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Abstract: Petronius when calling Hannibal "a lizard" not only alludes to the symbolic system built upon the concept of *Punica fraus*, but also refers to the Carthaginian commander's military tactics as presented by ancient historians.

Key words: Hannibal, Petronius, Livy, *stelio*

Trymalchio — a protagonist of Petronius's satire and a host of a famous feast — while entertaining his guests told them an unbelievable story about the creation of a Corinthian bronze, in which Hannibal was also mentioned. The entire narrative, though only consisting of a two sentences, has a very rich meaning. The Carthaginian was described as *homo vafer et magnus stelio*. This description seems only a passing remark, but after a deeper analysis it turns out to be ambiguous and can be also seen in relation to the epithets used by the other authors. It is worth noting that this entire passage is characterized by intertextuality and a game with the literary conventions[1].

Homo vafer can have a double meaning — on the one hand it describes a man who is shrewd, clever when it comes to tricks, stratagems and ruses, and almost ingenious; on the other hand, it depicts somebody who is cunning and crafty in a negative sense. This twofold description corresponds nicely with the way of waging the war by Hannibal, as it was portrayed by Roman historiography.

The Carthaginian leader waged the war *suis artibus*[2], which were contrasted by Livius with the *Romanis artibus*[3], defined by contrast to *ars Punica*: *minime*

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[1] See B. Baldwin: "Hannibal at Troy: The Sources of Trimalchio's Confusion". *The Petronian Society Newsletter* 1987, Vol. 17, p. 6.

[2] Liv. 21, 34, 1: *non bello aperto sed suis artibus, fraude et insidiis.*

[3] Liv. 5, 27, 8: *Romanis artibus, virtute opere armis.*

arte Romana, fraude ac dolo[4]. A similar — though somewhat ironical — statement we find in the work of Valerius Maximus[5] who might allude to the proverbial *versutiae Punicae*[6]. Florus, however, proposed to battle the Carthaginians with the aid of *suis consiliis*[7], which also mean wicked intrigues and, in a military sense, tricks and stratagems. So consequently his proposition was not so dissimilar from the Punic means. War tricks, i.e. ambushes, are to be found in the repertoire of any leader[8], while cunningness and insidiousness are among the virtues of a good leader, as already noticed by Xenophon[9]. These characteristics became, however, typically associated with Hannibal, in fact more than with any other military leader. A proof of that is a rhetorical question posed by Eumolpus, another character in the Petronius's work: *'Quae autem hic insidiae sunt' inquit 'aut quis nobiscum Hannibal navigat?'*[10]. One of the often mentioned epithets of Hannibal is a polysemous adjective *callidus*[11]. *Calliditas* in its primary meaning is synonymous with *astutia* and *versutia* but can also mean *prudentia*, *sapientia* and finally *acies ingenii*[12]. It can have a positive meaning when it is used as a description of military leaders and orators, also Roman ones[13]. Yet, as Hans Friedrich Mueller noticed, this word underwent some semantic change and acquired also a moral connotation since the same characteristic (prudence, ingenuity) when applied to Roman circumstances is called *prudentia* while used in a Punic context — *calliditas*[14]. *Callidus* is thus synonymous with *vafer*, which is used only once to describe Hannibal — in the work of Valerius Maximus[15]. This author depicts an ingenious stratagem which consisted in sparing the estate of general Fabius Maximus.

Still more interesting is the epithet *stelio* — a lizard — metaphorically meaning a treacherous man, liar and a cheater[16]. Treachery, falsehood and hypocrisy bore a similarity to the image of a split tongue. A use of such an imagery can be found in Plautus's comedy *Poenulus* where a Carthaginian Hanno was characterized as somebody whose tongue is split like that of a snake *bisulci lingua quasi*

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[4] Liv. 1, 53, 4.

[5] Val. Max. 7, 4, ext. 2: *haec fuit Punica fortitudo, dolis et insidiis et fallacia instructa.*

[6] Liv. 42, 47, 7: *religionis haec Romanae esse, non versutiarum Punicarum neque calliditatis Graecae, apud quos fallere hostem quam vi superare gloriosus fuerit.*

[7] Flor. 1, 22: *quippe adversus hostem totiens victorem tam callidum non virtute tantum, sed suis etiam pugnare consiliis oportebat.*

[8] Polyb. 1, 57, 3.

[9] Xen. *Memor.* 3, 1, 6.

[10] Petr. 101, 4.

[11] Nep. *Hann.* 9, 2; Nep. *Reg.* 3, 5; Flor. 1, 22; Front. *Strat.* 1, 1, 9; Front. *Strat.* 1, 8, 7; Cic. *off.* 1, 108.

[12] P. Probst: "Calliditas". *TLL*, Vol. 3, fasc. 1, Leipzig 1989, col. 167—169.

[13] Nep. *Hann.* 5, 2; Cic. *off.* 1, 108 (Fabius Maximus); Flor. 2, 13 (Caesar).

[14] H.-F. Mueller: *Roman Religion in Valerius Maximus.* London—New York 2002, p. 90.

[15] Val. Max. 7, 3, ext. 8: *Hannibalis vafri mores.*

[16] *OLD*, p. 1817.

proserpens bestia[17]. Certainly, here the meaning is close to a far more often used adjective *bilinguis* — bilingual but at the same time "treacherous, insincere, false". In the latter meaning it was used by Vergil, in the first book of the *Aeneis*, where he describes fear of the goddess Venus, who is conducive to the Trojan refugees, trying to escape *Tyriosque bilinguis* — treacherous Tyrians[18]. As Maurus Servius Honoratus in his commentary to the work of Vergil explains, *bilinguis* should be understood simply as *fallaces*. He also adds that this adjective refers to the character not to the language[19]. The use of the name of a mother-city with reference to the Carthaginians might be seen as a poetic employment of *variatio* (in a similar functions it features also in the poem *Punica* by Silius Italicus). At the same time it might point to the fact that this *topos* has a longer history and was inherited from Phoenician antecedents. One may find the adjective *bilinguis* also in the aforementioned work of Silius. First time in the second book[20], in which the African tribes were described. Most likely there the primary meaning of the word *bilinguis* was intended since the inhabitants of this part of Africa could speak both Punic and Libyan languages[21]. Clearly, this is not an obstacle to undertaking a conscious literary game with a reader, especially as we have here also the adjective *distinctus*. For the second time *bilinguis* features in the Scypio's oration to Masinissa[22] and there it is used undoubtedly in a metaphorical way. The Roman uses the following phrase: *dimitte bilingues ex animo socios*.

The use of *stelio* instead of *proserpens bestia* by Petronius might serve the purpose of adding some additional meanings which are absent from the snake-imagery. On the one hand, this expression preserves all the connotations bound to a split tongue (so in effect describing somebody treacherous and deceptive), on the other hand, additional meanings appear, which describe agility and change-ability. Consequently, *stelio* can be understood as chameleon, which appears to be an accurate description of a strategy used by the Carthaginian, which consisted in deceiving his enemies with the help of disguises[23]. Although the chameleon has its own generic name (*chamaeleon*) and was perceived as a distinctive species in antiquity[24], maybe this specific usage can be seen as a synecdoche. This seems all the more possible, if we take into account the fact that such an interpretation of

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[17] Plaut. *Poen*. 1034.

[18] Verg. *Aen*. 1, 661.

[19] Servius Honoratus: *In Vergilii Aeneidos libros* 1, 661: *nec enim ad linguam rettulit, sed ad mentem*.

[20] Sil. *Pun*. 2, 56: *Discinctos inter Libyas populosque bilingues* […].

[21] Cf. B. Rochette: "Sur le bilinguisme dans les armées d'Hannibal". *Les Études Classiques* 1997, Vol. 65, pp. 153—159.

[22] Sil. *Pun*. 16, 156—157.

[23] Polyb. 3, 78; Liv. 22, 1, 3; App. *Annib*. 21, 22. See P. Krafft: *Hannibals Perücken. Motivik und Erzählstruktur von Livius 22, 1*. RhM 2007, Bd. 150, pp. 67—88.

[24] Levit. 11, 30, 31: *migale et cameleon et stelio ac lacerta et talpa / omnia haec inmunda sunt*.

the word *stelio* gives us much more possibilities of reading than its direct meaning (i.e. lizard). This particular lizard belongs to the family *Lacertidae* or *Gekonidae*, which is widely spread in both Europe and Africa. Chameleons, however, which also belong to the same species, though they are a specialized clade of lizards, are found mostly, but not exclusively, in Africa. Perhaps, this could point also to the place of Hannibal's origin. The weakness of this theory lies in the fact that at the tip of a chameleon tongue there is a cub-like structure so the tongue is not split (I am not sure, how common was this knowledge in antiquity). On the contrary, this lizard was known for its venom and was described as *stelio venenatus*[25] while Plinius mentions also *stelio transmarinus*[26].

However, some researchers such as Alfred Marbach[27], are of opinion that the correct reading is *scelio* (from *scelus* — crime). Nonetheless, the correction proposed by Heinsius (*stel(l)io*) was widely accepted. Giovanni Alessio points to its semantic evolution[28] which coupled with the following passage from Plinius: *nullum animal fraudulentius invidere homini tradunt; inde stelionum nomine in maledictum translato*[29], confirms the metaphorical meaning and highlights *fraus*, commonly associated with the Punicians. Consequently, all this excludes Marbach's correction. When we take into consideration the original context in which *stelio* is mentioned (*homo vafer et magnus stelio*), the metaphorical translations appears to be fully justified, although the additional meanings can in the same time be present in the common consciousness of the readers.

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[25] Colum. 9, 7, 5 and Plin. *n. h.* 29, 73.

[26] Plin. *n. h.* 30, 53; 30, 55; 30, 88.

[27] A. Marbach: *Wortbildung, Wortwahl und Wortbedeutung als Mittel der Charakterzeichnung bei Petron*. Gießen 1931, pp. 19—20.

[28] G. Alessio: *'Hapax legomena' ed altre 'cruces' in Petronio*. Napoli 1967, p. 336.

[29] Plin. *n. h.* 30, 89.