

## NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

### A LEGEND OF THE DESTRUCTION OF CARTHAGE

R. T. Ridley's recent note on the modern and ancient sources for the destruction of Carthage in 146 B.C. offers a stimulating corrective to the modern belief that the city was sown with salt upon its destruction.<sup>1</sup> He is, however, mistaken in asserting that the plowing of Carthage is also a modern invention. The story of the city's destruction, like many legends, is a compound of historical fact and the distortions or embellishments of later ages. It is possible to shed more light on the history and development of this legend by breaking it down into its historical and folkloric parts: the plowing and the salting.

As Ridley has shown, neither the main ancient accounts of the destruction nor passing mentions of the event in other sources attest the use of plow and salt.<sup>2</sup> The sources that discuss the later history of the city do, however, imply that some religious rituals were performed on the site, though their exact nature is unclear. Macrobius is the most helpful source because he quotes the text of a *devotio* that was to be accompanied by certain gestures of the commander and the sacrifice of three black rams.<sup>3</sup> There are other indications that the site of the Punic city was under religious taboo: the portents that plagued the Gracchan colony of Junonia in 122 B.C. (Plut. *C. Gracch.* 11) and provided religious grounds for suppressing the colony (App. *BCiv.* 1. 24); the exemption of parts of Carthage from the agrarian law of 111;<sup>4</sup> and Cicero's arguments (*Leg. agr.* 1. 2. 5, 2. 19. 51) against the *rogatio Servilia agraria*. Furthermore, a passage of Tertullian on Carthage's trials (*De pallio* 1) alludes to a reconsecration of the city to the infernal gods in 81 B.C.<sup>5</sup> and to rites performed by Sestius Saturninus, probably in 14/13 B.C.,<sup>6</sup> celebrating the Augustan colony Julia Carthago.

There is no doubt that the Romans, like many other agricultural peoples, used a plow to draw a ritual furrow around a new city.<sup>7</sup> Although the ancient sources are less expansive on the subject, the Romans also used the plow in a similar but

1. "To Be Taken with a Pinch of Salt: The Destruction of Carthage," *CP* 81 (1986): 140-46.

2. "Pinch of Salt," pp. 140-42.

3. *Sat.* 3. 9. 9-14, mentioned by Ridley, "Pinch of Salt," p. 142, and discussed by J. Marquardt, *Römische Staatsverwaltung*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1878), pp. 268-70, and G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*<sup>2</sup> (Munich, 1912), p. 322. Macrobius claims to have taken the text from Serenus Sammonicus, who took it in turn from a certain Furius—probably L. Furius Philus, cos. 136, a friend of Scipio.

4. *CIL* 1. 200. 81, with the comments of Mommsen, p. 100. The implications of the law for Carthage are further discussed by A. Audollent, *Carthage romain*, BEFAR 82 (Paris, 1901), pp. 38-39.

5. Cf. S. Gsell, "Les premiers temps de la Carthage romaine," *RH* 156 (1927): 225-27.

6. Cf. B. Thomasson, *Die Statthalter der römischen Provinzen Nordafrikas*, vol. 2 (Lund, 1960), pp. 11-12; my thanks to the anonymous referee for this reminder.

7. The ritual of the *sulcus primigenius* is described at length in many Greek and Latin sources; cf. C. Thulin, *Die etruskische Disciplin*, vol. 3 (Göteborg, 1909), pp. 5-6.

contrary ritual to destroy the identity of a city.<sup>8</sup> The practice may have been widespread, since Propertius (3. 9. 41), Horace (*Carm.* 1. 16. 21), and Seneca (*Clem.* 1. 26. 4) mention (without referring to Carthage) the passing of a plow over a city's site as a mark of its complete annihilation. Furthermore, Modestinus, a jurist of the third century A.D. whose legal opinions were excerpted in the *Digesta*, uses Carthage specifically as an example of a city deprived of *usus fructus* by having a plow drawn over the site: "si usus fructus civitati legetur et aratrum in ea inducatur, civitas esse desinit, ut passa est Carthago, ideoque quasi morte desinit habere usum fructum."<sup>9</sup> Since Mommsen published the two volumes of his edition of the *Digesta* in 1866 and 1870, this passage is the probable source of his carefully worded statement quoted by Ridley.<sup>10</sup> Among modern scholars Niebuhr cannot be credited with introducing the story of the plow and its literal interpretation into the history of Carthage.<sup>11</sup> The story was evidently widespread already in the 1780s, when Edward Stanley wrote: "The present ruins are by no means the remnants of the ancient city destroyed by the Romans; who, after taking it, drove out the few wretched inhabitants left alive, entirely erased it and plowed up the foundations."<sup>12</sup> The story must have received even wider dissemination by being included in the fourth edition (1810) of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the report of the plowing of Carthage was already circulating in antiquity and continued to be transmitted by modern scholars, complete with misinterpretations, even in the last decades of the eighteenth century.

Now to the salt, the other major feature of the story as it is told in modern accounts. There is, to my knowledge, no ancient evidence that attests the ritual use of salt in this fashion by the Romans;<sup>14</sup> Ridley's discussion of the ancient Near Eastern origin of the ritual is persuasive, and he is surely correct in suggesting that a reading of Judges 9:45 shaped the legend of the salting of Carthage.<sup>15</sup> But when was the salt-sowing interpolated in the story? It was certainly earlier than 1930, the date of B. Hallward's chapter in the *Cambridge Ancient History*.<sup>16</sup> Though ancient historians may have been innocent of the story until this date, scholars in other fields were not. The Freudian analyst Ernest Jones, in an article published in 1912, asserted: "it has at all ages been a common custom to add strength to a curse by strewing salt as a symbol of destruction."<sup>17</sup> One of his examples is the destruction of Carthage by the Romans—even though M. J. Schleiden, Jones' source, makes no mention of Carthage in this context.<sup>18</sup> I am convinced that Jones did not originate the story

8. Servius ad *Aen.* 4. 212. J. Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town* (Princeton, 1976), p. 70, suggests that the Greeks had a similar practice.

9. *Dig.* 7. 4. 21; my thanks to Ralph Mathisen for helping me to track down this reference.

10. "Pinch of Salt," p. 142.

11. Cf. Ridley, "Pinch of Salt," p. 143.

12. *Observations on the City of Tunis and the Adjacent Country* (London, 1786), p. 24, quoted by Audolent, *Carthage*, p. 816.

13. S.v. "Carthage," p. 222.

14. See Ridley, "Pinch of Salt," p. 142.

15. "Pinch of Salt," pp. 144–45.

16. On Hallward, see Ridley, "Pinch of Salt," p. 144.

17. "The Symbolic Significance of Salt in Folklore and Superstition," reprinted in his *Essays in Applied Psycho-Analysis* (London, 1923), p. 190.

18. *Das Salz: Seine Geschichte und Symbolik* (Leipzig, 1875), p. 95.

of the salting of Carthage, but his case is instructive. It suggests that in the continuing search for the source of the story and its first application to Carthage we should look to nonspecialist works of the mid- to late nineteenth century.

We should note, too, that the legend of a city's being plowed and salted is a prominent motif in the city chronicles of medieval Italy. Padua is said to have been destroyed and sown with salt by Attila the Hun in A.D. 452;<sup>19</sup> and Milan was allegedly destroyed, plowed, and salted by Frederick Barbarossa in 1162.<sup>20</sup> The legend of Attila's salting of Padua, like his epithet *flagellum Dei*, is probably based on the Old Testament.<sup>21</sup> Christians would readily have compared his actions in France and Italy with the destruction of cities by the heathen Assyrians. The Milanese chroniclers may have adopted the motif from Paduan sources and applied it to Barbarossa without being aware of its origins in the Old Testament: to compare one of the leaders of western Christendom at the time of the Crusades to the Assyrian Abimelech would have been incongruous, even if that leader was hostile to the pope. I have not, however, been able to rule out the possibility that Frederick, as Holy Roman Emperor, was imagined to be imitating a Roman ritual practice by plowing and salting Milan. In any case, already by the mid-eighteenth century Italian historians had rejected the plowing and salting of Milan as unhistorical, for the same reasons that the application of the story to Carthage has now been rejected by Ridley.<sup>22</sup> By the last quarter of the nineteenth century some scholars had recognized that the plowing and salting of an enemy city by the victor was a well-established folkloric motif.<sup>23</sup>

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19. Schleiden, *Das Salz*, p. 95. For the legends of Attila in Padua, see A. Simioni, *Storia di Padova dalle origine alla fine del secolo XVII* (Padua, 1968), pp. 92-95.

20. The legend is at least as old as the fourteenth century: G. Fiamma, *Manipulus Flori, sive Historia mediolanensis ab origine urbis ad annum 1336* 190, cited in *Storia di Milano*, vol. 4 (Milan, 1954), p. 68.

21. Cf. H. de Boor, *Das Attilabild in Geschichte, Legende und heroischer Dichtung* (Bern, 1932), p. 8, n. 8. In the early seventh century Isidore of Seville (*Hist. Goth.* 29, *Chron. min.*, 2:279) derived *virga furoris dei*, as an epithet for Attila, from Isaiah 14:5; for Attila in the eighth century, see F. Altheim, *Attila und die Hunnen* (Baden Baden, 1955), p. 138.

22. See G. Giuliani, *Memorie spettanti alla storia, al governo ed alla descrizione della città e della compagne di Milano ne' secoli bassi*, vol. 6 (Milan, 1760), p. 264, and P. Verri, *Storia di Milano* (Milan, 1783), p. 334.

23. Cf. Schleiden, *Das Salz*, p. 95.

#### PASSING THE SALT: ON THE DESTRUCTION OF CARTHAGE AGAIN

R. T. Ridley's note, "To Be Taken with a Pinch of Salt: The Destruction of Carthage,"<sup>1</sup> contains an indictment of B. Hallward, the British historian who wrote a chapter on the Third Punic War for the *Cambridge Ancient History* in 1930. According to Ridley, Hallward was the culprit who introduced to modern