

An Ambiguous Oracle from the Libyan Desert

1 In the Footsteps of Alexander

‘Son of Zeus.’ This is how the priest of Zeus Hammon allegedly greeted Alexander the Great when he arrived at the shrine of the god in the Siwa Oasis.¹ Alexander travelled to this sacred place in the middle of the Libyan desert to obtain an oracle for his upcoming march against Asia. Whatever the authenticity of this event, the greeting of Alexander as son of the supreme god was regarded as a sign of divine favour, which would result in a successful conquest of Asia, and was even taken literally as proof of his divine descent.²

The visit of Alexander to this oracle has also found its way into the *Punica*. Alexander’s consultation is nowhere explicitly mentioned, but Hannibal sends his envoy Bostar to the same temple at a crucial point of *his* military enterprise, right after the capture of Saguntum and just before crossing the Alps at the very beginning of Book 3:

nec uatum mentes agitare et praescia corda
cessatum super imperio. citus aequore Bostar
uela dare et rerum praenoscerre fata iubetur.
prisca fides adytis longo seruat ab aeuo,
qua sublime sedens, Cirrhaeis aemulus antris,
inter anhelantes Garamantas corniger Hammon
fatidico pandit uenientia saecula luco.
hinc omen coeptis et casus scire futuros
ante diem bellique uices nouisse petebat. (3.5–13)

He does not stop to urge the minds of seers and prescient hearts on the topic of supreme power. Bostar is ordered to quickly set sail over the sea and to learn the fate of events beforehand. An ancient faith is preserved

1 Plutarch (*Alex.* 27.5) attributes this form of address to a flawed Greek pronunciation of the priest. According to Plutarch, the priest just wanted to call Alexander ‘child’ to reassure him. Instead of ὦ παιδίον he said ὦ παιδίος, as if he were saying ὦ παῖ Διός.

2 Plutarch (*Alex.* 26.6–27), Curtius Rufus (4.7.5–32), Arrian (*An.* 3.3.4), and Diodorus Siculus (17.49–51) mention Alexander’s visit to the oracle of Hammon. See Nicol 1936: 7–9 and Stürner 2015: 185 and 203.

by a sanctuary from an early age, where the horned Hammon sits on high, a rival of the Cirrhaean caves, and reveals the coming eras from his prophetic grove between the panting Garamantes. From here Hannibal sought an omen for his undertakings and knowledge on the future chances and the vicissitudes of war before their date.

Only at the end of Book 3, when Hannibal has just crossed the Alps and arrived in Italy, does Bostar return from Libya and give a report of his journey and the oracle of Hammon. This ring composition adds to the suspense of the story: both Hannibal and the primary narratees only hear the words at the very end of the book.³

There is no historical evidence for Hannibal's consultation of the oracle at this point of his military enterprise—Silius is the only source to mention it.⁴ In this chapter I explore the role of Bostar's narrative in Book 3 and the *Punica* as a whole. How does it relate to other prophecies? And more specifically: what does the narrative have to say about Hannibal and his relationship with the gods?

Before answering these questions, I examine the narrators and narratees of this episode, because this helps to see whether Bostar can be seen as a "Spiegel-oder Schattenbild" of Hannibal, as Walter has argued.⁵ After that, I discuss the intertexts of the passage. The Silian narrative resonates two other visits to the same oracle. Apart from Alexander's famous visit, Bostar's expedition recalls Cato's journey through the Libyan desert in Lucan's *Bellum Civile* 9, as has been widely acknowledged.⁶ Aeneas' encounter with the Sibyl in Virgil's *Aeneid* 6 is another oracular consultation that comes to mind when reading Bostar's narrative.⁷ In what way do Alexander, Cato, and Aeneas effect the characterization

3 Vessey 1982: 334 calls the mission of Bostar 'otiose', as Hannibal has already crossed the Alps: there is no way back. Hannibal did, however, not send his envoy to Hammon for getting divine permission, but divine information. On a narrative level, the oracle is a prolepsis of the battles until Cannae and especially of the battles in Book 4 and 5. On the ring composition of Book 3, see also Von Albrecht 1964: 197 and Küppers 1986: 189–190.

4 On this matter, see especially Stürmer 2015: 184–186, who explains that Bostar's visit might have been inspired by the tradition that Hannibal visited the oracle of Hammon in 193 BC, when he was living as an exile at the court of Antiochus III in Ephesus. He got an ambiguous oracle, saying that he would be buried in Libyssian earth, which he interpreted as Libyan earth: ὁ μὲν δὴ ἤλπιζεν ἀρχὴν τε τὴν Ρωμαίων καθαιρήσειν καὶ οὐκ ἄδε ἐς τὴν Λιβύην ἐπανελθῶν τελευτήσειν γῆρα τὸν βίον ('so he hoped to destroy the Roman empire, to return to his home in Libya, and there to die of old age', Paus. 8.11.11). The oracle turned out to have prophesied his suicide as an exile in Libyssa, a town in Bithynia. See also Seibert 1993a: 514.

5 Walter 2014: 300.

6 E.g. Gibson 2005: 187–193, Walter 2014: 300–303, Stürmer 2015: 194.

7 Walter 2014: 303.

of Bostar and by extension Hannibal? In the final part of this chapter, I examine the intratextual relation between Bostar's embedded narrative and the main narrative of the *Punica*.⁸

2 Synopsis of the Narrative

After his crossing of the Alps Hannibal pitches his camp in northern Italy. At this moment his officer Bostar returns from Libya, where he has received an oracular response from Hammon (3.647–649). Bostar begins by narrating to Hannibal his journey through the desert (3.650–665). Then he describes the arrival at the grove of Hammon, where he met the priest Arisbas (3.666–674). An aetiological tale on the origin of the forest and shrine follows, put in the mouth of the priest (3.675–691). Bostar continues to relate how the god takes possession of the priest (3.692–699), before finally quoting the oracular response itself (3.700–712), which predicts fierce warfare in Italy and fear for the Romans as long as Hannibal is alive. This message raises the spirits of Hannibal's troops and makes them belligerent (3.713–714, the final lines of the book).

3 Narratological Structure

The embedded narrative, counting 68 lines (3.647–714), has three levels of narration. The primary narrator quotes the words of Bostar, who addresses Hannibal. Bostar in turn ventriloquizes the words of the priest Arisbas, who is a tertiary narrator with Bostar as his narratee. This tertiary level consists of 30 lines (3.675–691 and 700–712) or almost half of the total. Interestingly, Bostar and Arisbas are narratological look-alikes, as we will see: they mirror each other in their role of narrator.

We can even discern the merging of narrative levels, or metalepsis.⁹ This is the case when Arisbas utters the oracular message while being possessed by the god. The tertiary narrator—either Arisbas or Hammon—addresses at this point Hannibal, who is narratee on a secondary level. I will argue that this mirroring and merging of narrators and narratees has implications for the understanding of the narrative as a whole.

⁸ The recent commentary on Book 3 of Augoustakis and Littlewood 2022 has not been incorporated in this study.

⁹ For metalepsis, see e.g. De Jong 2014: 41–42.

3.1 *Bostar and Arisbas: Mirroring Narrators*

While Bostar narrates events he has seen and experienced in person, Arisbas recounts events that go beyond the geographical and temporal boundaries of the narrative. This role befits Arisbas, who as a priest is supposed to have knowledge of past and future. From his mouth the aetiological story on the origin of the oracle and the prophecy of Hammon gain more authority than they would have had if Bostar had summarized them.

The two narrators show close resemblance. Just as the primary narrator has introduced Bostar as *laetus* (3.648), Bostar in turn says that Arisbas tells the aetiological tale ‘with a joyful heart’ (*laetaque ... mente*, 3.674). As an eyewitness, Bostar is emotionally involved in the story he tells.¹⁰ This involvement can be felt in exclamations like *nouum et memorabile* (‘strange and remarkable!’) in 3.669, before he starts his description of the wondrous Spring of the Sun, and *ecce* (‘look!’) in 3.697 when he tells how the god takes possession of the priest.¹¹ His engagement is also clear from a phrase like *dumque ea miramur* (‘while we were still astonished by his words ...’, 3.692). This describes his reaction on hearing the miraculous story of Jupiter’s doves from the priest Arisbas. Like Bostar, this priest, too, is an emotionally involved narrator. An example is his use of the exclamation *admirabile dictu* (3.685) before narrating that the dove could actually utter oracles. This echoes Bostar’s own exclamation *nouum et memorabile* (3.669).¹²

Another similarity between the two narrators is their stress on the divine. Bostar states that the grove is ‘full of god’ (*loca plena deo*, 3.673) and that it is the god who takes possession of the priest: *ecce intrat subitus uatem deus* (‘look, the god suddenly enters the priest’, 3.697). Arisbas, too, stresses the involvement of the god in the grove, both in the past and the present: ‘Jupiter set foot in these forests’ (*calcatosque Ioui lucos*, 3.676); ‘a divinity is present in these trees’ (*arbor numen habet*, 3.691). These similarities between Bostar and Arisbas contribute to their mirroring qua narrators.

10 A characteristic of many narrators in the *Punica*, as Schaffenrath 2010b: 118 observes.

11 The particle *ecce* often marks subjective engagement of the narrator and is frequently used when supernatural events are narrated; see Dionisotti 2007: 84–85 and 90. Virgil has introduced the word in epic, using it 37 times in the *Aeneid*, of which 11 in Aeneas’ narration in Book 2 and 3. Silius also uses the word frequently, 44 times in total.

12 Besides the similarity in sound, *memorable* and *admirabile* share the same metrical *sedes*. The exclamation (*admirabile dictu*) appears eight times in the *Punica*, of which four times in embedded narratives (Arisbas in 3.685, Marus in 6.305, Cilnius in 7.44, and Teuthras in 11.440), and four times in the main narrative (14.66, 15.211, 16.363, 17.595). In all cases, the narrators use the expression as an introduction to events whose validity might be questioned by the narratees.

The second narrative of Arisbas is the oracular response itself. The divine message is uttered through the mouth of the priest, but who is the actual narrator? The god has in fact just entered the priest, as Bostar had just told, after which mysterious sounds and a loud voice were heard:

alta sonoro
collis trabibus uoluuntur murmura luco,
ac maior nota iam uox prorumpit in auras (3.697–699)

Tree branches clash against one another, a deep murmuring rolls through the resounding forest and now a voice, louder than the known one, bursts forth into the air.

Bostar observes that Arisbas does not speak with his normal voice, as it is louder than usual (*maior nota*).¹³ This observation of Bostar suggests that the prophecy from the mouth of the priest is that of Hammon himself.¹⁴

This is analogous with Bostar's own role as the middleman of Hannibal. After the first tale of Arisbas, Bostar had reported to the priest the questions that Hannibal had ordered: *mandatas effudi pectore uoces* ('I had poured out the words that had been assigned to me', 3.696). The repetition of the word *uox* stresses the similar role of both narrators, who are voicing someone else's words: Bostar repeats the *mandatas ... uoces* of Hannibal, Arisbas resounds the *uox* of Jupiter Hammon.

3.2 *Hammon and Hannibal: Metalepsis*

Not only the narrators, but also the narratees of the prophecy deserve attention. Bostar and his men are the (tertiary) narratees of this prophecy, which is confirmed by verbs in the second plural (*tenditis ... paritis*, 3.700) and the vocative plural *Libyes* ('Libyans', 3.701). From line 705, however, Hannibal himself is addressed (second person singular) and given instructions to invade Italy (imperative singular):

tu, qui pugnarum euentus extremaque fati
deposcis claroque ferox das uela labori,
inuade Aetoli ductoris Iapyga campum. (3.705–707)

13 Or any known human voice. See for the two interpretations Spaltenstein 1986: 261. In any way the adjective *maior* indicates a divine transformation of the priest.

14 This is very similar to the prophecy of the Sibyl in *Virg. A.* 6.49–50, on which see section 4.2 below.

You, who demand the outcome of war and the fated end, you who boldly set sail for glorious toils, invade the Iapygian field [i.e. Cannae] of the Aetolian leader [i.e. Diomedes].

Arisbas, or rather Hammon, no longer addresses Bostar and his men, but the *secondary* narratee Hannibal, as if anticipating that the message would be conveyed to him.¹⁵ Although the prophecy is an embedding to the third degree (the primary narrator tells of Bostar who in his turn reports Arisbas' words), the god is now speaking directly to Hannibal, thereby crossing narrative boundaries.

How should we understand this mirroring and metalepsis? Because Bostar and Arisbas are stand-ins for Hannibal and Hammon respectively, it is as if the latter two are communicating directly with each other, as if temporal and geographical boundaries have been dissolved: Hannibal can, as it were, be present in two places at once and hear Hammon's message directly.¹⁶ It also indicates Hannibal's ability to be in touch with the divine. This is in line with other instances in the *Punica* where Hannibal receives divine messages. Together with Scipio he is the character that gets closest to knowledge of his fate, although not everything is disclosed to him. The metalepsis also brings about a closer connection with the Alexander episode. Whereas the Macedonian general was present at the site and received divine information in person, Hannibal sent his officer. But because the god speaks directly to Hannibal, the Punic general *does* get his information virtually first hand.¹⁷

Only the primary narratees (and the primary narrator), however, know the full story, because they have shortly before heard the prophecy of Jupiter to Venus in which the god promises the Romans victory (3.571–629). In the final part of that prophecy, the supreme god apostrophizes emperor Domitian (3.607, 3.625), predicting his victories and apotheosis. In the case of Hannibal, this last narrative boundary—between the secondary and primary level—is not crossed: neither Bostar nor Hannibal has a complete overview of the Carthaginian fate.

15 Although the metaphor of 'giving sails' refers to the campaign of Hannibal, it echoes the sea travel of Bostar as well: *citus aequare Bostar* | *uela dare ... iubetur* ('Bostar is ordered to quickly set sail over the sea', 3.6–7).

16 See also Walter 2014: 300.

17 Walter 2014: 307 rather stresses the narrative *distance*: a secondary narrator (Bostar) quotes a tertiary narrator (Arisbas) who articulates the words of the god.

4 Intertextuality

Now that we have examined the narrative structure, I turn to the literary models that should be taken into account. As already said, these intertextual allusions create a link between Bostar and Hannibal on the one hand and Alexander the Great, Cato, and Aeneas on the other. Although Hannibal resembles these literary predecessors to a certain extent, there are also notable differences.¹⁸ I will argue that a consideration of these intertextual models in Bostar's narrative helps to shed light on the heroism of Hannibal and his relation with the gods in the preceding part of Book 3 and the rest of the *Punica*.

4.1 *Hannibal and Alexander*

Neither Bostar nor the primary narrator explicitly mentions Alexander's visit to Hammon's oracle. The consultation of this specific oracle suffices to evoke the reminiscence of Alexander. Bostar's description of the mysterious Spring of the Sun, which boils at midnight and is cold at noon, confirms the association with Alexander. This spring forms part of Curtius Rufus' account of Alexander's visit to Siwa, and specific verbal correspondences confirm that his *Historiae* are indeed an intertext of Bostar's narrative.¹⁹

Bostar locates the oracular shrine in a wooded grove: *lucos nemorosaque regna | cornigeri Iouis* ('the groves and the wooded kingdom of the horn-bearing Jupiter', 3.666–667). Nearby there is a spring:

stat fano uicina, nouum et memorabile, lympha,
 quae nascente die, quae deficiente tepescit
 quaeque riget, **medius cum sol** accendit Olympum,
 atque eadem rursus **nocturnis feruet** in umbris. (3.669–672)

In the vicinity of the shrine there is—strange and remarkable—water, which is lukewarm in morning and evening, but cold when the sun at midday kindles the sky and which is boiling again in the shadow of the night.

18 On this topic, see Vessey 1982; Gibson 2005; Stürmer 2015.

19 Spaltenstein 1986: 258. Although little is known about Curtius' life, most scholars date his *Historiae* at the beginning of Claudius' reign (AD 41), while others opt for a Vespasianic date. A minority suggests a post-Silian dating. For an overview of the discussion and further references, see Atkinson and Yardley 2009: 2–9.

Bostar's exclamation 'strange and remarkable' is also an intertextual signpost: from a literary point of view, the spring is not 'strange' (*nouum*), but in fact very well known, and therefore indeed 'worthy of being recorded' (*memorable*). The vocabulary of these lines alludes partly to Lucretius and Ovid, who describe the same spring.²⁰ Specific correspondences with Curtius alone confirm that his *Historiae*, too, should be taken into account:

est et aliud Hammonis nemus: in medio habet fontem (**Solis** aquam uocant): sub lucis ortum **tepida** manat, **medio** die, cuius uehementissimus est calor, frigida eadem fluit, inclinato in uesperam calescit, media nocte **feruida** exaestuat, quoque nox propius uergit ad lucem, multum ex nocturno calore decrescit, donec sub ipsum diei ortum adsueto tepore languescat. (Curt. 4.7.22)

There is also another grove of Hammon; in the middle of it is a fountain (they call it the water of the Sun): at daybreak its flow is lukewarm, in the middle of the day, which is very hot indeed, the same fountain is cold, as the day inclines towards evening it grows warmer, in the middle of the night it boils forth hot, and as the night approaches dawn, it decreases greatly from its nocturnal heat, until at daybreak it cools off to its normal temperature.

While Lucretius and Ovid focus on the bipolarity of the temperature (cold vs. hot), both Curtius and Silius add that the water is tepid in the morning and evening (*tepidus ~ tepescit*). The boiling of the water, absent in Lucretius and Ovid, also recalls the account of Curtius (*feruida ~ feruet*).²¹ Another possible echo of Curtius is *medius cum sol accendit Olympum*, which seems to be a conflation of the two phrases *Solis aquam uocant* and *medio die*—a clever way of

20 *Esse apud Hammonis fanum fons luce diurna | frigidus et calidus nocturno tempore fertur* ('near the sanctuary of Hammon is a spring cold during daytime and warm in night-time, as the story goes', Lucr. 6.848–849); *medio tua, corniger Ammon, | unda die gelida est, ortuque obituque calescit* ('in the middle of the day, horn-bearing Hammon, your water is cold and it grows warm at sunrise and dawn', Ov. *Met.* 15.309–310). Curtius' description also alludes to these two passages. Interestingly, Silius' allusions to Lucretius and Ovid (*cornigeri*, 3.667; *fano*, 3.669; *nocturnis*, 3.672) are words that Curtius does *not* echo. This might be a sign that the Silian passage looks back to Lucretius and Ovid through a Curtian lens.

21 Boiling also features in Herodotus' description of the same spring: *ἐπι δὲ μάλλον ἰὸν ἐς τὸ θερμὸν ἐς μέσας νύκτας πελάζει, τηνικαῦτα δὲ ζέει ἀμβολάδην* ('[the water] becomes increasingly warmer till midnight until it is boiling and bubbling', Hdt. 4.181.4).

referring to the spring's name without actually mentioning it. These echoes of Curtius' text serve to underscore the parallel between Hannibal and Alexander.

Both generals get instructions from the oracle. Alexander learns to which gods he should sacrifice to make his conquest of Asia successful,²² while Hannibal receives the order to continue his invasion of Italy. The most important difference, of course, is that Hannibal, unlike Alexander, is not recognized as the son of a divine parent. In fact, the final two lines of the oracle rather hint at Hannibal's mortality. The Romans will live in anxiety 'as long as Hannibal draws breath in the upper world' (*nec ponet pubes umquam Saturnia curam, | dum carpet superas in terris Hannibal auras*, 3.711–712). The conjunction *dum* suggests that there will actually come an end to Hannibal's life (and the fear of the Romans), while the words *superas in terris ... auras* stress that Hannibal now lives on earth, but will eventually descend to the underworld.²³ The word *curam* might actually recall Hannibal's last words before committing suicide as recorded by Livy: *liberemus ... diuturna cura populum Romanum* ('let us free the Roman people from long-lasting anxiety', Liv. 39.51.9).²⁴ Although for the time being Hannibal stirs great fear in Roman hearts, he remains a mortal and will not receive the same divine status as Alexander during and after *his* lifetime. The absence of this divine status makes clear that Hannibal is no second Alexander.

4.2 *Hannibal and Aeneas*

Bostar is a host (*hospes*, 3.668), reminiscent of Euander who received Aeneas in Pallanteum in *Aeneid* 8. Both are of old age and show their guest a sacred forest (*nemus*) that has been visited by Jupiter (3.675–676 ~ *A.* 8.351–353). The old men both tell an aetiological story about the places they visit and lead their guest into their house: *tectis inducit* (3.668) ~ *subter fastigia tecti | ... duxit* (*A.* 8.366–367). It is as if Bostar, and by extension Hannibal, is following in the footsteps of Aeneas.²⁵

22 Arr. *An.* 4.19.4. The *Anabasis* itself is dated after AD138, but its sources are of course older. See also Tarn 1948: vol. 2 354.

23 Perhaps there is a pun in the word *superas*. The adjective means here 'earthly' (*OLD* s.v. *superus* 2a), but another meaning is 'celestial, heavenly' (*OLD* s.v. *superus* 3). Hannibal is only a 'god' as long as he is among the living.

24 This allusion has been noted by the humanist Calderini; see Muecke and Dunston 2011: 278.

25 The correspondences between these two hospitality scenes have been pointed out to me by Ruurd Nauta. The scene from *Aeneid* 8 is also a model for the arrival of Serranus at Marus' hut in Book 6, for which see Chapter 2, section 4.1. For other hospitality scenes in the *Punica*, see Chapter 3, section 4 and Chapter 4, section 8.

Bostar's journey to Hammon also evokes the visit of Aeneas to the Sibyl, as many scholars have noticed.²⁶ Book 6 of the *Aeneid* comes especially to the fore when Bostar narrates how the god takes possession of the priest Arisbas:

dumque ea miramur, subito stridore tremendum
 impulsae patuere fores, maiorque repente
 lux oculos ferit. ante aras stat ueste sacerdos
 effulgens niuea, et populi concurrere certant
 inde ubi mandatas effudi pectore uoces,
 ecce intrat subitus uatem deus. alta sonoro
 collis trabibus uoluuntur murmura luco,
 ac maior nota iam uox prorumpit in auras (3.692–699)

While we were still astonished by his words, the doors were set in motion and opened formidably with a sudden creaking and a brighter light suddenly struck our eyes. The priest was standing before the altar, shining with his white garb and people flocked together in rivalry. Then when I poured out the words that had been assigned to me, look, the god suddenly enters the prophet. Tree branches clash against one another, a deep murmuring rolls through the resounding grove, and now a voice, louder than the known one, bursts forth into the air.

A clear analogy are the doors of Hammon's temple that open of their own accord, corresponding with the hundred openings of the Sibyl's cave: *ostia iamque domus patuere ingentia centum | sponte sua uatisque ferunt responsa per auras* ('and now the hundred mighty mouths of the house have opened of their own will and carry the oracles of the seer through the air', Virg. *A.* 6.81–82).²⁷

Arisbas performs the role of the Sibyl. Notice for example that Bostar calls him at this point of the narrative a *uates*, the same word that Virgil used twice for the Sibyl (*A.* 6.78 and 6.82). Bostar's observation *ecce intrat subitus uatem deus* (3.697) echoes the words of the Sibyl, when she notices the sudden approach of Apollo: *deus ecce deus!* (*A.* 6.46).²⁸ At this point, Arisbas' voice changes into one 'louder than the known one' (*maior nota ... uox*, 3.699). This picks up the metamorphosis of the Sibyl, who becomes 'taller to behold' and also does not sound mortal anymore: *maiorque uideri | nec mortale sonans*

26 Ernesti 1791: 175 and Ruperti 1795: 253 were the first to list parallels with *Aeneid* 6. See also e.g. Gibson 2005: 185–186, Walter 2014: 303–304, Stürmer 2015: 188–189.

27 Spaltenstein 1986: 260 and Walter 2014: 303.

28 In addition, the word *subitus* might be an echo of *subito* in *A.* 6.47.

(A. 6.49–50).²⁹ Arisbas' mirroring of the Sibyl is also clear from the prophecy itself. Arisbas predicts harsh wars in Italy in 3.701: *coepta aspera cerno* ('I see harsh enterprises'). A few lines later he adds the gruesome detail of 'horse reins dripping with streams of blood' (*multoque fluentia sanguine lora*, 3.704). This recalls the prophecy of the Sibyl in *Aeneid* 6: *bella, horrida bella, | et Thybrim multo spumantem sanguine cerno* ('wars, grim wars I see and the Tiber foaming with streams of blood', A. 6.86–87). In both prophecies the cruelty and bloodshed of future wars in Italy are emphasized.³⁰

Bostar and his men in turn are reminiscent of Aeneas and his fellow Trojans. This is underlined by the opening of the prophecy. The oracle starts with the words *tenditis in Latium* ('you are heading towards Latium', 3.700). This is an echo of Aeneas addressing his men after the sea storm in *Aeneid* 1: *tendimus in Latium* ('we are heading towards Latium', A. 1.205).³¹ Hammon's words almost mean: "You are heading for the same land as Aeneas did."

The association of Hannibal with Aeneas is again underscored by the prophecy's reference to Hannibal's mortality:

nec ponet pubes umquam Saturnia curam,
dum **carpet** superas in terris Hannibal **auras**. (3.711–712)

The Saturnian men [i.e. the Romans] will never be free from anxiety as long as Hannibal draws breath in the upper world.

The unusual phrase *carpere auras*, meaning 'to breathe, to be alive', is an echo of Venus' greeting of Aeneas, when he has safely landed on African soil:³²

quisquis es, haud, credo, inuisus caelestibus **auras**
uitalis **carpis**, Tyriam qui adueneris urbem. (Virg. A. 1.387–388)

Whoever you are, not hateful, I think, to the powers of heaven do you draw the breath of life, since you have reached the Tyrian city [i.e. Carthage].

29 Gibson 2005: 185–186 and Walter 2014: 303 note this parallel. Verbal repetition in the verse ending aligns Arisbas also with Orpheus, another priest mentioned in *Aeneid* 6: *ueste sacerdos | effulgens niuea* ('the priest, shining with his snow-white robe', 3.694–695) ~ *Threicius longa cum ueste sacerdos* ('the long-robed Thracian priest', A. 6.645).

30 Gibson 2005: 185–186 and Walter 2014: 304.

31 Walter 2014: 304.

32 Virgil and Silius are the only two classical authors to use this collocation; see *TLL* 3.494.39–41 s.v. *carpo*. Ernesti 1791: 176 and Ruperti 1795: 254 cite the allusion without comment.

In both cases, a divinity speaks about the protagonist as being alive (*carpere auras*), but the contrast is telling: Venus stresses the fact that the Trojan is still alive after a shipwreck, while Hammon hints at the Carthaginian's mortality.³³

All intertextual allusions that I have mentioned put Hannibal's mission on a par with that of Aeneas. Like the Trojan leader, Hannibal will go to Italy and wage terrible wars against the local people, in which he will prove to be victorious. But whereas subsequent prophecies in *Aeneid* 6 predict a glorious future *after* the war, not only for Aeneas and his fellow Trojans, but also for later generations of Romans, the glory of Hannibal and Carthage will not last long. Even during his own lifetime, the general will be confronted with a reversal of fortune.³⁴

4.3 *Hannibal and Cato*

Another important literary model for Bostar's narrative is Lucan's episode of Cato's march through the Libyan desert from the Syrtes towards Mauretania in Book 9 of the *Bellum Civile*.³⁵ The incorporation of a visit to Hammon's oracle, a detour to the opposite southeastern direction of about 600 kilometres, is an invention of Lucan, just as Bostar's visit to the same oracle in the *Punica* has no historical precedent.³⁶

The connection between the two episodes is already clear from the first part of Bostar's narrative, in which he relates his journey through the desert. He finds himself in a sand storm that closely resembles the one that Cato experienced in Lucan:³⁷

33 Note, too, that Hammon has switched from the second to the third person (*carpet*), now talking *about* Hannibal instead of apostrophizing him. Venus addresses Aeneas in the second person (*carpis*).

34 On the other hand, one can argue that Hannibal's fame lives on, of which the *Punica* itself is a good example. The last words of the Carthaginian general in the epic point in that direction: *non ullo Cannas abolebis, Iuppiter, aeuo, | decedesque prius regnis, quam nomina gentes | aut facta Hannibalis sileant* ('not in any age, Jupiter, will you wipe out Cannae and you will give up your reign sooner than people keep silent about the name and deeds of Hannibal', 17.608–610). In this (literary) sense, Hannibal is immortal. Silius is here voicing the well-known topos of poets making their subjects immortal; see e.g. Suerbaum 1968: 217–223.

35 Livy also mentions this journey, of which we only have a summary (Liv. *Per.* 112). For a comparison between the two passages in Lucan and Silius, see Walter 2014: 299 and Stürner 2015: 94–95.

36 See e.g. Morford 1967, Radicke 2004: 475, and Seewald 2008: 278. In Strabo (17.3.20) Cato travels along the coastline of the Syrtes.

37 A land storm in epic seems to be an invention of Lucan. See Seewald 2008: 22: "Mit der Be-

nos tulit ad superos perfundens sidera **Syrtis**,
 nos paene **aequoribus** tellus **uiolentior** hausit. (3.652–653)

The Syrtis, which splashes the stars, raised us towards the gods above and the land, more violent than the seas, almost swallowed us.

Cato, too, departs from the Syrtis, where the Roman fleet came to a standstill (Luc. 9.368–373), and he, too, is overtaken by a desert storm:

nam litore sicco,
quam pelago, **Syrtis uiolentius** excipit Austrum,
 et terrae magis ille nocens. (Luc. 9.447–449)

For more violently on dry shore than on the sea does Syrtis take the Auster's blast—he does greater damage on land.

The violent sand storm forces Bostar and his men to travel by night so that they can rely on the stars for navigation: ‘we steer out of these valleys by observing the stars’ (*has obseruatis ualles enauimus astris*, 3.662). This, again, recalls Lucan, who states that Cato and his men ‘found their way by the stars’ (*sideribus nouere uiam*, Luc. 9.495).³⁸ These allusions create the image of Bostar as a Cato-like figure, who defies the dangers of the desert, relying on his navigational skills, rather than on divine help.³⁹ But as the narrative moves on, it will be clear that Bostar cannot put himself on a par with his Stoic predecessor.

schreibung eines Wirbelsturms in der Wüste betritt Lucan episches Neuland und bereichert die Gattungstradition, die bis dahin nur die Schilderung eines Seesturms kannte.’ A land storm also appears in the first book of Statius’ *Thebaid*, when Polynices travels from Thebes to Argos (*Theb.* 1.345–389). There, Polynices is compared with a sailor, caught in a sea storm. The comparison of the desert with the sea occurs in several accounts in the Alexander tradition, as Stürmer 2015: 187 observes. Curtius, for example, compares Alexander’s journey to Hammon with sea travelling: *haud secus quam profundum aequor ingressi* (‘no different than if they had entered a vast sea, Curt. 4.7.11).

38 See Wick 2004: vol. 2 188 on other instances of the topos ‘navigating through the desert by the stars’. A parallel might be found in Curtius Rufus’ passage on Alexander’s journey in Bactria: *itaque qui transeunt campos nauigantium modo noctu sidera obseruant, ad quorum cursum iter dirigunt* (‘so they who cross these fields observe the stars at night, like sailors, to steer their course by’, Curt. 7.4.28). Nicol 1936: 8 quotes Alexander’s trip to the Siwa Oasis in Arrian (*An.* 3.3.4), a passage that is close to 3.655–662. There we read that the desert lacked physical landmarks by which Alexander could navigate, ‘just as seamen do by the stars’ (*καθὰ περ ναῦται τοῖς ἀστροῖς*).

39 Walter 2014: 300 rightly remarks that Bostar seems to have learned all this from Lucan’s

When Bostar arrives in Siwa, he meets Arisbas, the priest of Hammon. The latter explains why the oasis is so fertile in comparison with the surrounding desert. Bostar introduces the response of the old man as follows:

tum loca **plena deo**, dites sine uomere glebas
ostentat senior laetaque ita **mente** profatur: ... (3.673–674)

Next the old man shows the places full of god, soil that is rich even without a ploughshare, and in good spirit speaks thus: ...

These lines echo the way in which Lucan introduces Cato's speech to his soldiers, right after the Stoic general has *refused* to consult the oracle of Hammon:

ille **deo plenus** tacita quem **mente** gerebat
effudit dignas adytis e pectore uoces. (Luc. 9.564–565)

He, full of the god that he carried in his silent mind, poured forth from his breast words worthy of a shrine.

Instead of consulting the oracle Cato gives a quasi-oracular speech. The general himself is the source of divine (Stoic) wisdom, according to the Lucanian narrator (*deo plenus*), which he carries silently in his mind (*tacita ... mente*). His divinely inspired words—stating that god cannot be found in sacred groves, but only in the minds of men—match those of an oracle (*dignas adytis ... uoces*).⁴⁰ Bostar, however, argues that Hammon's oracular seat is actually divine (*loca plena deo*) and that the priest, who rejoices in his mind (*laetaque ... mente*), has a divine message to announce.⁴¹

The second line of the Lucanian passage is echoed when Bostar says: 'I poured out the words that had been assigned to me' (*mandatas effudi pectore uoces*, 3.696). This again creates a contrast. While Cato utters an almost oracular speech without actually consulting the oracle, Bostar obediently asks Arisbas for a prophecy as ordered to him by Hannibal. He is only a reporter, not like Cato an independent person.⁴²

Cato. The other epic travellers of that same desert, the Argonauts, get help from deities no less than three times (A.R. 4.1223–1619). See Wick 2004: vol. 1 112–19 on the relation between this Argonautic episode and Cato's journey in the *Bellum Civile*.

40 On Cato's divine status, see Tipping 2010: 231.

41 The verb *profatur* has often oracular connotations. See *TLL* 10.2.1732.66–1733.5 s.v. *profator*.

42 Walter 2014: 302–303.

The description of the grove that the priest gives is another marked contrast with Lucan's version. Arisbas describes the place as a *locus amoenus* with many lofty trees that provide ample shadow when he asks Bostar to honour the place:

has umbras nemorum et conexa cacumina caelo
calcosque Ioui lucos prece, Bostar, adora. (3.675–676)

Bostar, honour in prayer the shades of the forests, the treetops that touch heaven and the groves that Jupiter has trodden.

The cause of this lush vegetation in the middle of the desert is, according to the priest, Jupiter's personal involvement.⁴³ In the past, the supreme god sent a divine dove to the oracle, which started prophesying. Hereafter the forest spontaneously started growing: *mox subitum nemus atque annoso robore lucus | exsiluit* ('then the forest, a grove of ancient oaks, suddenly sprang forth', 3.688–689). The supernatural cause of this vegetation is underlined by the suddenness of its creation (*subitum*) and the fact that the oak trees, an atypical species for an oasis (*robore*), are immediately full-grown (*annoso*).⁴⁴

In the *Bellum Civile*, Hammon's grove has a very different appearance. The narrator states that the trees can barely protect their own trunks from the sweltering heat of the sun:

hic quoque nil obstat Phoebo, cum cardine summo
stat librata dies; truncum uix protegit arbor,
tam breuis in medium radiis compellitur umbra. (Luc. 9.528–530).

43 Lines 3.675–676 contain an allusion to a less favourable example of Jupiter's involvement. Arisbas unwittingly echoes Jupiter's own words when chasing Io: '*pete*', *dixerat*, '*umbras | aliorum nemorum*' (*et nemorum monstauerat umbras*) | '*dum calet et medio sol est altissimus orbe*.' ('he [i.e. Jupiter] said: "Seek the shadows of the high forests" (and he showed her the shadows of the forests) "now it is warm as the sun has reached its zenith"', *Met.* 1.590–591). The words *umbras nemorum* might also recall Cato's exhortation to his soldiers not to seek any shadow in the burning desert: *aut umbras nemorum quicumque petentem*, | *aestuet* ('and let him swelter, whoever [sees] me heading for the shade of trees', *Luc.* 9.399–400); Cato's speech also echoes Jupiter's words in Ovid.

44 Compare the sudden creaking with which the doors of the temple spring open, only a few lines later (*subito stridore*, 3.692). Old oak trees are often associated with sacred locations, for example in the story of Erysichthon, who violates an oak dedicated to Ceres: *stabat in his ingens annoso robore quercus | una nemus* ('there stood among these a mighty oak with strength matured by centuries of growth, itself a grove', *Ov. Met.* 8.743).

Here too there is no obstacle to Phoebus when the day stands poised at the zenith; the trees protect their trunks with difficulty: so short is the shadow driven by the rays towards the centre.

The lack of shadow is in sharp contrast with the lush and shadowy trees in Bostar's account. The ancient oaks that Bostar mentions are conspicuously absent in Lucan's account of Cato's journey. In fact, the narrator of the *Bellum Civile* explicitly denies that Libya has 'ancient oaks' to obstruct desert storms: *nec ruit in siluas annosaque robora torquens | lassatur: patet omne solum* ('[the wind] does not rush upon the woods and grow exhausted twisting aged oaks: all the soil lies open', Luc. 9.452–453).

Apart from the contrast in appearance between the two forests, their origin is also explained differently. Lucan's narrator first suggests that the spring near Hammon's shrine is proof of a divine presence: *esse locis superos testatur silua per omnem | sola uirens Libyen ... solus nemus abstulit Hammon* ('that there are gods in the place is proven by the lone green forest in the whole of Libya ... Hammon has taken the forest for himself', Luc. 9.522–523 and 525). He then immediately corrects himself by giving a rational explanation: *siluarum fons causa est* ('the cause of the forest is a spring', Luc. 9.526). In other words, the forest is perhaps located in an unusual environment, but its origin can be perfectly explained by a natural cause. This is of course the opposite from Bostar's and Arisbas' assumption that the forest came into being because of Jupiter's personal involvement.⁴⁵

These contrasts between Silius and Lucan have been read as evidence for the idea of the *Punica* as an anti-*Bellum Civile*: the idea that Silius reintroduces the gods in epic and "returns to Virgilian optimism".⁴⁶ This idea is in general an oversimplification. There are many overlaps between the *Bellum Civile* and the *Punica*, foremost the theme of civil war, as has been pointed out in recent Silian scholarship.⁴⁷ In the case of Bostar's narrative, Arisbas' capacity as priest explains his supernatural explanation of the vegetation. For him it is only natural to ascribe the creation of the grove to a divine force. This does not mean that this focalization of the tertiary narrator can automatically be attributed to the primary narrator. Moreover, it is difficult to argue that Bostar's narrative should be interpreted as a mainly positive appraisal of the

45 Note, too, that the spring in the *Bellum Civile* is not unusual in any respect; Lucan does not mention abnormal fluctuations in temperature, as most other accounts, including Bostar's, do.

46 Liebeschuetz 1979: 168.

47 See Marks 2010b: 128 with n.4 for further references.

gods. Although Bostar and Hannibal receive a divine message and understand it as an affirmation of the Punic cause, it hardly leads to a positive outcome for either Carthaginians or Romans. Rather, it indicates the manipulative involvement of the gods in epic warfare.

The contrastive allusions should not be read as a ‘correction’ of the Lucanian epic without gods. Instead, the *Punica* provides a confirmation for Cato’s distrust of oracular shrines in general and this one in particular—when we consider the *Punica* as a prequel to the *Bellum Civile*.⁴⁸ Although Bostar and Hannibal both attribute divine power to the oracle, Cato—as if he has read the *Punica*—knows that putting trust into this oracle is to no avail.

5 The Function of the Narrative in the *Punica*

Now that we have explored the intertextual models, I turn to the place of Bostar’s narrative in the *Punica*. I want to show that the oracle’s concealment of information is in line with prophecies that Hannibal has received earlier in the epic. Next, I will address the relation between the oracle of Hammon and the prophecy of Jupiter in the preceding part of Book 3.⁴⁹ Finally, I argue that a mirroring scene in Book 13 of the *Punica* makes clear that Scipio should be seen as the rightful successor of Alexander and Aeneas—a claim that Bostar’s narrative (implicitly) makes for Hannibal.

5.1 *Earlier Prophecies for Hannibal*

Hannibal receives his first prophecy when his father Hamilcar made him as an eight-year-old swear eternal hatred towards the Romans, as told in Book 1 of the *Punica* (1.125–137). The fact that both this prophecy in the early part of Book 1 and that of Arisbas at the end of Book 3 have the same number of lines (13) strengthens the idea that we should read them together.⁵⁰

48 For the idea of the *Punica* as an epic chronologically situated between the *Aeneid* and the *Bellum Civile*, see Introduction section 5.2. Chaudhuri 2014: 240–243 compares Hannibal in Silius to Caesar in Lucan, who also crossed the Alps.

49 Vessey 1982: 321 rightly observes that Book 3 is full of prophecies, starting with Hannibal’s dream, followed by Jupiter’s prophecy to Venus, and concluded by Jupiter Hammon’s oracle.

50 So Stürmer 2015: 196 n.50, although it should be noted that the prophecy in Book 1 covers *almost* thirteen lines, as the last two words of 1.137 fall outside the quotation. Stürmer 2011: 153–154 and 2015: 196 n.52 argue that the ring composition between the two prophecies marks Book 1–3 as introductory unit of the epic, instead of Book 1–2. On the other hand,

On a verbal level, too, the two prophecies mirror each other. After the oath of the young Hannibal, the priestess of Elissa examines the entrails of a sacrificial animal in order to predict the child's future. She foresees wars and mentions the shedding of blood:

'Aetolos late consterni milite campos
Idaeoque lacus **flagrantes sanguine cerno.**' (1.125–126)

I see the Aetolian fields covered far and wide with soldiers' corpses and lakes glittering with Trojan blood.

At the end of the prophecy the involvement of the gods in these wars is mentioned:

'magna parant superi. tonat alti regia caeli,
bellantemque Iouem cerno.' uenientia fata
scire ultra uetuit Iuno, fibraeque repente
conticuere. latent casus longique labores. (1.136–139)

'The gods above are preparing great things: the palace of high heaven thunders and I see Jupiter waging wars.' Then Juno forbade her to learn more of the coming fates and suddenly the fibres kept silent. Calamities and long-lasting hardships were concealed.

So before the priestess can tell more about the course of the war, for example the downfall of Hannibal, Juno forbids her to foresee more.⁵¹

Arisbas' prophecy mirrors this earlier scene. Hammon's priest, too, *sees* before his mind's eye future wars and gods participating in them: *coepta aspera cerno* | *Gradiumque trucem currus iam scandere* ('I see harsh enterprises and savage Mars already ascending his chariot', 3.701–702).⁵² He likewise stresses the bloodiness of the battles: *multoque fluentia sanguine lora* ('horse reins dripping with streams of blood', 3.704). This warfare culminates in the Battle of Cannae: *inuade Aetoli ductoris Iapyga campum* ('invade the Iapygian field

the Bostar episode also forms a ring composition with Bostar's departure at the beginning of Book 3. Perhaps we should think of the *Punica* as having multiple subdivisions.

51 The goddess did the same with Helenus in *Virg. A.* 3.379–380. But there, as Feeney 1982: 93 rightly observes, Juno did not want to encourage the Trojans, whereas here she does not want to discourage the Carthaginians.

52 For *cerno* referring to seeing in the future, see Feeney 1982: 90.

of the Aetolian leader', 3.707).⁵³ As in Book 1, Hannibal only gets a restricted view of the future, up until Cannae.⁵⁴

Earlier in Book 3, after sending off Bostar but before crossing the Pyrenees and Alps, Hannibal receives a second prophecy, when Jupiter sends Mercury in his sleep (3.163–221).⁵⁵ In this dream, Hannibal sees a giant serpent, which is bulldozing forests in its course. Mercury prophesies that Hannibal will crush the Romans, just as the snake destroyed forests:

bella uides optata tibi. te maxima bella,
te strages nemorum, te moto turbida caelo
tempestas caedesque uirum magnaue ruinae
Idaei generis lacrimosaque fata sequuntur. (3.204–207)

You see the wars you have wished for: mighty wars follow you, destruction of forests, and violent storms in a stirred sky, the slaughter of men, great destruction of the Idaean people and tearful fates.

Again, the prophecy only mentions Hannibal's victories and keeps silent about his eventual downfall and the Roman victory.⁵⁶

This dream is a key moment in the epic, inciting the Carthaginian general to come into action. One would perhaps have expected a pro-Carthaginian god or goddess to be Hannibal's motivator, rather than Jupiter who in the end promotes the cause of the Romans.⁵⁷ "[W]hy should he actually incite his people's

53 Neri 1986: 2042 lists a few other verbal parallels, e.g.: *trepidantia fumant* | *moenia* ('shivering walls are smoking', 1.129–130) ~ *trepidabunt Dardana regna* ('the Dardanian empire will shiver', 3.710).

54 Küppers 1986: 15 and 189–190. In the prophecy of Book 1, some events go beyond that moment, like Marcellus' death. See Feeney 1982: 91–92. Cf. the exhortation of Anna in Book 8, who also urges Hannibal to go 'to the Iapygian fields' (*Iapygios ... in agros*, 8.223). She was instructed to do so by Iuno in 8.30–38. There, the goddess does again not specify Hannibal's future *after* Cannae. Anna, however, explicitly states that Cannae will cause Rome's downfall. See Chapter 4, sections 2 and 16.

55 On this episode, see e.g. Vessey 1982: 329–331 and Brouwers 1985.

56 Note that the phrase *lacrimosa fata* is ambiguous: Hannibal would connect it naturally with *Idaei generis* in the same line, but Mercury might also hint at Hannibal's own *lacrimosa fata*.

57 The dream of Hannibal is mentioned in many other writers, such as Cicero (*Div.* 1.49), Livy (21.22.6–9), and V. Max. (1.7 ext. 1). Quintus, the narrator of the dream in the *De Divinatione*, ascribes the story to Silenus, the Sicilian historian who accompanied Hannibal on his campaign. The story could have originated from the Carthaginians, giving Hannibal's invasion of Italy a divine sanction; see Händl-Sagawe 1995: 144 for references. In this

enemy to the task of inflicting those disasters?”, Feeney asks rhetorically.⁵⁸ The answer is that Jupiter wants to put the Romans to the test by means of a replay of the Trojan war:

tum pater omnipotens gentem exercere periclis
Dardanium et fama saeuorum tollere ad astra
bellorum meditans priscosque referre labores ... (3.163–165)

Then the omnipotent father, intending to test the Dardanian people by perils and to lift the fame of savage wars to the stars and to repeat ancient toiling ...

This plan of the supreme god (*pater omnipotens*) to test the Roman people to the extreme is rather cynical and conflicts with the optimism that some have noted in Jupiter’s role in the *Punica*.⁵⁹ In fact, Jupiter intends to increase the fame of *savage wars*, a striking formulation, as one would rather expect that the god wants to increase the fame of *the Romans*. In the end, Jupiter prevents Rome from being destroyed by the Carthaginians. This is made clear when Jupiter assures his daughter Venus (as well as the primary narratees of the *Punica*) that the Romans will prevail.

5.2 *Jupiter’s Prophecy vs. Hammon’s Prophecy*

This prophecy of Jupiter (3.571–629) is juxtaposed to that of Hammon.⁶⁰ The narrator stresses their closeness in time, when he states that Hannibal was

‘original version’, it might have been Baal Hammon who appeared to Hannibal, as Walsh 1973: 163 suggests. In Quintus’ retelling, Hannibal is invited by Jupiter to join a council of the gods, in which he was given an unnamed ‘guide’ (*ducem*, Cic. *Div.* 1.49). Livy, followed by Valerius Maximus, refers to this guide as a ‘young man sent by Jupiter’ (*iunem ... ab loue ... missum*, Liv. 21.22.6). Silius’ identification of the guide as Mercury gives a particular Virgilian touch to the scene, as the same god warned Aeneas in *Aeneid* 4, as noted by Spaltenstein 1986: 196–197 and Foulon 2000: 678–680. Foulon 2003 suggests that Silius had Mercury Aletes in mind, a protecting deity of Carthage. For an overview and comparison of the different accounts, see Seibert 1993b: 184–191. For references, see also Wardle 2006: 231.

58 Feeney 1991: 305–306.

59 See e.g. Liebeschuetz 1979: 173: “But the core of old religion, the providential care of Jupiter Optimus Maximus for Rome, is proclaimed with greater assurance than ever.” See Ahl, Davis, and Pomeroy 1986: 2503–2504 on the paradoxical idea in the *Punica*, like in Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, that “defeat is morally better than victory”; see also Von Albrecht 1964: 17–18.

60 Jupiter’s prophecy has received quite some scholarly attention. See e.g. Kiesel 1979: 38–46, Schubert 1984: 45–70, Ripoll 1998: 509–515, and Marks 2005: 211–217.

crossing the Alps *at the same time* ‘while Jupiter reveals the course of the future age’ (*dum pandit seriem uenturi Iuppiter aeui*, 3.630). Shortly thereafter, Bostar returns to Hannibal with the oracle of Hammon (3.647–649), to whose shrine he was sent in the beginning of the book: *corniger Hammon | fatidico pandit uenientia saecula luco* (‘the horn-bearing Hammon reveals the future eras from his prophetic grove’, 3.10–11). This means that this oracle must have been given to Bostar at the time that Hannibal was crossing the Pyrenees and Alps, so during or right after the conversation between Venus and Jupiter in heaven. The closeness of the two prophecies invites the narratees to compare the two.⁶¹ Are they presenting a similar or a different view on the future?

A first important question is whether the two prophesying gods have to be considered as identical or separate deities. There is in this case no easy answer. In general, Silius does not always make a clear distinction between Jupiter and Hammon.⁶² In the Bostar episode in particular, Hammon is consequently called ‘Jupiter’, suggesting that the two gods are identical.⁶³ On the other hand, it is only natural in Latin to call supreme gods of other peoples ‘Jupiter’, and this might also be the case here, as has been argued.⁶⁴ In other parts of the *Punica*, there is indeed a clear distinction between the two gods, for example when in the Battle of Cannae Hammon is cited by the primary narrator as one of the gods who sides with the Carthaginians (9.298). Likewise, when the Numidian king Syphax wants to make a treaty with Scipio, he suggests to call upon both ‘the horn-bearing and Tarpeian Jupiter’ (*cornigerumque Iouem Tarpeiumque*, 16.261) to ask for omens.⁶⁵

Walter considers the two prophecies in Book 3 to be very different and sees them respectively as symbols for the ‘Roman’ and ‘Carthaginian’ voices in the

61 E.g. Schubert 1984: 192, Walter 2014: 305, Stürmer 2015: 195.

62 On the status of Jupiter and Hammon, Schubert 1984: 59 observes: “Silius läßt offen, ob er Jupiter und Hammon als letztendlich identische Gottheiten sieht oder nicht.”

63 All narrators of the episode do this. The primary narrator: *Iouis* (3.647), *Tonante* (3.649); Bostar: *cornigeri Iouis* (3.667); and Arisbas: *Ioui* (3.676), *Iouis* (3.677). Note that the primary narrator called the god by his Carthaginian name in the beginning of Book 3: *corniger Hammon* (3.10).

64 Schubert 1984: 123 and 1986: 60–61. Caneva 2012 discusses the Greek ‘interpretation’ of Hammon from Herodotus to Alexander the Great. He assumes an early assimilation of Hammon, Amon and Zeus, as shown by Pindar *Pyth.* 4.14–16. He convincingly argues that Hammon is used as a divine legitimization of Alexander’s imperial world rule and that ever since the association between Alexander and Hammon survived, even when in historical times the oracle lost its importance as a cult site (cf. Strabo 17.43).

65 These turn out to be unfavourable. In the end, Syphax was taken captive by Scipio for siding with Carthage (17.140–145).

epic.⁶⁶ She considers the *aetion* of the oracle, as told by the priest Arisbas, to be another symbol of this split voice. The two doves of Jupiter, departing from Thebes, flew in different directions and founded the oracles of Dodona and Siwa. The former ‘fills the Dodonian oak with prophetic murmuring’ (*implet fatidico Dodonida murmure quercum*, 3.680), while the latter is explicitly framed as an oracle for the local ‘Marmarican peoples’ (*Marmaricis ... populis*, 3.687).⁶⁷ Walter suggests that the Dodonian oracle stands for the voice of the ‘Roman’ Jupiter, and Siwa for that of the ‘Carthaginian’, even though these twin doves (*geminas ... columbas*, 3.678) share the same origin. However, it is not so easy to make this distinction between the two oracles; the oracle of Dodona is neither consulted by Romans, nor said to be specifically Roman. Stürner rather sees the god at Siwa as another manifestation of the same Jupiter that is now comforting Venus. He also does not see a huge difference between the two prophecies and argues rightly that the oracular message of Hammon is not conflicting with Jupiter’s earlier prophecy in Book 3, as the former does not give a full disclosure of the future either.⁶⁸

Thebes being mentioned as the place of origin of the two doves can be regarded as an intertextual signpost to the *Thebaid* of Statius, in which the two oracles are twice mentioned in close combination.⁶⁹ In Book 3 of that epic, the seer Amphiaraus, while addressing the supreme god (*Iuppiter omnipotens*, *Theb.* 3.471), states that *all* oracles are an inadequate way of revealing the future in comparison to interpreting the signs of birds. When Amphiaraus lists important oracles that have to yield to bird augury, he juxtaposes the Dodonian oak and Hammon in the same line: *aut frondes lucis quas fama Molossis | Chaonias sonuisse tibi, licet aridus Hammon | inuideat* (‘or the Chaonian leaves in the Molossian groves that are said to sound on your behalf, although parched Hammon is envious’, *Theb.* 3.475–477).⁷⁰ The second time that they are mentioned

66 Walter 2014: 305–307.

67 The story of the two doves originates from Herodotus (2.55), who talks about Thebes in Egypt, while Silius thinks of Thebes in Greece. This can be deduced from 3.681, where the dove, heading for Siwa, flies over the Carpathian Sea that lies between Crete and Rhodes. See Spaltenstein 1986: 258.

68 Stürner 2015: 195.

69 See also Walter 2014: 306, who links their origin from Thebes with the theme of civil war. Of course, there is also a possibility that Statius alluded to Silius. For the issue of Flavian intertextuality, see Introduction, section 5.2.

70 Snijder 1968: 192–193 has the following comment: “What is striking is that among the holy places are mentioned the sanctuaries of Dodona and Hammon, which were dedicated to Jupiter. This proves that only the quality of the oracles given by the priests of the ancient Greek shrines are meant, not the oracular abilities of the gods concerned, for this would be the same as saying that Jupiter is inferior to himself.”

together is in Book 8, when Amphiaraus has just died and his mourning comrades say that from now on all other oracular priests will be silent, including those in Dodona and Siwa:

quin et **cornigeri** uatis nemus atque Molosso
quercus anhela Ioui Troianaque Thymbra tacebit. (*Theb.* 8.201–202)

Yes, even the forest of the horn-bearing priest and Jupiter's panting oak in Molossus and Trojan Thymbra will be silent.

In one way, the oracular response that Bostar brings to Hannibal proves the words of Amphiaraus' friends to be untrue, as the oracle still continues to give out prophesies. On the other hand, the words of Amphiaraus himself inform us that oracles, even those from Jupiter, are not to be trusted.

That the oracle of Hammon is unreliable has been experienced already by Hiarbas, a Garamantian soldier fighting in the Carthaginian army during the siege of Saguntum, whom the narrator had apostrophized:

tu quoque **fatidicis Garamanticus** accola **lucis**
 insignis flexo galeam per tempora **cornu**,
 heu frustra reditum sortes tibi saepe locutas
 mentitumque Iouem increpitans, occumbis, Hiarba. (1.414–417)

You, too, fall down, Hiarbas, Garamantian neighbour of the prophesying grove, conspicuous by your helmet with curved horns over your temples, ah, in vain accusing the oracles that often promised your return and Jupiter for having lied to you.

His name is suggestive of Hiarbas, the son of Hammon and father of Asbyte (2.58–59). This warrior Hiarbas is dressed like Hammon himself, wearing horns on his helmet. This was a means of claiming allegiance to the god.⁷¹ Although Silius does not explicitly say so, it must be assumed that he is a priest of Hammon, as he is called a 'Garamantian neighbour of the prophetic grove' (*fatidicis Garamanticus accola lucis*).⁷² This is exactly how the grove of Hammon is described in the beginning of Book 3: *inter anhelantes Garamantas corniger Hammon | fatidico pandit uenientia saecula luco* ('the horn-bearing

71 This was how special devotees and alleged children of the god, like Alexander, were represented, for example on coins. See Roscher s.v. Ammon and Feeney 1982: 218.

72 Spaltenstein 1986: 69, however, does not think Hiarbas to be a priest.

Hammon reveals the future eras from his prophetic grove among the panting Garamantes', 3.10–11). Hiarbas has often consulted the oracle, which promised his safe return home. He is killed all the same and while dying accuses the god of being a liar (*mentitumque Iouem*). Another priest of Hammon, Nabis, meets a similar fate in the Battle of the Metaurus in 15.672–699.⁷³ He, too, wore a helmet with Hammon's horns (*casside cornigera*, 15.679) and imagined himself to be safe under the protection of his god: *fatidicis Nabis ueniens Hammonis harenis | improba miscebat securus proelia fati | ceu tutante deo* ('Nabis, coming from the prophetic sands of Hammon, joined the wicked battle, having no fear of death, as if the god were safeguarding him', 15.672–673).⁷⁴ This priest, too, falls in battle, slain by a Roman soldier and sees his faith in Hammon's protection betrayed.

Hammon did not even protect Asbyte, who claimed to be his granddaughter: *unde genus proauumque Iouem regina ferebat | et sua fatidico repetebat nomina luco* ('from there the queen took her descent and claimed Jupiter to be her grandfather and traced her name back to the prophetic grove', 2.66–67).⁷⁵ After her *aristeia*, she met a gruesome death, when Theron beheaded her with her own axe and put her head on a spike to show it to the Carthaginians (2.199–205). These examples show that Hammon and his prophecies cannot be trusted. The warriors that regard themselves as his closest worshippers and even his granddaughter do not survive the war.

The role of Venus in Hammon's oracle has been overlooked or downplayed in discussions of this episode. It was in fact *her* bird that founded the temple and became the first prophet:

at quae Carpathium super aequor uecta per auras
in Libyen niueis tranauit concolor alis,
hanc sedem templo **Cythereia** condidit ales. (3.681–683)

73 In his case, there is no doubt about his status as priest: he wears ritual fillets (*infula*, 15.679) and his garb is called sacred (*sacras uestes*, 15.698). During his *aristeia*, he shouts out the name Hammon: *ouans et ouans Hammona canebat* ('celebrating his triumphs he chanted the name of Hammon over and over again', 15.688). The verb *cano* has prophetic connotations and is reminiscent of Jupiter's dove, who also 'sang oracular responses' (*responsa canebat*, 3.687). Nabis' name is probably Semitic and may be related to Hebrew נָבִי *nabi* 'prophet', as Lefebvre suggested. See Ruperti 1798: 468 and Spaltenstein 1990: 386.

74 The deceptiveness of Hammon is suggested by *ceu tutante deo*; compare Bostar who thought that he had seen Jupiter: *ut uiso ... Tonante* ('as if he had seen Jupiter', 3.649).

75 Her name recalls Asbystes, a cult title of Hammon; see Spaltenstein 1986: 110 and 112 and Bernstein 2017: 69.

But the other one travelled through the air over the Carpathian sea and flew across to Libya, having the same colour as its snow-white wings; there the Cytherian bird founded this site for a temple.

The reference to Venus has been explained away as being merely ornamental, as doves are generally consecrated to this goddess.⁷⁶ But they are actually reminiscent of the twin doves that helped Aeneas to find the golden bough (*geminas ... columbas*, 3.678 ~ *geminas ... columbae*, Virg. *A.* 6.190). The Trojan hero immediately identified them as birds sent by his divine mother: *maternas agnouit aues* (*A.* 6.193). This intertextual allusion makes clear that in the Bostar episode, too, it really was a bird coming from Venus that became the first priest at Siwa. On an intratextual level, the adjective *Cythereia* echoes the way in which Jupiter had addressed his daughter earlier in Book 3: *Cytherea* (3.572, 3.593).⁷⁷

When we pursue this line of thought, Arisbas is the successor of the prophesying white dove. This connection is underscored by the snow-white robe of the priest, mirroring the colour of the bird: *ante aras stat ueste sacerdos | effulgens niuea* ('the priest stands before the altar, shining with his snow-white robe', 3.694–695).⁷⁸ The altar before which the priest is standing is exactly the place where in the olden days the dove was standing between the horns of Hammon, as Arisbas had just told Bostar: 'here where you now see the altar, [the bird] gave oracular responses, standing right between the horns' (*hic, ubi nunc aram ... uidetis (...) media inter cornua perstans | ... responsa canebat*, 3.684 and 686–687). The priest of Hammon does not only mirror the bird of Venus, he also echoes the words of the goddess herself in his prophecy, when referring to the war plans of the Carthaginians: *belloque agitare paratis | Assaraci prolem, Libyes* ('Libyans, you prepare for waging war against the lineage of Assaracus',

76 E.g. Spaltenstein 1986: 259: "Cette périphrase est ici de pure décoration, Vénus n'ayant aucun lien avec ce temple."

77 Both are rare forms in the *Punica*; the goddess is also called *Cytherea* by Proteus in 7.458, while the adjective *Cythereius* is used once more for the morning star in 12.247.

78 Many editors have suggested emendations for *niueis*, such as *nigris*, as they understand *concolor* meaning 'having the same colour as the people of Libya'. Another reason for suspecting a corruption is that Herodotus speaks of two black doves (*Hdt.* 2.55). Delz places the word between *cruces*. The Budé defends the manuscript reading, arguing that the dove has the same colour as the white-crested waves (155 n.4). I, however, follow Spaltenstein 1986: 259 in taking *concolor* together with *niueis ... alis*: the dove has the same colour as its wings, i.e. the dove is totally white. The correspondence with the colour of the priest's garment is another argument for defending the manuscript reading. Cf. *TLL* 4.81.24–41 s.v. for examples of *concolor* with a dative, where 3.695, however, is not listed. See also Stürner 2015: 189 n.25, who suggests that Silius does not draw on Herodotus, but on an alternative tradition.

3.700–701). The mention of Assaracus, the grandfather of Anchises, is a repetition of Venus' question to Jupiter where Romans should go to when their city would be destroyed: *quo ... | Assaracique larem et Vestae secreta feramus?* ('whither (...) should we bring the house god of Assaracus and the mysteries of Vesta?', 3.565–566). The repetition of Venus' words by Arisbas emphasizes that the Carthaginians are indeed plotting to turn Rome into a second Troy. But between the question of Venus and the oracle of Hammon, the goddess and the primary narratees have already heard the master plan of Jupiter himself, who has assured them that Rome will not be destroyed. This makes the oracle of Hammon less frightening from a Roman perspective: we know that the house of Assaracus will be saved. This is also confirmed by the intertextual echo from a vatic passage in Virgil's *Georgics* 3: the narrator describes the marble statues of the Trojan ancestors that will be put in an imaginative temple: *stabunt et Parii lapides, spirantia signa, | Assaraci proles* ('here in Parian marble shall stand statues, breathing life, the lineage of Assaracus', *Virg. G.* 3.34–35).⁷⁹ This is another confirmation that the lineage of Assaracus will survive the Hannibalic war. The references to Venus in the Bostar episode suggest that this goddess plays a role in safeguarding the descendants of this family by misleading Hannibal. In Book 11, it is this goddess that will cause the downfall of Hannibal during his stay in Capua.⁸⁰

In conclusion, the oracle of Hammon is not conflicting with that of Jupiter, but only gives a restricted view of the future. Whereas Hannibal rejoices over this message from the god, the primary narratees know that Hammon's message is in line with the plans of Jupiter, and that Rome will survive.⁸¹

5.3 *Scipio as the True Successor of Alexander and Aeneas*

At this point in the *Punica*, the victory of the Romans is still far away. In the following books, Hannibal will achieve victory after victory, which culminate in the Battle of Cannae in Book 9 and 10. Only after this major victory does the success of Hannibal start declining, and it becomes clear that he is not the true

79 Note that Venus' words in turn evoke the words of Ascanius to Nisus: *per magnos, Nise, penatis | Assaracique larem et canae penetralia Vestae | obtestor* ('I implore you by the great Penates and the household god of Assaracus and the sanctuary of the hoary Vesta', *Virg. A.* 9.258–260). These two clear allusions to Virgil suggest that it is probably no coincidence that the name Assaracus occurs seven times in the *Punica*—the same number as in the *Aeneid*.

80 See Introduction, sections 2 and 5.3 and Chapter 3, section 8.

81 Chaudhuri 2014: 241. Vessey 1982: 334 assumes that *laetis* in 3.713 only refers to the Carthaginian soldiers and that we do not learn Hannibal's reaction. I think that Hannibal should be included in those who rejoice.

successor of Alexander or Aeneas. The person who can rightfully claim this title is the Roman general Scipio, as is most clearly articulated in the famous *Nekyia* scene in Book 13. Accompanied like Aeneas by the Sibyl, Scipio meets the ghosts of several famous men, including Alexander the Great. This is the only place in the *Punica* where Alexander is explicitly mentioned. Scipio asks him how to achieve the same *gloria* as he has:

incipit Aeneades: 'Libyci *certissima proles*
 Hammonis, quando exsuperat tua gloria cunctos
 indubitata duces similique cupidine rerum
 pectora nostra calent, quae te uia, fare, superbum
 ad decus et summas laudum perduxerit arces.' (13.767–771)

The descendant of Aeneas begins: 'O most sure offspring of Libyan Hammon, since your undoubted glory exceeds all other generals and my heart burns with a similar desire for such deeds, tell me what road has led you to proud glory and the highest citadel of honours.'

Scipio, who himself is called a descendant of Aeneas by the primary narrator, calls Alexander the son of Hammon. By acknowledging Alexander's divine parentage, Scipio creates an analogy between the Macedonian general and himself. Mars had already called the young Scipio 'true offspring of Jupiter' (*uera Iouis proles*, 4.476).⁸² Shortly before his meeting with Alexander, his mother Pomponia revealed to him that his real father is Jupiter (13.637–644). The god had come to Pomponia in the form of a serpent, just as a snake had allegedly paid a visit to Alexander's mother.⁸³ On an intertextual level, the phrase *certissima proles* connects Alexander also with Aeneas, whom Virgil's Sibyl addresses with the words *deum certissima proles* (Virg. *A.* 6.322). Since Scipio is a descendant of Aeneas (*Aeneades*), this adds to the idea that Scipio is the true successor of both Alexander and Aeneas. The primary narrator will confirm Scipio's divine parentage in the final two lines of the *Punica*:

nec uero, cum te memorat de stirpe deorum,
 prolem Tarpei, mentitur Roma, Tonantis. (17.653–654)

82 C. Reitz 1982: 113.

83 C. Reitz 1982: 113. Livy 26.19.6–7 tells the same story of Scipio and makes an explicit comparison with the birth of Alexander. For the serpent visiting Olympias, see e.g. Plu. *Alex.* 2.6 and 3.1–2. For further references, see Van der Keur 2015: 331. See also Chapter 2, section 7.3.

Truly Rome does not lie, when it tells that you have a divine origin and that you are a child of the Tarpeian Thunderer.

In fact, Scipio outclasses his semi-divine predecessors, since he is the son of the supreme god Jupiter, while Aeneas is the son of Venus and Alexander of Hammon.⁸⁴

Hannibal, on the other hand, is explicitly said to be the son of his mortal father Hamilcar, whose ghost also appears to Scipio in the same scene in Book 13. Hamilcar refers to his son with the words ‘o true child of mine’ (*o uera propago*, 13.749). Clearly, Hannibal is the son of a mortal man, not of a god. Scipio addressing Alexander as son of Hammon, only twenty lines later (13.767–768), underscores the difference with Hannibal: although the latter had received an oracle from this same god in Book 3, he did not acquire any divine status, which makes clear that he is not the successor of Alexander.⁸⁵

The presence of the Sibyl enables Scipio to get a clearer view of past and future than Hannibal could ever get through his stand-in Bostar and the Sibyl’s double Arisbas in Book 3. The Sibyl predicts that the Punic general will die ignobly in a foreign country by poisoning himself. Then ‘he will free the world at last from long-enduring fear’ (*tandem terras longa formidine soluet*, 13.893). These last words of the Sibyl are a sequel of Hammon’s oracle in Book 3, who predicted never-ending fear as long as Hannibal was alive: she discloses to Scipio *how* the life of Hannibal will actually come to an end.

That the prophecy in Book 13 echoes the one in Book 3 is also apparent from Scipio’s reaction: he returns to his comrades joyfully (*laetus*, 13.895). The same emotion is ascribed to Hannibal and the other Carthaginians after hearing the prophecy of Hammon (*laetis*, 3.713).⁸⁶ The difference is of course that the Carthaginians were rejoicing too soon, as they did not know the outcome of the war, while Scipio is now rightfully cheerful, since he knows that Hannibal’s successes will come to an end.

84 Walter 2014: 271–272, however, contends that the finale of the *Punica* still leaves room for doubt about Scipio’s parentage, pointing at the central position in the last verse of *mentitur* (although negated by *nec*).

85 See Vessey 1982: 321–322 on Hannibal as a “lost Alexander”.

86 After the dream of the serpent earlier in Book 3, Hannibal had shown mixed emotions of both joy and fear: *laetoque pauore* (3.215). On this oxymoron, see Ruperti 1795: 199. In Livy, Hannibal was simply happy after having received this dream: *hoc uisu laetus* (Liv. 21.23.1). The happiness of Scipio in Book 13 contrasts with Hannibal’s sadness earlier in that book (*haud laetus*, 13.94); see Van der Keur 2015: 476.

6 Conclusion

In several ways, the narrative of Bostar functions as a mirror text. On a narrative level Bostar and Arisbas mirror each other as narrators. In turn they are stand-ins for respectively Hannibal and Hammon. This means that Bostar acts as a substitute for Hannibal. We have also seen that Hammon skips a narrative level and speaks, as it were, directly to Hannibal. This indicates that Hannibal is in close touch with the divine world.

The allusions to Alexander the Great, Aeneas, and Cato shed another light on Bostar's mission. Although the visit to Hammon's shrine recalls the visits of Alexander and Cato to the same oracle and Aeneas' meeting with the Sibyl, it is made clear that Bostar, and by extension Hannibal, cannot live up to these famous literary predecessors. Arisbas does not identify Hannibal as being a child of Jupiter Hammon, as the priest had done in the case of Alexander. The oracle of Hammon predicts the same bloody wars in Latium as the Sibyl's in *Aeneid* 6, but whereas Aeneas and his descendants will eventually benefit from these, Hannibal will only reap a bitter harvest. The echoes of Cato's journey through the Libyan desert in Lucan make Bostar at first sight comparable to the Stoic general, but Bostar's confidence in the divine nature of the oracle is the opposite of Cato's scepticism. The allusions to Lucan thus indicate that his confidence is ungrounded and call in question the reliability of the oracle.

Allusions to other parts of the *Punica* confirm that Hannibal, although in close touch with the gods, never acquires full knowledge of his fate. The two earlier prophecies that Hannibal has received in Book 1 and 3 are quite similar to the oracular message of Hammon: the great defeats of the Romans are emphasized, while the final defeat of Hannibal is kept silent. The oracle of Hammon is therefore highly ironic: while Bostar thinks that Jupiter as supreme god has given his assent to the Punic enterprise, the primary narratees know that Jupiter has other plans, as the god himself has affirmed to Venus. Hammon's oracle is therefore nothing more than an instrument of Jupiter's will.

Hannibal almost accomplishes the fall of Rome, but finally has to acknowledge the superiority of Scipio. In Book 13 of the *Punica* Hannibal's Roman rival is identified as son of Jupiter and the true successor to both Aeneas and Alexander.