

Antonios AUGOUSTAKIS

Fashioning Barbarian Women: The Female as Other in Silius Italicus' *Punica*

This paper focuses on the representation of two barbarian women as Roman *matronae* in Silius' *Punica*. I examine a pair of foreigners, Imilce and Masinissa's mother, who demonstrate in contrasting terms how we can reconstruct the significance of gendered otherness in Silius' poem. Following recent discussion on the role of periphery and geographics in the impinging upon, and reshaping of, gender hierarchies and imperial ideology (Konstan 2000; Joshel 1997), I explore what happens when the periphery is acculturated by the center, and how threatened central ideology becomes by an "assimilated," yet barbarian, outsider.

As this paper argues, Imilce, Hannibal's wife, is fashioned by the poet as an extremely Roman female figure, who tries to persuade her husband not to pursue his destructive plans (3.61-157). In a long *suasoria* (4.763-807), where she denounces the Carthaginian custom of child sacrifice, Imilce is portrayed as a learned and reasonable Roman woman who is juxtaposed to her husband's *immitia corda*. Just as her Greek name suggests (*meilichos*), Imilce exemplifies the power of mildness and reason, traits which distinguish her otherness: as she opposes Carthage, Imilce becomes the *other* to her own culture. At the same time, however, Imilce's allusive representation (Brure 1952) as a Bacchant (4.774-777) evokes to the reader's mind distraught Virgilian women (Dido, Amata) and Seneca's Andromache (*Troades* 672-677; Fucecchi 1992), as well as prophetic figures (Virgil's Sibyl, Lucan's Autonoe), whose qualities anticipate their own destruction. In short, Imilce's presence is made as an hybridic, unclassified, *other*.

In contrast to Imilce, the poet provides us with an example of successful acculturation which integrates efficient speech and prophetic ability. Masinissa's aged mother (16.115-134) promotes her son's penchant for an alliance with the Romans. Her prophetic power (*praenosces omina*, 124; *vates*, 132) and prediction of prosperity (*laeta prodigia*, 127-128) for the Numidians mark her otherness as auspicious and immediately place her within the reach of the center: she is a foreigner, assimilated to a preacher of Roman ideals of fidelity and piety, ideals at once endorsed by the Romans themselves, especially Scipio (16.154-169); it's the lack of these qualities which leads the Carthaginians to defeat.

The optimistic portrayal of female figures and their power culminates with the image of Claudia Quinta, the embodiment of female Roman virtue, who drives the Magna Mater's vessel up the Tiber (17.1-47). It is precisely the arrival of a "foreign" goddess, an outsider, which reflects the power of otherness and the negotiations and fluidity of terms such as insider and outsider. The conflation of Roman-ness and otherness will no longer be a threat but a necessary condition for a prosperous future. To be sure, the binary opposition between male and female has also weakened: women's presence is essential *hostis ut Ausoniis decederet advena terris* (17.1).