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Horace's Punic Sailor

By Archibald Allen, The Pennsylvania State University

This is the text of *Carm.* 2.13.13ff. which D. R. Shackleton Bailey prints in the second edition of his Teubner *Horatius* (Stuttgart 1991):

15 *quid quisque vitet numquam homini satis*
 cautum est in horas. navita Bosphorum
 † *Poenus* † *perhorrescit neque ultra*
 caeca timet aliunde fata;

 miles sagittas et celerem fugam
 Parthi, catenas Parthus et Italum
 robur: sed improvisa leti
 vis rapuit rapietque gentis.

The despairing obeli of line 15 may well represent the best that can be done with the manuscripts' *Poenus*, but one can still hope; I should like to suggest a more radical removal of the epithet than that proposed recently in this journal by J. Delz¹.

Scholarly puzzlement about the identification of the sailor as 'Punic' or 'Carthaginian' dates back to the ancient commentators. Porphyrio notes: *Bosporum. fauces sunt Pontici maris, unde <cum> longissime Africa sit, quid ita Poenus navita eum perhorrescat?*² But the problem with *Poenus* is not simply one of geographical inappropriateness, the far remove of Carthage from the Bosphorus. The sailor in question, like the soldier and the Parthian of lines 17ff., is a type, introduced to illustrate the thesis that people are never sufficiently on their guard, from hour to hour, against the dangers which threaten each of them; thus the sailor shudders in dread at the Bosphorus but fails to exhibit proper fear for other, unseen perils, and so, too, the soldier and the Parthian dread only the dangers which are immediate and obvious. *A priori*, therefore, *Poenus* is suspect since it does not identify the sailor as a recognisable type, comparable to the *miles* and the *Parthus*. The convenient suggestion that it might stand here for *Sidonius* or *Tyrius* (so Orelli), making the

1 "Horatius ex Horatio emendatus ...", *MusHelv* 50 (1993) 214ff. (219f.). I refer to several editions of Horati Carmina by editors' names: P. Hofmann Peerlkamp (Amsterdam ²1862); J. C. Orelli (rev. by J. G. Baiter/W. Hirschfelder, Berlin ⁴1886); E. C. Wickham (Oxford ²1877); A. Kiessling/R. Heinze (Berlin ⁶1917); R. G. M. Nisbet/M. Hubbard (Comm. on Bk. 2, Oxford 1978).

2 *Pomponi Porphyronis Commentum in Horatium Flaccum* (= *Scholia antiqua in Q. Horatium Flaccum*, vol. I), rec. Alfred Holder (Innsbruck 1894) 72.

navita Phoenician, and so a very typical seaman (cf. *Epod.* 16.59 *Sidonii ... nautae*) can be regarded only as that, a convenient suggestion.

Of emendations, Lachmann's *Thynus*, printed by Kiessling/Heinze and deemed 'tempting' by Wickham, brings the sailor's home much closer to the Bosphorus, but, as Nisbet/Hubbard object, "the Thyni ... were not typical sailors, and seem too unimportant to balance the Romans and Parthians of the next stanza". Peerlkamp proposed *Bosphori / aestus (vel simile aliquid)*; word order, he felt, demands that if *Poenus* is read with *navita* it must also be read – nonsensically – with *miles*, just as *navita* and *miles* and *Parthus* are each to be read with *perhorrescit*. Moser's *Bosphori / portas* is similar (and I may admit that I have thought of *Bosphori / undas*). Friedrich's *unum* emphasises the narrow focus of the sailor's dread, but is probably too emphatic. Delz recalls Horace's other mentions of the Bosphorus, in each of which the strait receives a participial epithet (*Carm.* 2.20.14 *gementis litora Bosphori*, and *Carm.* 3.4.30 *insanientem ... Bosphorum*), and he therefore emends *Poenus* to *torvum*.

Since no feasible ethnic epithet appears to be available for the sailor, and since none of the attempts to enlarge or embellish the reference to the Bosphorus is really compelling, we should perhaps look for an adjective which will cohere well with the preceding statement (*quid quisque vitet numquam homini satis / cautum est*): an epithet for *navita* which can be shared by *miles* and *Parthus* meaning "on his guard". Nisbet/Hubbard offered *prudens*, in the sense of *providens*, citing *Carm.* 2.10.2f. *dum procellas / cautus horrescis*. I would suggest *tutus* and claim that what lies beneath the manuscripts' *Poenus* is the core of an early gloss, *impune*, which had been inserted to clarify the adverbial function of the adjective:

navita Bosphorum
tutus perhorrescit ...

For *tutus* = 'on one's guard', 'watchful' (*OLD*, s.v., 2a), one may compare *Sat.* 2.1.20 (*cui male si palpere, recalcitrat undique tutus*)³, *Ars* 28 (*serpit humi tutus nimium timidusque procellae*), and *Ars* 266 (*tutus et intra / spem veniae cautus*). As C. O. Brink observes (on *Ars* 28), "*tutus* oscillates between 'safe', 'apparently safe', and 'on one's guard'"⁴. If, then, Horace did write *tutus perhorrescit*, the *navita*, the *miles*, and the *Parthus* who shudder 'cautiously' at familiar dangers may also be thought to shudder 'safely' or 'without harm', so that *tutus* might reasonably be glossed by *impune* – especially in the light of *Carm.* 1.17.5 *impune tutum per nemus arbutos / quaerunt*. And from an intrusive *impune* came *Poenus*, the very epithet which occurs – hardly by coincidence – just 40 lines earlier, at 2.12.3 (*nec Siculum mare / Poeno purpureum sanguine*).

3 On the probably early date of *Carm.* 2.13 (33 B.C.?), close to that of *Satires* Bk. 2 (30 B.C.?), see E. A. Schmidt, "The Date of Horace, Odes 2.13", in: N. Horsfall (ed.), *Discendi Peritus. Studies in Celebration of Otto Skutsch's Eightieth Birthday*, *BICS* Suppl. 51 (1988) 118ff.

4 *Horace on Poetry* (Cambridge 1971) 112.