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Phoenix and Poenus: usage in antiquity

The term *poenus*, and its modern English equivalent 'Punic', is one of the most problematic in the classical tradition. There is hardly any evidence for its use in self-definition by individuals in antiquity, and the word itself is used almost solely in literary contexts. Nonetheless, it is freely, often uncritically, employed across all branches of scholarship in the study of the ancient Mediterranean, and rarely is it clearly defined. Although, as I shall suggest in this paper, 'Greek' is probably the nearest equivalent term (in use, not meaning), even this equivalence is only partial: 'Greek' is, most would accept, an ethnic label; but whether 'Punic' can really be so defined, when to the best of our knowledge no-one defined themselves as 'Punic', seems much less obvious (Prag 2006). 'Punic' has, for example, no equivalent in ancient literature to the notorious passage in which Herodotus offers a definition of what constitutes 'Hellenicity' (Hdt. 8.144, on which Thomas 2001; cf. Hall 2002), and there is little modern debate of the sort which that passage has engendered – as opposed to very extensive accounts of the negative image of the Punic (cf. Bernal 1987: 8-9; Vella 1996; Liverani 1998; Bonnet 2005; Bonnet and Krings 2006).

The essential difficulty of the term is well illustrated by the virtual absence in modern English usage of a noun for those described as 'Punic'.¹ The observation in fact begs the question: whom would we wish to describe as 'Punics'? As is noted in the introduction to this volume, the term 'Punic' has perhaps most commonly been applied to those peoples of primarily Phoenician origin settled in the western Mediterranean, often with a chronological *terminus post quem* of the sixth century BC (advocated by Moscati 1988; cf. Moscati 2005: 1-3). The term usually carries an implicit association with Carthage, and often a presumption of some degree of

¹ Although 'Punic' is occasionally pressed in to service as a noun in modern English, this can seem awkward; the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* observes (*s.v.* 'Punic', A.2) that the substantive form is archaic (that is, 'Punick') and really only found currency up to the seventeenth century.

Carthaginian hegemony, not least because the significance of the sixth century lies precisely in the rise of Carthaginian hegemony in the West; on occasion, modern usage even appears to imply equivalence between 'Punic' and 'Carthaginian'.² In some recent work there has been a move to abandon the term 'Punic' both because of its implications – among many moderns – of Carthaginian hegemony (however defined) and because of the unavoidable, and undesirable, influence of the associated negative stereotype with which the label is frequently burdened. It has been suggested that we should, instead, employ the apparently more neutral label 'western Phoenician' (López Castro 2007: 105; cf. Prag 2006: 4-7; Aubet 2001: 10-13). This paper is however not concerned directly with the modern usage as such, but rather with the ancient usage which underpins it. Through a consideration of the word's origins, and how the ancient terminology was in fact used, I shall try to clarify the actual scope of *poenus*, and in so doing problematize the modern usage.

The ancient negative stereotype is of course important to this process, but is hardly the whole story (and it should be emphasized that this paper is not concerned with discussing the stereotype *per se*, but only as it relates to the development of the terminology). As we shall see, the negative tradition about 'Punics' does have precedents in the Greek tradition. Although, for historical reasons, both negative traditions (Greek and Roman) are very westward focused, this does not prove the terminology refers only to the west. In both Greek and Latin traditions, the underlying term for 'Phoenician'/'Punic' is in fact the same, because *poenus* is in fact equivalent to φοῖνιξ. Modern notions of 'Punic' as applying to the western Mediterranean take their inspiration principally from the later Roman literary tradition (dating from the very late Republic onwards), rather than any more secure foundation. The evidence for a real distinction between eastern and western Phoenicians will consequently be shown to be surprisingly weak.

² The problem is particularly visible in English translations, where *Poeni* is regularly (and wrongly) translated by 'Carthaginians': for example, Sélincourt (1965: 546 = Liv. 28.37.1-4), repeatedly renders *Poeni* as 'Carthaginians' in a passage where the whole point is that these were independent communities. Franko's 1994 study of *Poenus* and *Carthaginiensis* (see below) is itself partially flawed by such equivalence, and Palmer (1997: 74 n.7), responding to Franko, himself asserts '... we still doubt that when a Roman thought *Poenus*, he did not also think *Carthaginiensis*.'

The origins of 'Punic'

At its simplest, 'Punic' derives from the Latin *poenus*, while 'Phoenician' comes from the Greek φοῖνιξ. However, the existence of two, seemingly distinct terms in modern usage is not in fact an accurate reflection of the situation in antiquity. The Latin term *poenus* is itself the rendering of the Greek φοῖνιξ, with the Latin *phoenix* a later development of (probably) the first century BC.³

In both Greek and Latin there was originally only one term to describe these peoples, wherever in the Mediterranean they appeared. The origins of the Greek term φοῖνιξ are much debated, although the only point of significance for this discussion is that the name was not, so far as we can tell, one that the Phoenicians used of themselves (Billigmeier 1977; Röllig 1983; Vandersleyen 1987; Paraskevaidou 1991). Crucially, Greek never employed a second term to mark out a distinct western group of Phoenicians (or 'Punics'): whether they come from Gades, Carthage, or Tyre, all fall under the single label of φοίνικες. However, the actual reality of Greek usage is important – more often than not, most Greek writers would have described 'Phoenicians' from any of these cities as Gaditani, Carthaginians, or Tyrians, and not as Phoenicians (see further below).

In Latin, the original term was *poenus*;⁴ it is only subsequently that one also finds the term *phoenix*.⁵ Significantly, the earlier, unaspirated forms are found applied to eastern as well as western Phoenicians, reflecting the originally single designation, as in Greek.⁶ However, it does appear to be true that the later aspirated form, *phoenix*, is only ever found in description of eastern Phoenicians. The

³ On the distinction in ancient usage, see the original study of Bunnens (1983); much of what is discussed here is examined in more detail in Prag (2006), to which however add Edwards (1977), esp. 234-5 (I am grateful to Andrew Lintott for this reference).

⁴ And its cognates: *Punicans*, *punicanus*, *punicus*, and the adverb *punicus*; forms in *-oe-* are earlier (cf. Baldi 1999: 248 n. 1).

⁵ And its cognates: *Phoenice/Phoenica* (place-names, not adverbs), *Phoeniceus*, *Phoenicius*, *Phoenissa*.

⁶ As for example Cic., *Fin.* 4.56 (*poenulus* and *phoenicia* together); *Rep.* 2.9; 3.7; 3.fr.3; Varro, *Ling.* 5.23.113, 8.35.65. Varro, *Rust.* 1.1.10 refers specifically to language (*poenica lingua*), and instead raises the interesting question as to whether the language of the Carthaginians was distinguished by the ancients from that of the eastern Phoenicians (see further below).

developing distinction in usage, consequent upon a combination of linguistic evolution and historical patterns of interaction, is first visible in Varro and Cicero.⁷

Guy Bunnens has already observed that the aspirated forms only appear in Latin literature from the mid-first century BC onwards. He suggested an historical explanation for this, namely that the Romans were slow to become aware of the eastern Phoenicians as a distinct people from those of Carthage and the other Phoenician settlements of the western Mediterranean whom they had already encountered. For him therefore, the separation of the two terms was consequent upon the rise of Roman power in the East and the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC (Bunnens 1983; cf. Bunnens 1979). Appealing as this historical explanation may be, it can only be part of the answer, not least since it is partially flawed by the presumption that these peoples, East and West, were perceived to be distinct. Another essential consideration is more banal: the aspirate, and with it forms in *ph-*, only entered Latin orthography in the course of the second century BC.⁸

In other words, use of the term 'Punic' to delineate a distinct people in the western Mediterranean is a practice taken wholly from later Latin usage (not datable before the very end of the Republic), and itself not one universally adopted in antiquity, since it does not appear to be mirrored in, for example, contemporary Greek literature. That should, at the very least, be a cause for caution.

⁷ The earliest testimony to a distinction between *Phoenices* and *Poeni* looks to be in Varro (*ap. Pliny, HN*3.1.8): *in universam Hispaniam M. Varro pervenisse Hiberos et Persas et Phoenicas Celtasque et Poenos tradit*. See Prag 2006, 12 n.47 for the problematic case of the personal name *Phoenicium* in Plautus, *Pseud.* 226.

⁸ The digraphs *ph*, *th*, and *ch* are not found in early inscriptions and are prevalent in Latin orthography only from about the middle of the second century B.C.E. At that time they become standard in transcribing Greek names and other loanwords containing the Greek aspirated stops φ, θ, and χ [...]. Before that time it was customary for Latin to use the simple *p*, *t*, and *c* [...]. (Baldi 1999: 291). Wachter (1987: 455-6 with n. 1027) suggests that *CIL* I².2940, from Samothrace, is the earliest example: *L. Iu(v)entius M.[f.] / Thalna m[ystes] | pius* (possibly the legate active in Spain 185-184 BC, Livy 39.31.4, 39.38.4-6). *CIL* I².626, 630, and 631 (all from the 140s BC) are the other early examples. The presence of *triumphans*, *Achaia*, but also *Corinto* in no. 626, and the legend *Q. Pilipus* on *RRC* 259 (129 BC), indicate that the change was gradual. See now Poccetti (2010).

Before looking at the ancient usage in more detail, it may be helpful briefly to consider the comparison offered by the terms for Sicilian in Greek and Latin: fifth-century Greek discourse can clearly be seen to differentiate between Σικελοί (native Sikels) and Σικελιῶται (Greek settlers in Sicily); over time however the distinction broke down, and in Latin there was only ever the single term *Siculus*.⁹ The comparison's value lies in illustrating the different practices adopted in different languages, consequent upon different historical moments of identity formation and salience, and of language contact (significant Roman involvement in Sicily dates from the third century BC, by which time the distinctions internal to fifth-century Sicily had become largely irrelevant). The comparison has its limits however: the Punic case remains unusual both for the late formation of the Latin distinction, visible only after the primary period of historical interaction with Carthage (as we shall see, it is difficult to associate the Latin bifurcation with a salient identity), and the further fact that Greek speakers never took up the distinction. By contrast the Sicilian distinction was already obsolete when Latin-speakers came on the scene, and so the impetus for any such maintenance of separate identities was lost.

Ancient usage

A brief examination of ancient usage of the terms for Phoenician and Punic may help clarify this development. By placing the Greek usage of φοῖνιξ in context, it is possible to trace a development from Greek usage, including a negative tradition about the Phoenicians/Carthaginians in the western Greek tradition, through to the later Roman usage. Such a sequence offers at least a partial explanation for the subsequent development of two different terms in Latin, with the increasingly western-oriented term *poenus* carrying the greater burden of the negative stereotype. This is not to suggest that as a result of this trajectory later Roman usage was wholly negative (neither was the earlier Greek usage), but it is undeniable that the negative emphasis upon the *Poeni* in the Roman tradition comes to dominate over more neutral usage.¹⁰

⁹ On Σικελοί and Σικελιῶται, see for example Thuc. 6.34 and Antonaccio (2001); for the distinction's collapse over time, see Diod. Sic. 5.6.5 with Prag (2009).

¹⁰ For overviews of the portrayal of Phoenicians/Carthaginians, see for example Bunnens (1979); Mazza (1988); Prag (2006), also on epigraphic self-representation. Specifically on the Greek tradition,

As already suggested, Greek usage of ethnic descriptions is normally rather precise. Some texts speak of Phoenicians in the West, not least in the early period of westward expansion (for example, Thuc. 6.2.6, Hdt. 2.32, 4.197, 5.46, or Pind. *Pyth.* 1.72). Others imply that the Carthaginians can be treated as a group distinct from the broader category of Phoenicians without specifying whether they are or are not a part of that larger group, although the point of the passage is usually a contrast with the Phoenicians of the East (for example, Hdt. 7.167, Ephorus *FGI*H 70 F186). But, generally speaking, Greek usage is best exemplified by the precision of civic ethnics employed by writers as diverse as Aristophanes, Thucydides, or Aristotle (for example, Ar. *Eq.* 1303; Thuc. 6.15, 34, 88, 90; Arist. *Poet.* 1459a, *Pol.* 1272b-1273b). The second-century BC author Polybius provides a particularly interesting case-study. The term φοῖνιξ only occurs eight times in Polybius, always describing those in the West, together with one adverbial instance, meaning to speak Phoenicio-Punic.¹¹ This stands in sharp contrast to over 700 instances of the civic ethnic καρχηδόνιος in the same author.

This should not be a surprise. As Frank Walbank put it, 'Polybius was Greek enough to get this sort of thing right.'¹² Civic ethnics were the dominant form of ethnic and political identity in the ancient Mediterranean (and indeed the same would seem to be true within Phoenicio-Punic inscriptions and coinage also, not just in the Greek-speaking world).¹³ That being the case, a broader term such as φοῖνιξ requires more

for example: Ribichini (1983); Schepens (1987); Bondì (1990); Musti (1991); Barceló (1994). On the Roman tradition, for example: Thiel 1994 [1954]; Prandi (1979); Dubuisson (1983); Bellen (1985: 20-35); Franko (1994); Devallet (1996); Poinsothe (2002); Camous (2007).

¹¹ Polyb. 1.19.10 (army in Sicily); 3.78.1 (Hannibal uses a Phoenician stratagem); 6.52.10 (Phoenician character); 9.11.2 (Phoenician character); 11.19.4 (as one element of Hannibal's army); 14.1.4 (Syphax friendly towards Phoenicians); 14.5.4 (a Carthaginian camp is Phoenician); 15.4.3 (describing Carthaginians); 1.80.6 (adverbial form). There are also eight instances of Phoenicia proper, describing the region in the Levant: 3.2.8; 5.59.4, 5; 5.66.6; 5.67.10; 5.87.6; 8.17.11; 28.1.2. Cf. Franko (1994: 157-8), who does not put the instances in context, and Prag (2006: 18).

¹² Walbank (1951: 46 n.24); contrast Whittaker's (1978: 64) peculiar assertion that '[...] there is perhaps a natural tendency among Greek authors to think of all Phoenicians as Carthaginians.'

¹³ Thus, for example, Millar (1993: 246): 'The point is not a trivial one, for we consistently mistranslate, and therefore misconceive, the nature of the communal attachments which gave people their identity, in the eyes of both themselves and others.' On the Phoenicians, e.g. Niemeyer (2000: 93): 'The Levantine communities were apparently defined primarily as the populations of their respective city-

careful consideration. The modern tendency to classify 'Phoenician' (or 'Punic') as an ethnic, in contrast to a political designation (the civic 'ethnic') is precisely that – a modern tendency. Epigraphic and literary practices differed in antiquity, and modern notions of ethnicity do not readily map onto ancient practices.¹⁴ In Greek epigraphy, the handful of instances of the ethnic label φοῖνιξ appear to relate specifically to an immediate origin in the actual region of Levantine Phoenicia (Prag 2006: 22-4; cf. Hansen 1996: 174-5, 187, 190; Prag 2006: 20-1): not in itself either surprising or unusual as an example of a regional or supra-polis ethnic, typically based upon a toponym. The use of the term in literature, in relation to those in the West, belongs in a different category. The examples of φοῖνιξ in Polybius are atypical for their association in several instances with the negative stereotype of the Phoenicians, which is otherwise virtually absent from that particular author.¹⁵ Consequently, it has been suggested that Polybius' usage here is a direct consequence of his close association with his Roman hosts, and so reflects the Roman influence of the negative Punic stereotype upon the writer (Walbank 1957-79, I: 412, *ad* Polyb. 3.78.1). Arguably that does Polybius himself an injustice, but more importantly, it (wrongly) gives the responsibility for the negative stereotype entirely to the Romans, and so fails to take proper account of prior Greek usage. It should be stressed that at the time when Polybius was writing, Latin *poenus* was equivalent to Greek *phoenix*, and not necessarily therefore either a distinct term nor possessed of a distinct function.

A clear case can be made for the development in the western Greek tradition, from at least the early fifth century BC, of the presentation of the Carthaginians as the 'barbarian' (Prag 2010). From the outset, this can often be seen operating in explicit

states, and had thus already developed their corporate identity by the second millennium. [...] As to the people and their ethnicity, the predominant if not decisive factor seems to have been whether or not they belonged to one of the city-communities along the Levantine coast.' See e.g. *SEG* 18.450 (c. 200 BC), and Prag (2006: 21-2, nn. 94-6) for more examples.

¹⁴ Cf. Lomas (2000: 86), discussing Italic peoples: 'Although the literary sources routinely prioritise the ethnic names over those of the individual communities, referring to these collectively, the epigraphic evidence generated by these communities themselves at the same period, in contrast, shows the opposite pattern - an emphasis on the state rather than the *ethnos*.'

¹⁵ Noted and emphasized by Franko 1994, 157-8, albeit with the false presumption that φοῖνιξ here means Carthaginian.

parallelism with the developing treatment of the Persians by the Athenians and others, and later on the similar influence of the Alexander tradition is also clear (cf. Feeney 2007: 43-59).¹⁶ Such a presentation often forms a key part of the claims of Syracusan tyrants, and others, to liberate the Sicilian Greeks from the (barbarian) Carthaginians. From at least the fourth century BC onwards this discourse shows signs of a strongly negative and moralizing tone, as for instance in the claim that Gelon required the Carthaginians to give up human sacrifice, reported in the tradition as early as Theophrastus (Theophr. *ap.* Schol. Pind. *Pyth.* 2.2 = Fortenbaugh *et al.* 1992: 2 no. 586), or in the ridicule of Carthaginian clothing in the speech attributed to Timoleon by Timaeus at the battle of the Crimisus (Timaeus in Polyb. 12.26.a). However, even in these instances, typical Greek usage tends to predominate, with both texts referring to the Carthaginians rather than the Phoenicians. Slippage from 'Carthaginians' to 'Phoenicians' is much more visible in the later, first-century Diodorus Siculus (for example, 14.46, 14.65, 15.15-17), much of which may be attributable to Timaeus (but not necessarily, nor all of it). But the possibility of using the broader term 'Phoenicians', as opposed to 'Carthaginians', in the western Greek tradition (as per the earlier accounts of western settlement noted above) is well exemplified by Theocritus, writing *circa* 275 BC:

Even now between the setting sun the Phoenicians that dwell in the outmost skirts of Libya tremble for fear; even now Syracusans grip their spears by the middle and charge their arms with shields of wicker, while Hieron, in their midst, girds himself like the heroes of old with crest of horsehair shadowing his helm (*Idyll* 16.76-81, trans. Gow).

A key text which illustrates the slippage, in just such a charged context, is the fourth-century [Plato] *Epistle* 8.353a and e:

[...] at that moment, I mean, when Greek Sicily was in the greatest danger of being laid waste by the Carthaginians and so reverting altogether to barbarism (ἐκβαρβαρωθεῖσαν). [...] You are face to face with the probability – may God avert it – that the Greek tongue will

¹⁶ Note esp. Hdt. 7.165-6, Pind. *Pyth.* I. 71-80; also Lysias 33.5 and Isoc. *Ep.* 1.7-8 for the application of later Panhellenic themes to the Sicilian sphere.

be all but silenced throughout the whole of Sicily, for that island will have come under the domination and have passed into the hands of Phoenicians or Opici (Φοινίκων ἢ Ὀπικῶν). (trans. Post).

Significantly, the additional element in this particular text, which might be considered at least partially responsible for the slippage, is the emphasis upon the importance of language (the obscure term Opician here standing most probably for Italian Oscan speakers). Language was, of course, originally the defining element in the categorization of the barbarian.

The fact that Greek usage illustrates this tendency towards negative stereotyping, and can be seen on occasion to employ the broader term Phoenician when doing so, even if not consistently or universally, is important.¹⁷ Not only does it provide a background to the exceptional instances in Polybius, which do not then require a purely Romano-centric explanation (that Polybius knew his Timaeus, for example, is undeniable), but it also prefigures the pattern which we observe subsequently in Latin literature, and so removes the need for *poenus* to have a specifically western meaning. It has been argued that in Latin the term *Carthaginiensis* was reserved for neutral and political statements, while *poenus* was employed for negative stereotyping and similar forms of reference (esp. Franko 1994: 158). There is much to recommend this in general terms – and it can be seen that such a pattern would not be wholly dissimilar to that traced with φοῖνιξ in Greek usage – but it is too narrow and polarized a representation of the reality, and again misses the point when it comes to ancient ascriptions of identity.¹⁸ Firstly, while it is true that all *Carthaginienses* are *Poeni*, it is clearly not the case that all *Poeni* are *Carthaginienses*, and the term *poenus* can be used without any reference to Carthaginians at all, whether with reference to people in the western Mediterranean, or in the East.¹⁹ Secondly, it is also, as in the Greek tradition, perfectly possible to find negative

¹⁷ Contrast Barceló (1994), who argues that the negative tradition is wholly Roman (although he is forced to make an exception for Timaeus).

¹⁸ For fuller consideration of usage in Latin down to the Principate, see Prag (2006: 12-17).

¹⁹ For example, descriptions of the people of Gades as Punic but with no direct Carthaginian element (Cic. *Balb.* 5, 30, 32, 39, 43; Livy 28.37.1-4); for the western Mediterranean Punics more generally, in a post-Carthaginian world, e.g. Cic. *De Div.* 2.131; *Ver.* 3.12, Sall. *Iug.* 19; Hor. *Carm.* 2.2.10-12. For the term describing the East, see above.

statements about the Carthaginians without recourse to the label ‘Phoenician’ (for example, Cic. *Leg. agr.* 2.95; *Phil.* 14.9; *Inv. rhet.* 1.71; Sall. *Cat.* 51.6; Livy 28.44.4; Val. Max. 9.6 ext.1).²⁰ Thirdly the term *poenus* can be found in use in a Roman context that is both semi-official and relatively neutral, and that extends beyond Carthage in its reference.²¹ These uses presumably reflect the term’s wider and more general frame of reference, as originally the *only* term available to describe all those of ultimately Phoenician origin. The tendency to use the broader label (whether Greek φοῖνιξ or Latin *poenus*) in negative judgements is then rather a reflection of the sweeping, non-verifiable claims made when stereotyping (which consequently operate much better with vague, rather than specific attributions), in both traditions, and is only one possible use of these broader labels (on stereotypes, see Bringham 1971; Hall 1989: 102-13; Bohak 2005). It is a very questionable step to infer from such instances a specific meaning for *poenus* in contrast to *phoenix*.

Two particular aspects of the usage of *poenus* might usefully be highlighted at this point, since they will serve to illustrate the wider range of uses of *poenus* and to extend the context for the increasingly western and negative orientation of the term, at least in surviving literature. The first is the use of the term *poenus* specifically in relation to language. As already noted in relation to the [Plato] passage quoted above, or as highlighted by Plautus’ *Poenulus*, the linguistic difference between speakers of Greek, Latin, or Phoenicio-Punic offers one of the prime contexts for the blanket use of the term *poenus* (or φοῖνιξ – or its potential conceptual equivalent, ‘barbarian’). However, it is again worth pointing out the divergence between modern and ancient practice, and the fact that modern writers have imported an additional layer of difference that cannot be found in the ancient sources. Modern linguists distinguish Phoenician from Punic, albeit at the level of dialectal

²⁰ Interestingly, considering that it is frequently (although by no means universally) considered to be a highly negative portrayal of ‘Punics’, Plautus’ *Poenulus* is the only Plautine play in which the more specific *Carthaginiensis* is employed (*Carthaginiensis* in Plaut. *Poen.* 59, 84, 997, 1124, 1377; *Poenus* in *Poen.* 104, 113, 120, 977, 991, 1125; the linguistic adjective *punice* also appears in *Poen.* 982-92, 1000. *Poenus* also in *Aul.* 566; *Cas.* 76; *Cist.* 202; *fr. inc.* 49.1). Note also Sall. *Jug.* 79.8 (two Carthaginians, subsequently called *Poeni*, behaving admirably, in contrast to some nasty Greeks from Cyrene).

²¹ In particular Cic. *Ver.* 3.12, referring to peoples subject to taxation; note the reference to the *bello Poinicio proxsumo* in the earliest secure epigraphic attestation of the term, in the *Lex agraria* of circa 111 BC (Crawford 1996, I: no. 2, line 75).

developments in Phoenicio-Punic rather than as separate languages (Amadasi Guzzo and Röllig 1995: 185-7). They also distinguish Punic from neo-Punic: the latter term designates a development in script rather than language (for which 'Late Punic' is preferred; cf. Amadasi Guzzo 1995: 26) and is a classification invented by Schröder in 1869 (Szyncer 1978: 266). The modern tendency to employ neo-Punic as a cultural label (e.g., van Dommelen 1998: 40) is even more problematic than the similar employment of 'Punic'. There is, however, so far as I am aware, no evidence that the ancient Greeks and Romans drew any such distinction: once again, there was only a single term in each of Greek and Latin for the language spoken/written by eastern and western Phoenicians alike. The perils of 'inventing' ethnic distinctions based upon linguistic labels, which have no necessary connection to labels or categories evidenced in antiquity, have been pointed out often enough not to require repetition (see esp. MacDonald 1998: 182-8). The modern distinction, in this instance, feeds off (false) presumptions about the value of the label *poenus*, and thereby generates a dangerously circular argument in support of the supposed significance of the ethnic label.

The second element worth noting is the variety of material culture items that attract the label 'Punic' in Latin authors, visible already in Cato's *De Agricultura* of the first part of the second century BC (e.g. Cato *Agr.* 7.3, 18.9, 85.1, 126.1; *ORF*³ 185; perhaps also in Plaut. *Aul.* 566). These elements do go some way towards suggesting that, in Latin, *poenus* was particularly associated with the North African region, but here too this may be no more than the historical accident that earlier Roman contact was primarily with western Phoenicians, mostly in Africa (or Spain).²² Livy's association of the position of *sufet* with the *Poeni* comes in the context of an account of Gades, with *poenus* clearly used in its broadest sense (Livy 28.37.1-4). It is, of course, quite undeniable that historically the Romans came into contact principally with the western Phoenicians before the eastern Phoenicians, as Bunnens noted, and that much of the (Roman) discourse which developed about these peoples did so in a

²² For *Poeni* in Spain as well, see for example Hor. *Carm.* 2.2.10-12; Sen. *Dial.* 12.7.2; Pliny *HN* 3.1.8; Mela 2.96.

western environment where the western Phoenicians, and in particular the Carthaginians, had been political or military opponents of one or other group for some time (most obviously, but not only, the Greeks of Syracuse), and so attracted the sort of negative discourse that is so often associated with conflict and competition (see above). Such a situation was of course reinforced and exacerbated by the Punic wars, and doubtless by the early Latin literature about the wars, which would, presumably, have rendered conventional the use of the archaic spelling of *poenus* for these conflicts (as for example in Naevius' *Bellum Poenicum*). The Third Punic War was already described as *bellum poenicum* in the *Lex Agraria* of circa 111 BC, line 75, although the wars strikingly did not attract such a name in Polybius. It should however be clear, by now, that the specific focus of the term *poenus* on the West, and in particular around Carthage, is a distillation of the increasingly polarized later tradition, and not the term's underlying meaning. Bunnens was undoubtedly right to suggest a historical explanation for the gradual development of two terms, *poenus* and *phoenix*, in Latin, but the explanation is a much more complex one, combining several centuries of history – and historiography – in the western Mediterranean, together with linguistic evolution, and the weight of later literary tradition.

Crucial to this whole analysis remains the point that no-one in the surviving evidence describes themselves as 'Punic', and in the later Latin tradition the aspirated form *phoenix* is directly associated, after the fashion of normal, topographical, regional ethnics in the Greek tradition and indeed as per epigraphic usage in the Greek East, with the region of the Levantine coast known as Phoenicia. Both *Carthaginiensis* (*AE* 1906.35; 1913.207; 1981.871; 1981.926; cf. 1989.888; *ILS* 6813) and *Afer* (*CIL* 12.686; 13.8335; 13.2000; cf. Palmer 1997: 74 n. 7) are reasonably commonplace as ethnics in Latin epigraphy of the imperial period; there are by contrast only two possible examples of *punicus* in the entire epigraphic *corpus* (*CIL* 3.4910, an imperial-period epitaph from Noricum; *AE* 1972.14 = Di Stefano Manzella 1972, an epitaph of 48 BC from the via Latina), and both are difficult in their reading and far from clear (cf. Prag 2006: 29). There are no recorded examples of *phoenix* as

an ethnic in Latin inscriptions. At the same time, 'Punic' traditions were being (re)invented in parts of Roman North Africa (Quinn forthcoming: 9-13), which would provide a further context for a developing North African focus to the term *poenus*, reinforcing the earlier historical focus on the West in the Roman tradition. However, it is worth pointing out that Sallust (*BJ* 78), writing in the 40s BC, described Lepcis Magna, which offers one of the best examples of 'Punic' reinvention, as being mostly 'Sidonian' in its laws and customs, not 'Punic', in a passage which considers interaction with the neighbouring Numidians. It is therefore difficult to argue that the evolving distinction between *poenus* and *phoenix* in Latin literature, which post-dates the fall of Carthage, should be directly tied to any obvious salience in a 'Punic' identity.

Conclusions

In other words, the ethnic label which we use so freely in modern discourse was used in a range of ways in antiquity, few of which map with any ease onto modern usage, and few of which, if any, equate to the normal range of ethnic labels in antiquity. The term, whether Greek φοῖνιξ or Latin *poenus*, had a potentially much wider range when used of people (both words relating to all those of Phoenician origin, and so equivalent only to the recent tendency to speak simply of eastern and western Phoenicians, or the already outmoded combination term 'Phoenicio-Punic'). Strikingly the term *poenus* is almost completely restricted to the literary sphere (likewise, but to a lesser extent, φοῖνιξ), not least when used in relation to people of the western Mediterranean. As is well known it shows a strong, although by no means universal tendency to be used in contexts, both Greek and Roman, that entail negative value judgements of peoples that may or may not include the Carthaginians, but that is not however equivalent to a definition of the term. Where the term does have a more specific use it is in relation either to language (where however the modern distinction between Phoenician and Punic does not appear to be reflected in ancient usage), or else to very specific material culture elements in the central western Mediterranean basin. In the case of these latter it is true that many of them – but not all – derive from the region of North Africa. By itself, however, this last is hardly sufficient to argue for an ancient view of a specifically 'Punic' (in any

modern sense) ethnic category. There is, in fact, very little basis in the ancient terminology for the modern distinction between Phoenicians and Punics, or even between Eastern and Western Phoenicians.

Poenus as an ancient term has few easy parallels for its range of usage. It falls outside the normal category of an ethnic, lacking any direct topographical foundation, and not relating either to any sort of coherent or easily identifiable political grouping. In this respect it is clearly not comparable to 'Roman' or 'Italian', for example. As a term that can however be connected to a linguistic group and on occasion to cultural or institutional traits, and which has an extremely rich presence in the literary tradition, the single closest parallel is probably 'Greek'. That particular aspect becomes all the clearer when one compares the language of, say, Cicero describing the Greeks (as in, for example, the *Pro Flacco*), where the blanket label reveals itself to be a highly flexible and powerful term of categorization, and indeed stereotyping, capable in turn of being sharply subdivided not least on a regional and civic basis (so Sicilians and Massaliotes can be 'better' Greeks, Phrygians and Carians 'worse', etc.) – such a set of distinctions of course reflecting the levels of more normal, everyday identity (Vasaly 1993; Ferrary 2001 and forthcoming in *Phoenix*). There are clear limits to this parallel, not least in the very clear and widespread self-ascription of the term 'Greek' (or 'Hellene') in antiquity. The total absence of Punic literary sources means that at some level this becomes an argument from silence. The historical fate of Carthage, and the Roman influence upon the later tradition in turn are clearly responsible for the increasing polarization of the literary tradition, and the evolution of the seemingly distinct frame of reference of *poenus* in the later literature. All of that being acknowledged, we are fully aware these days of the highly flexible nature of the label 'Greek' and the very complex processes attached to the process of 'Hellenization' in the ancient Mediterranean. Given such apparent parallels in usage between 'Punic' and 'Greek', it would seem that rather greater caution is due in our use of the term 'Punic' also.

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