

## Inverting the Carthaginian Foundation Myth in Nepos' *Hannibal*

This paper offers an analysis of Cornelius Nepos' *Life of Hannibal* and its manipulation of the foundation myth of Carthage. I argue that, in his description of Hannibal's period of exile, Nepos inverts important elements of Carthage's foundation myth, and, further, that he uses this reversal to emphasize the changes in Hannibal's *virtus* during his time in the East. In so doing, I build on recent scholarship that analyzes Nepos' *vitae* with a focus on his use of literary figures and the comparative model he utilizes in his works (e.g., Titchener 2003 and Beneker 2009).

Nepos' *vita* focuses on the exile of the formidable general in order to depict how this Carthaginian fled from the Romans and returned to his Tyrian roots, inverting Elissa's foundation myth along the way. I build upon the work of Scheid and Svenbro (1985), Daviault (1991), and others in an analysis of the ancient accounts of the foundation of the city by Elissa in order to elucidate the standard elements of the foundation myth that would have been understood in Nepos' day. The ancient accounts of Elissa's flight to the West, including Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus, contain three key elements: 1) her clandestine departure from Tyre; 2) the cunning that she demonstrates in the ruses she employs to preserve her wealth and purchase land for her new city; and 3) the native Africans' acceptance of her arrival. Throughout his account of Hannibal's life, Nepos selects events and compresses other details to emphasize the Carthaginian's trickery. Further, Nepos' narrative of Hannibal's surreptitious departure from Carthage, flight to the East, and subsequent ruse to preserve his wealth from the greedy Gortynians preserves an account of Hannibal's exile that stresses the traditional elements of the foundation myth, only inverted.

In so doing, Nepos shows that Hannibal has lost the virtue that he displayed during his successes in his war against Rome even as he continues to demonstrate the acts of deception for

which he is famous (cf. Stem 2009). The thread of Punic perfidy is thus woven throughout both Nepos' biography and the foundation myth of Carthage and is the one element that stretches back to the oldest traditions of Tyre and the Phoenicians' past there. I conclude by arguing that Nepos' *Life of Hannibal* inverts the Carthaginian foundation myth to focalize the narrative on the general's deceptive nature and to contrast his character with traditional depictions of Elissa, the city's more virtuous founder. Further, I suggest that Nepos' narrative strategy overturns the expected cultural themes and motives behind his subjects' actions.

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