is also used by Minato, whose play reproduces this sermonic sentiment. Minato's heroine complains twice that she is a victim of Fate, falling from the rank of queen to the humble status of servant: first in her initial appearance on stage and secondly in her monologue in the second act where she recalls her downward descent for the audience with a didactic aim.

> Tanto rigida
> sorte perfida
> contro me!
> Già regina, e adorata
> fui la gioia del mio Re.
> Hor cattiva e disprezzata
> calco nemico suol con servo piè.[36]
>
> Oh, how stiff and wicked was Fate against me! I was a beloved queen, the joy of my king; now I am a despised prisoner, who lives in a hostile land as a slave.

This stress on the transience of wealth and luck appears not only in Venetian literature about Sophonisba but also in plays that represented the African heroine in a radically different way. For instance, in Valcerca's *Gli sposi sventurati* Sophonisba is well aware of the precariousness of her wealth, and her first line underscores this consciousness: "Ricordati, Sofonisba," she exhorts herself, "se hor festeggi e canti, che son d'ogni piacer il fine i pianti"[37] [Remember, Sophonisba, that even if you are now partying and singing, every

[34] On the pursuit of a conservative politics based on maintenance of the *status quo ante* within the seventeenth-century republican agenda in Venice, Genoa and the Dutch Republic, see Zucchi 2022.

[35] Brunacci 1661, 187.

[36] Minato 1664, 6.

[37] Valcerca 1677, 27.

pleasure ends in tears]. This connection between Valcerca's play and the moral lesson offered by the Venetian authors is probably premised in Valcerca's religious background; still, in the seventeenth century this emphasis on the precariousness of Fate becomes a common, evocative feature of the story of Sophonisba. In fact, this refrain appears not only in Italian authors but also in other European plays on the subject: for instance, the Dutch tragedy *Sophonisba*, published in 1626 by Guillaume van Nieuwelandt, also centers on this sentence.[38]

However, if we look at the other two thematic points raised in the seventeenth-century rewriting of Sophonisba, love and politics, we find a much less homologous framework. As mentioned above, two opposing traditions of portraying the Carthaginian noblewoman emerge, both entwining love and politics despite their divergent representations. In the Venetian works (and also in Rome), Sophonisba is considered a *femme fatale*, who employs her exceptional beauty to obtain political advantages and is driven by her ambition to become queen; on the other hand, in Bonacossi and Valcerca, both inspired by Petrarch's *Trionfi*, she is a desperate lover betrayed by her government, used a mere political bargaining chip against her will.

Framing Sophonisba as a negative character in seventeenth-century Venice was not only an anti-classic choice also made by Corneille in his theatrical play on the subject. Indeed, conferring the qualities of fickle seductress and self-interested social climber on a female protagonist was fully in line with the misogynist cultural milieu of the Incogniti.[39] Several novels almost coeval with the publication of Brunacci's *Sofonisba* introduced not only wicked female characters but also depictions underscoring the heartlessness of women. Francesco Loredan's 1640 novel *Adamo*, for instance, offering a radically secular version of the story of the first Biblical couple Adam and Eve, assigned full blame to Eve for the human fall from earthly paradise. When Adam forbids Eve to eat the apples of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, she immediately feels the desire to transgress that order, since "il proibire alle donne è un destar in loro maggiormente l'appetito"[40] [to prohibit women from something means to amplify their natural wish for transgression]. Introducing a major change to the Biblical tale, Loredan then portrays Eve persuading the Devil to tempt her:[41] in this misogynic version

[38] On this point, see Gruijters 2013, 244.

[39] On the widespread misogyny in the Venetian Accademia degli Incogniti, see Beniscelli 2012, 380-390; Cosentino 2016, 47-48; Favaro 2017.

[40] Loredan 1640, 27.

[41] In the Italian text, Eve "persuade il demonio a tentarla", Loredan 1640, 27.

of the *Genesis* story it is Eve, and not the Devil, who constitutes the origin of human pain.[42]

Brunacci surely had in mind this representation authored by his master Loredan when writing *Sofonisba*, and in fact he intended to dedicate the work to him. Loredan was moreover not the only writer in this circle to introduce such representations of the feminine in his novels. Antonio Lupis, another figure in the world of the Incogniti who was very close to Brunacci—in fact, in the preface of *Sofonisba* Brunacci admits that Lupis encouraged him to write his novel[43]—also admirer of Loredan,[44] published a novel in 1660 entitled *Faustina*, devoted to the life of the daughter of the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius. In this work, Lupis describes the shadowy love stories of the feminine protagonist, driven by lust, starting the novel with this misogynist claim:

> Le donne sono state sempre un veleno della Natura. Non è gloria nel Mondo che fraposta in questa nube non habbia perduto il suo splendore. […] I loro trofei si restringono ne' capricci di un ago e pende solo la loro grandezza da un filo. […] Una beltà è bastante a corrompere i più floridi Senati e gl'innesti più illustri del Campidoglio.[45]
>
> Women have always been a poison of Nature. Every glorious thing in the World that has been infected by the feminine cloud has lost its splendor. Women's trophies are only in the whims of a needle, and their greatness depends only on a strand. A single feminine beauty is enough to corrupt the most prosperous Senates and the most illustrious delegates of the Capitol.

Thus, it is not surprising that Brunacci, who clearly looked to Lupis's novel in his own adaptation to contemporary Venetian culture of a subject taken from Latin sources, portrayed Sophonisba similarly to other female characters in the Incogniti's novels. Sentences like the one opening *Faustina* above are common also in Brunacci's *Sofonisba*, where the actions of the heroine are commented upon by the author in asides like this:

> L'ambizione è propria delle Donne. Dall'adorazione degl'amanti maggiormente presumono nella propria bellezza, e divengono più altiere nella loro superbia. [….] Nel regno d'Amore, in somma, è la prima massima il tradimento. La ragione non di stato, ma il moto delle

[42] On the overturning of the Biblical text in Loredan's novel, see Ardissino 2012.

[43] Brunacci 1661, 14.

[44] Lupis, together with Brunacci, was one of the first biographers of the Prince of the Incogniti. Two biographies of Loredan were published shortly after his death: the first one, authored by Brunacci, in 1662, and the second one, written by Lupis, in 1663. On this point see Spera 2014.

[45] Lupis 1676, 11.

> Donne, è come quella di Atalanta, cioè a dire inarrivabile. […] La vera Alchimia si prattica dalle Donne. Addottrinate più di ogni altro in sì fatta scienza con un'infinità di crocciuoli alterando un mondo d'imbrogli, pongono in alembicco gl'amori per cavarne un astratto di eternità.[46]
>
> Ambition belongs to women. From the adoration of lovers, they come to rely more on their own beauty, and become more arrogant in their pride. [....] In brief, betrayal is the first general law in the kingdom of Love. Worse than the reason of state, the inconstancy of women is as unattainable as the goddess Atalanta. […] The true alchemy is practiced by women. Learned in such a science with plenty of stockpots, they create a world of frauds, putting love in alembic to extract from it the essence of eternity.

The foil of this portrayal of Sophonisba as a lustful seductress—a new Helen, as portrayed in Minato and in the Roman play on this subject—was a positive protagonist, the Roman Captain Scipio Africanus, who, already in Brunacci's novel but even more so in Minato's play, embodied precisely the opposite values: the epitome of constancy and self-restraint. Indeed, in Minato's *dramma per musica* Scipio is tempted by the beauty of another Carthaginian noblewoman, Ericlea, but in the end, thanks also to the advice of Cato, Scipio manages to overcome his passions and do what is best for Rome and the Roman army. Neglecting his own feelings, Scipio, who is celebrated for his "heroic continence",[47] blesses the wedding between Ericlea and his beloved friend Polinio, arguing in the final lines of the play that self-restraint is much more difficult than being a brave and victorious soldier:

> Stringete omai le destre, e veggia il mondo
> che trofeo glorioso
> una provincia doma, un Re depresso
> ma vittoria maggior vincer se stesso.[48]
>
> [To Polinio and Ericlea] And now shake hands, so the world can see that to restrain a rebellious province and to win over a king is a glorious trophy, but the biggest victory is to win over ourselves.

The Venetian authors not only overturn history in these baroque accounts, they also introduce a male character to outshine Sophonisba in virtue. Of course, revision of history was one of the poetic aims of both Brunacci's and Minato's works, which contrary not only to Livy, but also to Petrarch and to Donato Acciaioli's addition to the Latin corpus of translations of Plutarch's

[46] Brunacci 1661, 31; 41; 44.
[47] Minato 1664, 4.
[48] Minato 1664, 74.

Lives,[49] represent Sophonisba rather than Massinissa as lustful. Yet, establishing a clear contrast between Sophonisba's inconstancy and Scipio's firmness allows the authors to not only compare male and feminine morality, but also to consent to stage a clear-cut divergence between the African and the Romans.

As was typical in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italian theater, attention to the sexual behaviors of royalty not only created entertaining erotic subplots but also bore allegorical meaning.[50] A modest governor, who sacrifices his own feelings in favor of the good of the community represented the prototype of the perfect sovereign, whereas a king who surrendered to love clearly manifested an inclination to privilege personal interest over the state's wealth. Sophonisba and Scipio thus also functioned as symbols of bad and good government. First, they represented a racialized difference in attitude between Carthaginian and Roman policy: whereas in Africa kings and noblewomen were driven by their passions, sacrificing the good of their subjects to their base instincts—as Sophonisba pushes Syphax and Massinissa to wage war in order to appease their jealousy—the Romans were able to renounce love in order to pursue the glory of Rome.

Secondly, the historical account retold through Sophonisba also symbolized the contemporary one between Venice and the Turks. In the years of the publication of both Brunacci's and Minato's works, Venice was carrying out the War of Candia against the Turks in a desperate bid to preserve its rich Greek territories.

That conflict, crucial for granting Venice royal status and allowing it to preserve its rights in the diplomatic order, matter not only of ceremonials, but also of state power's representation[51] was infused with substantial ideological content: presenting itself as a bastion of Catholic Europe, Venice tried to depict the War of Candia as a conflict between Christians and Muslims in order to prevent a Turkish incursion on the continent. Unfortunately, they were not able to manage to persuade other governments to help them preserve their territories in the Mediterranean, and they lost possession of the isle of Crete in 1669.[52]

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[49] While translating Plutarch's *Lives* Acciaoli added the *Life of Scipio*, which was lost. On the reception of Plutarch in early modern European culture see Desideri 2012, 281-350.

[50] On this allegorization of royal sexual behaviour in early modern Italian theater, see Zucchi 2016.

[51] For an introduction to the early modern diplomatic ceremonials and to the conflict for precedence, see Roosen 1980. On the Venetian diplomacy, see Levin 2005, 13-42; Alonge 2019.

[52] On the political reasons for the conflict of Candia, as well as its representation inside and outside Venice, see Candiani 1998.

In this political framework, staging the conflict between Rome and the African army as a clash of civilizations between two opposing realms driven by very different values was a clear strategy for alluding to the coeval war between Venice and the Turks, one offering other Catholic polities the opportunity to support the republic in this conflict. This identification of Venice with Scipio and of Carthage with the Turks becomes even clearer in a novel published by Brunacci shortly after *Sofonisba*, which was fully devoted to the Roman captain: he dedicated *L'Heroe, overo Scipione l'Africano* (1668) to Ghiron Villa, the general of the Venetian fleet in the conflict of Candia.[53] Comparing Villa to Scipio and evoking the contemporary War of Candia through the Punic war, Brunacci acknowledges using Roman history to discuss the present and recalls that clash of civilizations already represented in *Sofonisba*:

> Finalmente Scipione fu l'Achille fatale dell'Ettore della Libia e della seconda guerra punica […] e fra supremi degl'incliti pregi di Vostra Eccellenza è il conseguito commando dell'Armi della sempre invitta, e Serenissima Republica Veneta, vero Propugnacolo della Fede Cattolica, nel quale ha havuto per Avversario un primo Visir della Tracia, per Campo Candia, per ispettatore il Mondo, che già viene scorso dalla Fama, che con Tromba d'Oro fa risuonare da per tutto Candia difesa da Vostra Eccellenza.[54]
>
> Finally, Scipio was the lethal Achilles of the Lybia's Hector and the winner of the Second Punic War. Similarly, you, who among other great recognitions were appointed commander of the army of the invincible and Most Serene Republic of Venice, the true guardian of the Catholic Faith, had as opponent the Vizier of Thrace, Candia as battlefield, the World as spectator. And all around the World is spread by golden trumpets the Fame that you were the true defender of Candia.

It is in this light that we should read Brunacci's frequent allusions to republican and absolutist government, which are often compared to show the superiority of the republic; indeed, in celebrating the perfection of the Roman constitution, Brunacci is celebrating the Venetian Republic, whereas when he attacks the moral weakness of Massinissa and Syphax, he is criticizing the Ottoman Empire. It is easy to decode this allegory in the following pages, where Brunacci exploits a typical absolutist discourse on the body politic,[55] arguing that a head, i.e. a state, with a multitude of eyes and glasses is far

[53] On Ghiron Villa, see Raviola 2020.

[54] Brunacci 1668, a5*v*.

[55] On the use of the body politics' metaphor in early modern absolutist political writings, see Archimbault 1967; on republican mobilization of this rhetoric in the seventeenth-century Dutch republic, see Helmers 2015.

more efficient than a government, guided by a single man, and consequently by only two eyes:

> La più avveduta politica è quella delle Republiche. Più occhi che d'Argo vegliano a suoi interessi. Formate di Senatori d'ogni età hanno occhiali d'ogni vista. Si servono dei vetri del Galileo, con i quali mirano in lontananza le mosche elefanti. Fin nel sole sanno scorger le macchie.[56]
>
> The best form of government is that of Republics. More eyes than those of the many-eyed giant Argus watch over its interests. Constituted by Senators of all ages, they have glasses for all eyes. They use Galileo's glasses, through which they are able to see the elephant flies from afar. They can even see the spots on the sun.

All these elements help contextualize the resurrection of the story of Sophonisba in seventeenth-century Venice, clarifying the overturning of the classical configuration of the heroine as part of a precise political strategy aligned with the cultural agenda of the republic at the time of the War of Candia. Moreover, the political message of Brunacci's *Sofonisba* addresses not only the Christian world, which is invited to take part in the Greek conflict alongside the republic; it also seems to implicitly allude to the internal debate within Venice in those years.

Continuing the conflict in Candia over the years was indeed a political choice which did not obtain unanimous consent in Venice, since several republican delegates thought that keeping the fleet in the Mediterranean was an unjustified waste of public money; supporting the War in Candia was actually very expensive for the republic and the territory of Crete was judged not politically or commercially relevant enough for that expense. In those years the pro-war party, led by the Doge Giovanni Pesari, won the debate, persuading the Senate to finance the war to preserve the Mediterranean kingdom, which, as mentioned above, had not only symbolical meaning but also a diplomatic one. Still, the opposition to Pesari's interventionism was strong in Venice, and one of the key strategies used by the Doge and his political partners was that of using literature to underscore the need to defend Candia to protect the Catholic world. Several theatrical plays and historiographic treatises, such as Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato's *Scena d'huomini illustri* (1659), tackle the issue of the Candian conflict in these terms, celebrating

[56] Brunacci 1661, 77. Conversely, monarchy is described as the government wherein the king makes laws based on his personal desires: "Anche le Follie de' Prencipi sono da sudditi applaudite. […] Mentecagine de' Grandi, che facendo legge la propria volontà pretendono le sia lecito ciò che vogliono" [The subjects applaud even the king's madness. The foolishness of sovereigns, who make laws of their desires, claims that everything they want is allowed], Brunacci 1661, 149.

Pesari and the Venetian *capitani da mar* for their participation in the clash of civilizations between the Christian and Muslim world.[57]

It is very interesting to situate Sophonisba's political observations in Brunacci's novel within this framework. In the novel, she appears as the emblem of individual ambition that turn its back on its homeland for self-interest: Pesari's opponents were likewise represented at that time in Venice as men driven by personal interest and not by the aim of protecting the republic and the common good of the Christian world from the Turkish threat. Brunacci distances himself from the words of the heroine, when she claims to be the victim of the state. Whereas Sophonisba, born a citizen of the Carthaginian republic, interprets her disobedience to her father's and the Senate's order to marry Massinissa as a reaction against the *raison d'état*, Brunacci describes her actions as pure betrayal, driven by her ambition to become queen.[58] The author's words used to portray Sophonisba's final attempt to escape from Roman slavery, marrying Massinissa even if she was already married to Syphax, are severe, defining the Carthaginian noble-woman as a sort of prostitute in matters of both love and politics:

> La Donna quando vuol prostituirsi a nuovo Amante, comincia con i parlamenti a far meretrice la fede. Somiglia una Rocca che quando si vuol rendere, manda gli araldi a parlamentare. La dogliosa rimembranza de' passati contenti, la speme di future dolcezze, e la tema di commutare i regi monili in catene, oprarono nel suo cuore, che con l'esborso della propria bellezza, quasi a prezzo d'inestimabil valore, ricomprasse lo stabile del perduto suo regno.[59]
>
> When a woman wants to prostitute herself to a new lover, she begins with words to offer her faith. She looks like a fortress when it wants to surrender, sending the heralds to negotiate. The painful remembrance of past happiness, the hope of future sweetness, and the fear of switching royal jewels with chains, worked in Sophonisba's heart to push her to use her beauty, of an almost inestimable value, to buy again another realm, after having lost the first.

Examining the political allegory behind Brunacci's words, we cannot help but see that, in condemning the capitulation as a sort of prostitution, he is also condemning the idea of surrendering to the Turks in Candia.

[57] The allusion is introduced in Gualdo Priorato 1659, 4r-4v; the same political emphasis on the Candian conflict as a clash of civilizations is contained in several plays of the time, such as Dario Varotari's *Il Cesare amante* (1651), Minato's *Artemisia* (1656) and *Antioco* (1658), or Giacomo Castoreo's *Il pazzo politico* (1659).

[58] Brunacci 1661, 136-137.

[59] Brunacci 1661, 146.

Outside of Venice things are less contaminated with this political agenda; Bonacossi and Valcerca did not fully understand the refashioning of Sophonisba's story, which they saw simply as a Baroque reaction against classical sources. In light of this interpretation of Brunacci's and Minato's works, they instead try to re-establish the ancient version of Petrarch's story of Sophonisba in a classicist way emphasizing the traditional virtues of modesty and bravery. However, considering the Carthaginian noblewoman a desperate lover raped by the logic of the state minimized the political content of the story, projecting the tale onto an anachronistic political view connected to sixteenth-century, anti-Machiavellian polemics about the limits of state reason. On the other hand, the allegorical meaning Brunacci and Minato infused in the story of Sophonisba relaunched Livy's tale in a contemporary optic that mapped the history of the conflict between Rome and Carthage onto the current War of Candia and the battle between the republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire.

Conclusion

A survey of the seventeenth-century *Fortleben* of the story of Sophonisba in Italian literature reveals a turn away from Gian Giorgio Trissino's celebrated sixteenth-century tragedy, the work which relaunched the character of the Carthaginian noblewoman in early modern Europe. If, in the first half of the century, the story of Sophonisba no longer seemed to attract Italian authors, works focused on this topic gained traction starting from 1661 and overturned earlier representations of the heroine, radically upsetting the classic (Livy) and Medieval (Petrarch) versions of the tale and neglecting Trissino's completely. Unlike the brave, masculine *Sofonisba*, seventeenth-century works published in Venice portrayed the character as a beautiful seductress who exploited her beauty to satisfy her desire to become queen.

The reasons for the reshaping of Trissino's character are various: even if appreciated as the first regular tragedy of the early modern period, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholars generally disliked this *Sofonisba*, considering the work too naïve in style since it meant to emulate the rhetoric of Greek tragic poets. Torquato Tasso diminished the exemplarity of Trissino's work, condemning its *sermo pedestris*,[60] whereas the scholar Ortensio Lando considered the style of this *Sofonisba* comic.[61] This negative judgment persisted in seventeenth and eighteenth-century literary

[60] Tasso's judgement on the earlier *Sofonisba* is published in Tasso 1884. On this stylistic criticism of Trissino's tragedy, see Cremante 2015.

[61] See Flora 1940, 338.

historiography[62] and probably conditioned authors' choices to pursue another approach to the character. Moreover, the Baroque spirit behind the relaunch of the genre of the novel, especially in Venice, at the Academy of the Incogniti, was based on an attempt to shock the reader. By reversing the classic representation of Sophonisba, Venetian authors managed above all to achieve a major objective of their poetics.

A decade later, outside of Venice, where the late traces of Baroque poetics no longer conditioned literature, this resounding overturning of the plot of Sophonisba was not understood. The Sophonisba plays that emerged in Ferrara and Brescia attempted to revive Petrarch's version of the tale, refusing the misogynic elements of the Venetian rewriting and restoring the outline of a heroine who is a desperate lover unjustly oppressed by the Carthaginian state. Still, the Roman play on this topic, written in 1681 for the pupils of the Collegio Clementino, drew upon the representation of the heroine in the Venetian works: here strict religious moralism met Baroque inventiveness but this is the exception, rather than the rule.

However, the seventeenth-century renegotiation of the character of Sophonisba pertained not only to the erotic aspects of the story and the portrayal of the heroine as a lustful or faithful woman; it also had strong political implications. In Venice, staging the Carthaginian noblewoman as an ambitious social climber aspiring to seduce a king in order to gain personal privilege, who stood in opposition to the modest Roman captain Scipio Africanus, was part of an allegory that alluded to the contemporary War of Candia. The conflict between the Carthaginians—presented as licentious and driven by personal ambition—and the modest Romans, who were able to sacrifice individual passions in favor of the common good, clearly aimed to mirror the war between the Turks and Venice for the isle of Crete, which Venetian authors framed as a clash of civilizations between Muslims and Catholics. In an extremely difficult and worrying situation, on the verge of losing its Mediterranean kingdom, Venice tried to revive its Roman heritage—representing its republic as the modern heir to the Roman one—in an attempt to persuade other Italian and European states to take part in the conflict against the Turks. Scipio, the exemplar of republicanism in the literature of the seventeenth century—celebrated, for instance, in the Republic of Genoa by Ansaldo Cebà for his modesty and inclination to sacrifice personal interest for the community[63]—becomes the symbol of the

[62] For instance, in the famous treatise by Pietro Calepio *Paragone della poesia tragica d'Italia con quella di Francia*, which was published in Bergamo in 1732; see Calepio 2019, 73-76.

[63] I am alluding to Ansaldo Cebà's *Le Gemelle Capovane*, published in Genoa in 1623.

Venetian republic: its war against the Ottoman Empire was a battle not only for its own interests, but also for the entire Christian world.

This was the propaganda that the Doge Pesari and his party carried out with the help of several novelists, dramatists, and historiographers in a desperate attempt to safeguard not only the commercial but also the diplomatic interests of the republic, whose survival was at risk in a Europe of rising absolute monarchies. Representing Sophonisba as a modern Helen of Troy, and opposing her to the modest Scipio, Brunacci's and Minato's works reflect not only the sexist legacy of the Incogniti, which contrasted female sensuality with male rationalism. Indeed, overturning the representation of Sophonisba as the perfect republican hero of Trissino's tragedy, who was motivated by an extreme thirst for liberty,[64] was not only a Baroque caprice: it was also perfectly coherent with the seventeenth-century political agenda of Venice, and the radical change of emphasis on key values.

This upheaval in the representation of the character of Sophonisba also mirrored the disruption of Venetian republican politics. At the turn of the century, republican values had completely changed: if in sixteenth-century Venice the Carthaginian noblewoman was a perfect symbol of the cornerstone of republican ideology, liberty, the value to defend at all costs, during the War of Candia Sophonisba becomes the Other, the radically different. In a changed world, in which Venice had lost most of its political relevance and was battling to uphold its royal status in a Europe where monarchies triumphed, Sophonisba personified not Venice but its enemy. Dangerous, ambitious, and disloyal the African heroine, symbolizing the Turkish nemesis, is now evoked to plead for help against the Ottoman threat. Still, what really counted in Venetian politics at the time was not to be considered a polity without a crown, and the overturning in Sophonisba's literary portrait was only one instrument in this desperate, but ultimately failing attempt of reassessing the representation of the republic in that troubling time.

[64] See on this point Skinner 1998.

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EPILOGUE

Reflections on Historical Comparativism Prompted by the Case of Sophonisba

By David Hasberg Zirak-Schmidt, Sofie Kluge, Anastasia Ladefoged Larn and Rasmus Vangshardt

I

In the introduction to his lecture series *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature* (*Hovedstrømninger i det 19. Aarhundredes litteratur*, 1872-1890) the founding father of Danish comparative literature, Georg Brandes (1842-1927), provocatively described comparativism as an antidote to the myopia allegedly characterising contemporaneous Danish literary studies and cultural life. A highly significant but also controversial figure on Denmark's intellectual scene, Brandes was deeply engaged in the modernisation of national culture, and the immediate agenda of his lecture series was to provoke local aesthetic and academic change. Nevertheless, his theoretical and methodological underpinning of this project reaches beyond the Danish context and may therefore serve as a starting point for the subsequent reflection on comparativism in literary studies broadly and historical such in particular.

In assessing Brandes's sketch for a comparative methodology it is useful to distinguish provisionally between its synchronic and diachronic aspects as two intertwined yet separate moments. While the latter covers the relation between literatures across time and the phenomenon of literary evolution, the former concerns the relation between literatures *sub specie aeternitatis* or the 'idea' of comparativism. If we begin by looking at the synchronic aspect, the *Main Currents'* opening lecture plainly establishes that the plurality of national perspectives summoned in the comparative approach per se produces a superior understanding because the various perspectives are made to mutually illuminate, nuance and correct each other. Following this, comparing is essentially—ideally—a matter of securing objectivity and balance: We compare one thing to the other in order to get the proportions right, compensating for any prejudice or partiality resulting from better acquaintance or physical or chronological proximity. Thus, inaugurating the attack on bourgeois culture that eventually led to Brandes's exit from the University of Copenhagen, the opening of the *Main Currents* candidly

presents the author's comparativist approach as a movement away from "the illusions of unassisted eyesight" allegedly marring contemporaneous Danish literary studies toward seeing national literature in "its true perspective":

> The comparative view possesses the double advantage of bringing foreign literature so near to us that we can assimilate it, and of removing our own until we are enabled to see it in its true perspective. We neither see what is too near the eye nor what is too far away from it. The scientific view of literature provides us with a telescope of which the one end magnifies and the other diminishes; it must be so focussed as to remedy the illusions of unassisted eyesight.[1]

With his telescope metaphor, Brandes makes an eloquent if slightly truistic case for comparativism: Who would not want to see things in their "true perspective", especially if the alternative is cultural shortsightedness? Against this truism, it could reasonably be argued that Danish literature deserves to be understood on its own terms, in its own context, and not be bulldozed through comparison with the major European literatures which would inevitably make it appear provincial and inferior. However, the implicit argument of the *Main Currents* is a bit more intricate than the polemic contrasting of comparativism and cultural myopia suggests. If we pursue the full meaning of the telescope metaphor, it becomes clear that the plurality of perspectives summoned in the comparative approach produces more than just nuanced, relational understanding of individual literatures. It adds something extra to the bargain, an epistemological surplus: The "true perspective". The scrutiny of continuities and discontinuities between various national literatures not only improves understanding of these literatures in themselves and in relation to each other. It simultaneously proposes what may provisorily be termed their virtual 'sum total' as a more complex object of investigation.

Thus, Brandes's study of contemporaneous literature is emphatically concerned both with Danish literature in its particularity, its relation to other literatures and the virtual synthesis suggested by the juxtaposition of various national literatures. Although he takes a special interest in the particular case of Danish letters which, according to his view, remains caught in Romanticist reaction unable to take the final step into modernity that other European literatures have consummated, Brandes also and in equal measure aims for the bigger picture. As he expresses it in Danish, the comparative approach—the perfectly adjusted telescope↓enables one to *overskue*, "overview", the totality.[2] Brandes's idea of comparativism is thus holistic in essence or, as he

[1] Brandes 1906, vii-viii.
[2] Brandes 1906, viii.

terms it, "scientific", characterised by the interdependence of parts and whole.[3] Indeed, "the reaction in the first decades of the nineteenth century against the literature of the eighteenth, and the vanquishment of that reaction" that Brandes's study concerns, and which Danish literature has purportedly not consummated, "can only be understood by a comparative study of European literature".[4] As an outlier or extreme, backward Danish literature illuminates the more progressive nature of contemporaneous English, French and German literatures *ex contrariis*. At the same time, all the different European literatures together suggest a more comprehensive image: That of nineteenth-century literature considered as a whole.

While these thoughts are certainly provocative and thought-provoking in themselves, stimulating reflection on why we would want to compare anything to something else in the first place, Brandes's sketch for a comparative methodology also has a significant diachronic or literary historical dimension. This dimension on one hand represents a separate moment of his thinking about comparativism, specifically concerned with the literary historical development from Realism to Romanticism and finally to what the Danish critic influentially labelled the Modern Breakthrough. On the other hand, however, the diachronic aspect of the *Main Currents* is also intricately intertwined with his idea of comparativism as an approach which sees the emergence of an epistemological surplus from the juxtaposition of multiple perspectives. Indeed, as the following passage makes clear, the comprehensive vision—the intellectual add-on—which materialises in the comparatist approach is, precisely, of a historical nature. It is the contour of the "one great leading movement" which puts the movements of all the individual nineteenth-century literatures into their "true perspective", the spirit of the Age of Revolution:

> It is my intention in the present work to trace the outlines of a psychology of the first half of the nineteenth century by means of the study of certain main groups and movements in European literature. The stormy year 1848, a historical turning-point, and hence a break, is the limit to which I purpose following the process of development. The period between the beginning and the middle of the century presents the spectacle of many scattered and apparently disconnected literary efforts and phenomena. But he who carefully observes the main currents of literature perceives that their movements are all conditioned by one great leading movement with its ebb and flow, namely, the gradual fading away and disappearance of the ideas and feelings of the

[3] Brandes 1906, viii.
[4] Brandes 1906, vii.

> preceding century, and the return of the idea of progress in new, ever higher-mounting waves.[5]

As can be gleaned from the subsequent characterisation of literary history as "psychology, the study, the history of the soul", Brandes's literary historiography is steeped in Hegelian philosophy of history:[6] The *Main Currents* lectures are in many respects classic *Geistesgeschichte*, exploring "what was really happening in men's minds in a given country at a given period".[7] For, as Brandes formulates it, "a book, even though it may be a perfect, complete work of art, is only a piece cut out of an endlessly continuous web" involving the life of the author as well as "the spiritual atmosphere which he breathed".[8] A work of literature is a window into the mind of its author and his or her particular national context but also into the spirit of the time: The *Zeitgeist*. This is, then, what Brandes's terms the "scientific view of literature": An approach focused not on individual literatures in their own right or in relation to other individual literatures but on the larger historical pattern revealed by their juxtaposition.

As such a laying bare of larger historical patterns, the *Main Currents* lectures in many respects epitomise the thrust of historical comparativism in its most classical form. Yet do Brandes's lectures present a viable ground for modern-day historical comparativism to build on? The answer to that question would have to be both negative and affirmative. While the historico-philosophical framework of Brandes's comparativism would seem to be definitively obsolete, the idea that the comparatist juxtaposition of national perspectives procures an epistemological surplus and the identification of this surplus as cognition of a complex historical development could offer a viable twin point of departure for modern historical comparativists. It just needs an update. How can Brandes's *Geistesgeschichte* be made to meet the horizon of twenty-first-century literary historians?

II.

One place to look for inspiration in this regard is in Walter Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 1925). A sophisticated modernist example of *Geistesgeschichte* and a perceptive study of seventeenth-century European drama, Benjamin's famous work not only takes us in the direction of this special issue's topic. It also refines the comparative methodology applied in the *Main Currents*, among other late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century literary histories, making it

[5] Brandes 1906, vii.
[6] Brandes 1906, viii.
[7] Brandes 1906, viii.
[8] Brandes 1906, viii-ix.

‚more palatable to twenty-first-century literary historians (but also decisively more intricate). The following discussion highlights similarities and differences between the two examples of historical comparativism, going into some detail with Benjamin's argument in order to demonstrate the latent and generally unacknowledged comparatist design of *Origin*—but also because of its immediate bearing on the topic of the present volume.

First of all, like Brandes, Benjamin aims to grasp the spirit of a historical epoch through its literature. More specifically, Benjamin studies the so-called Baroque—the 'long' seventeenth century or *early* Early Modernity, overlapping roughly with the period covered by the contributions in the present volume—through its most significant literary form: The new secular drama depicting the characters and events of a recognisable historical world (rather than Scriptural figures and moral allegories) and employing varying mixtures of pessimism and playfulness in the representation of this world. Also like Brandes, Benjamin starts from the literary production of his native country juxtaposing the allegedly inferior German specimens of this emerging dramatic genre with major contemporaneous variants from other European countries: Principally the theatre of the acclaimed Spanish playwrights Lope de Vega and Pedro Calderón de la Barca,[9] the latter famously specified as the "virtual object" of the study in a letter written by Benjamin to his friend Gershom Scholem in December 1924;[10] but also, inevitably, Shakespearean drama which is addressed in the subchapter "Hamlet"[11] and again at the end of the book where it is stated that "for *Richard III*, for *Hamlet*, as indeed for all Shakespearean 'tragedies', the theory of the *Trauerspiel* is predestined to contain the prolegomena of interpretation".[12] The fact that the title of his study mentions only the German mourning play should, thus, not obscure the fact that Benjamin's study, just like Brandes's lectures, concerns a broad European trend. It merely takes the German variant of this trend as its centre of gravity, in a tongue-in-cheek revisionist gesture seeking to amend centuries of "neglect and misinterpretation" of this "amorphous fragment".[13]

However, there are other important methodological points of contact between *Origin* and *Main Currents*. For just as Brandes contended that nineteenth-century literature revealed "what was really happening in men's minds in a given country at a given period", Benjamin's comparative study of seventeenth-century secular drama everywhere implies that the

[9] Benjamin 1996, 80-88; 91-95.
[10] Benjamin 1991, 881.
[11] Benjamin 1996, 157-158.
[12] Benjamin 1996, 228.
[13] Benjamin 1996, 48-51; 176.

simultaneous upsurge and predominance of this type of drama on an array of European stages reveals something essential about the "spiritual atmosphere" that the dramatists breathed: About the *Zeitgeist*. An epochal spirit can be many things, of course. To Brandes, the nineteenth-century spirit was mainly political. In *Origin*, the different variants of the mourning play first of all convey different aspects of seventeenth-century religious sensibility. Viewed through Benjamin's comparative telescope, the various German, Spanish and English forms of the mourning play examined in his study together suggest the complex image of an epoch which grappled differently with the problem of a historical world perceived as devoid of metaphysical meaning and urging meaningful interpretation.

Thus, while the Spanish dramatists exploited a theatrical logic akin to the Counter-Reformation doctrine of transubstantiation, endowing the historical world with a blaze of transcendental significance or a suggestive mystical glow (an endeavour viewed by Benjamin with considerable suspicion), their German colleagues Andreas Gryphius, Daniel Casper von Lohenstein and Johann Christian Hallmann opted for the via negativa of apophatic theology which allowed them to at the same time insist on the gloominess and vanity of the historical world and to preserve a however miniscule, utopian idea of redemption. Shakespearean drama, for its part, with its Hamletian dialectic of melancholy and hope, mediated between Spanish levity and German gravity by showing the overcoming of sorrow through self-awareness.[14] Though the latter appeared to thereby epitomise the tragicomic epochal spirit suggested by the term 'mourning play', a play (Spiel) with mourning, Benjamin's study essentially proposes that the different national variants of seventeenth-century secular-historical drama each found their way to cope with historical meaninglessness. Indeed, in several passages, Benjamin tends to favour the German variant over the artistically superior drama of Calderón and Shakespeare because of its "ethical superiority": Its insistence on the ruinous nature of history and the remoteness of grace.[15] Nevertheless, to each nation their own mourning play, his point appears to be. What worked in Madrid would not have worked in Silesia and vice versa. Still, together the different variants convey the inner tensions of seventeenth-century religious sensibility. Like the *Main Currents* lectures, *Origin* thus also aims to present a nuanced and relational or perspectivic image of the literary materials and the epoch studied, putting together a grand, complex puzzle.

Finally, like Brandes, who compared nineteenth-century literature to what came before and after it, studying "the reaction in the first decades of the

[14] Benjamin 1996, 158.
[15] Benjamin 1996, 84; 235.

nineteenth century against the literature of the eighteenth, and the vanquishment of that reaction", Benjamin pursues the seventeenth-century spirit encrypted, as it were, in the mourning play backward and forward in time, suggesting the outline of a comprehensive transhistorical and transnational development: The development of an historical ethics, or an ethics defining the meaning of the historical world in strictly secular terms, through the medium of theatre. His study thus posits the seventeenth-century mourning play as the authentic heir to Greek tragedy and as the cradle of a modern historical drama that was, however, never fully realised but instead marginalised as an aesthetic abomination by less hard-headed or more comfort-seeking dramatic schools, notably of classicist pedigree but also of the anti-realist Romanticist kind criticised by Brandes. In Benjamin's book on the seventeenth century, as in Brandes's lectures on the nineteenth century—and as in all interesting works of historical comparativism—literary history becomes a space for communicative exchange across time and space as continuities and discontinuities are contemplated and "the true perspective", the synthesis, is suggested: In the case of *Origin*, the long-winded via dolorosa to an illusionless but precisely not disillusioned view of historical existence.

However, notwithstanding the notable coincidences between the two types of *Geistesgeschichte* highlighted here, *Origin* also in important methodological aspects departs from the historical comparativism of *Main Currents*. In establishing his epochal synthesis Benjamin is, first of all, extremely cautious. Second, his comparative methodology is anything but vague, as Brandes's arguably was. The "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" lays a solid methodological foundation indeed, conscientiously addressing scepticisms about synthetic epochal concepts and emphasising the responsibility informing the scientific coining of such concepts. Indeed, as Benjamin's striking adoption of the Platonic imperative "to save phenomena",[16] *τὰ φαινόμενα σώζειν,* indicates, the objective of *Origin* is less to convey a unitary picture of the mourning play and its historical epoch than to immerse the reader in all the dissonances, incongruences and discontinuities that, indirectly or negatively, together suggest a greater and much more complex picture, an incoherent picture even, full of tensions and contradictions. Thus, what Brandes called the "scientific view of literature"—the comparatist piecing together of different perspectives—Benjamin terms the "philosophical contemplation" and its paragon is not the telescope but, perhaps more appropriately, the mosaic:

[16] Benjamin 1996, 33.

> Just as mosaics preserve their majesty despite the fragmentation into capricious particles, so philosophical contemplation is not lacking in momentum. Both are made up of the distinct and the disparate; and nothing could bear more powerful testimony to the transcendent force of the sacred image and the truth itself. The value of fragments of thought is all the greater the less direct their relationship to the underlying idea, and the brilliance of the representation depends as much on this value as the brilliance of the mosaic does on the quality of the glass paste.[17]

The elaborate aesthetic and intellectual-historical analysis of the mourning play which makes up the rest of *Origin* certainly follows this methodological ideal. The particular is not sacrificed on the altar of the universal, phenomena are not squeezed into conceptual straightjackets, but the two are balanced against each other in a historical understanding which oscillates between the bold suggestion of overarching evolutionary patterns and the necessary immersion in empirical detail to support the argument. Indeed, much as his epochal construction may superficially resemble the purer idealism of Brandes's Hegelian aesthetics, one cannot accuse Benjamin of disregarding the complexity of the historical material in his hunt for the epochal spirit that it conveys. His philological engagement with the seventeenth-century texts in their singularity and complexity escapes the empirical anaemia of traditional *Geistesgeschichte* while still retaining the holistic outlook that was the strength of that approach. Furthermore, in rather sharp contrast to Brandes's historical narrative which described a one-way street to Modernity, Benjamin's study is characterised by a dynamic or dialectic relation between past and present. The seventeenth century is not something that is over and done with, as was Realism or, especially, Romanticism in Brandes's literary history. On the contrary, with the prologue's much-noted juxtaposition of "Baroque and expressionism",[18] rather unfavourable to the latter, *Origin* actually appears to recommend a return to the Baroque as a reservoir of untapped possibilities, a road not taken, an open path to a better—more truly enlightened—form of historical awareness: The understanding of the historical world through the medium of theatre.

III.

On the backdrop of the above reflection on historical comparativism we can now return to this volume's theme: The Carthaginian noblewoman Sophonisba. Why did this particular figure, a minor character in ancient

[17] Benjamin 1996, 28-29
[18] Benjamin 1996, 53-56.

historical sources on the Second Punic War, become a major star on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European stages? What does her simultaneous or near- simultaneous appearance in plays written in the Netherlands, England, France, Greece, Germany and Italy convey about the individual cultures of these countries? Why was Sophonisba, for example, the preferred heroine of the French theatre, rivalled only by Cleopatra? How should her popularity in the Netherlands, where she triumphed all through the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth century, be construed? Why does she not appear in the otherwise prolific Spanish historical drama until the late eighteenth century? How should this Spanish exception be understood? What does Sophonisba's simultaneous or near-simultaneous emergence in an array of early modern (or early early modern) European contexts reveal about that period? And what should be made of the figure's disappearance roughly after 1800? Did she finally exhaust her potential or why else was she slighted by modern dramatists? The case of the Sophonisba figure virtually craves comparatist scrutiny.

The intriguing situation, where Sophinisbas appear all over Europe within a rather short period of time, would seem to be comparable to when archaeologists discover that a specific object—say a certain type of vessel or a metallic receptacle—was produced in a range of independent geographical contexts roughly at the same time. First, they surely begin to look for the concrete, practical connections which could have brought either specimens of the object itself or knowledge of the object from one location to the next: Merchant routes, itinerant theatre troupes, diplomats and other travellers. However they also, supposedly, begin to investigate the cultural function and meaning of this type of object: What was it there for? Which contemporaneous need or needs did it meet? What does the object convey about the epoch that saw its proliferation? Does its simultaneous appearance in an array of contexts reveal a larger historical pattern?

A collection of articles by scholars from different scholarly backgrounds approaching their subjects in different ways, the present volume does not attempt to lay out any unitary design. Instead it presents so many pieces of a large puzzle for the reader to assemble. In this sense, it makes manifest how comparative literary studies and historical in particular can constructively be conceived—and indeed often materialize—as teamwork. For if Benjamin's mosaic metaphor is to be taken seriously, comparatists should preferably work together. No single scholar can cover everything by themselves and the "brilliance of the representation" of a given theme, figure or epoch inevitably depends on the individual "value of fragments of thought": Every single element of the grand mosaic must be thoroughly and impeccably researched, knowledgeable and informed, for only thus will the—always only suggested,

composite, indistinct—whole be able to emerge and take shape as a convincing narrative about the past. Assembling the work of an array of specialists as so many mosaic stones, this volume aims to suggest, if not "the truth itself", then at least a significant pattern informing early modern European imagination.

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