

# A Translator's Appraisal of Classical and Hellenistic Influences in Flaubert's *Salammô*

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## Abstract

In the present autobiographical appraisal my aims are: to mention briefly the reasons why I translated *Salammô*; to give the reader of this paper, by means of parallel extracts from the Maltese and English translated texts, a glimpse of the dazzling beauty of Flaubert's epic prose descriptions; to make the student aware of what I, as a translator became aware of while translating Flaubert, showing how the latter succeeds in creating such an excellent masterpiece by means of intertextual classical references and other non-written materials (in particular the coins that were minted with the name of Gozo on them); and to demonstrate why the reader is set on a course to discover both the Classical and Hellenistic worlds together with antiquity's command over Flaubert's imagination. Biblical sources, which this paper will be slightly referring to, are another source abundantly used by Flaubert.

**Keywords:** *translation, epic, classical references, allegory, numismatics, Gozo*

*My Salome is a mystic the sister of Salammô a Saint Thérèse who worships the moon.* – Oscar Wilde

## Introduction

To my mind, there is no better way for anyone seeking to discover ancient Carthage through historical fiction other than to read Flaubert's *Salammô*. Unlike any other novel, set in ancient times, written before 1862 or ever since, *Salammô* offers to the student of ancient history a unique opportunity to read historical fiction, authored by an exceptional novelist, who, above all, aimed not simply at telling the story of a particular episode of Rome's greatest rival but actually at reconstructing Carthage from the remains of her own scattered ashes. *Salammô* opens a window onto an imagined ancient Carthage, immediately after the First Punic War, during the Mercenary War (240 BC – 238 BC) – also referred to as the Libyan War – which almost brought the city to her knees but from which she, ultimately and astonishingly, managed to survive by the skin of her teeth. Thus, the novel recreates the ancient city of Carthage throughout one of her intensively dramatic moments

in her chequered history by giving, *inter alia*, a detailed description of the daily lives of her inhabitants and a glimpse of Punic power dynamics both at local and regional levels. Furthermore, in *Salammô* Flaubert does not just describe Carthage as documented in historical sources but he also thoroughly presents the city as he imagined her to be.

## A Personal Experience

I always wonder on how life is full of intersections. And it is precisely because of one particular intersection among the many interspersing my life that I decided to translate Flaubert's *Salammô* into Maltese. *Salammô* intersects both my interests in French literature and anything to do with ancient or classical history.

The first time I came across Flaubert's novel was in the late seventies when, as a sixth former in Valletta, I was assiduously studying for my A-Level French. At the time, studying the Classics locally was not an option as no courses were available; so my particular interest in them could only be assuaged as a personal initiative. And *Salammô* was just the right choice, giving me the opportunity of hitting two birds with one stone by practising my French and at the same time enjoying reading, in my restricted free time, an ancient history novel. In a way it was like squaring the circle. The second time round was many years later, but just a few years ago, when I decided to translate Flaubert's novel into Maltese. An extraordinary and enriching experience, which not only required full care and concentration to replicate faithfully into Maltese Flaubert's masterpiece, but also obliged me to delve into and reflect on the historical and other material that Flaubert himself referred to in order to write it. It must also be remembered that it took Flaubert several years of research to finish the novel. As Andrew Brown maintains "He [Flaubert] sought inspiration, as ever, in massive feats of ingestion, devouring learned tomes as Moloch devoured children in the hope that fructifying rain would fall ... [swallowing] some hundred volumes on Carthage" (Brown 2009, p. 124). Thus, I consider that during the roughly four years that I spent working on the translation I faithfully followed in Flaubert's footsteps till the very end of this literary journey.

Therefore, by translating the text I became aware more than ever before of how Flaubert's artistic genius and story-telling techniques, which prominently include intertextuality and ekphrasis from ancient sources, managed to convert Polybius' simple narrative history into a literary masterpiece. I have read quite a few well-written historical novels set in ancient times, so, both on the basis of this extensive reading experience and my translation, I can safely maintain that in my reading canon, Flaubert's *Salammô* is still the foremost artistically written ancient history novel to date. This view is also attested and reinforced by the intensive critical interest in academic circles that, since its publication in 1862, has resulted in an abundance of academic research, reviews, papers and publications on all its varied

themes. Indeed, few other historical novels dealing with antiquity ever reached such a height of literary and aesthetic perfection.

### **Salammô: the Epic**

Polybius' narrative of the Mercenary War (Polybius 1922, pp. 66-88) is, except for rare instances (more of this below), nothing but the subset of Flaubert's narrative text in *Salammô*. Actually, I find that by translating *Salammô* into Maltese I had simultaneously translated both Flaubert's novel and Polybius' account of the Mercenary War. Yet, Flaubert, whose knowledge of Polybius depended on the translation of the Benedictine monk Dom Thuillier (Bourguinat 2010), does more than just rework Polybius' bone-dry narrative account of the war. Stylistically speaking, he turns the latter's narrative into a Carthaginian epic in prose. This is evident in the many corresponding epic elements from the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, overtly and covertly embedded, that pervades both the descriptive and narrative components of his novel. What follows are just a few examples of epic influence on Flaubert's novel:

- Carthage, like Troy, is a besieged city. The besieging mercenaries, like the Achaeans under Agamemnon's command, hail from different lands. And, accordingly, though admittedly very briefly, Flaubert imitates Homer's catalogue of ships in the *Iliad*, and lists the dismissed contingents of the Mercenaries' army that sailed from Sicily to Carthage at the end of the First Punic War:

*Men of all nations were there, Ligurians, Lusitanians, Balearians, Negroes, and fugitives from Rome. Beside the heavy Dorian dialect were audible the resonant Celtic syllables rattling like chariots of war, while Ionian terminations conflicted with consonants of the desert as harsh as the jackal's cry. The Greek might be recognised by his slender figure, the Egyptian by his elevated shoulders, the Cantabrian by his broad calves. There were Carians proudly nodding their helmet plumes, Cappadocian archers displaying large flowers painted on their bodies with the juice of herbs, and a few Lydians in women's robes, dining in slippers and earrings. Others were ostentatiously daubed with vermilion, and resembled coral statues. (Flaubert 2006, p. 5)*

*Kien hemm irġiel min-nazzjonijiet kollha, Ligurjani, Lużitanjani, Baleariċi, Negri, u magħhom dawk maħrubin minn Ruma. Kienu jinstemgħu, maġenb id-djalett tqil Doriku, bħal imriekeb jidwu u ħfief is-sillabi Keltiċi, u t-truf tal-kliem Joniku inkompatibbli daqs l-għajta tal-ġakall mal-konsonanti ħorox*

*tad-deżert. Il-Grieg kien jingħaraf mill-għelubija ta' ġismu, l-Eġizzjan minn spallejh merfugħin 'il fuq, u l-Kantabrijan mill-pxiexen wesgħin. Kien hemm Karjani li mkabbrin kienu qed ixejru r-rix ta' elmijiethom, u qawwisin mill-Kappadoċja li kienu pingew ġisimhom b'ħabaq ta' fjuri kbar, u xi ffit Lidjani kienu qed jieklu libsin ilbies ta' nisa, bil-papoċċi f'saqajhom u l-imsielet f'widnejhom. Oħrajn kienu għal għajn in-nies imċallsin bil-vermilju, bħal statwi tal-qroll. (Flaubert 2014, p. 4 )* [It is to be noted that the Maltese text is based on the French original and not on the preceding English translation shown in this paper. Readers of both the English and Maltese translations can, therefore, spot certain divergences. Accuracy, can only be measured by comparing the two translations with the original in French. From here onwards, this remark applies to all the translated quotations from the novel given in this paper.]

The list of nations mentioned in the above quotation is not exhaustive but is further extended later on as the war gains momentum, mid-way through the novel, to include amongst others: Zuaeces, Garamantians, Troglodytes, Ammonians, Atarantians, Auseans, Achyrmachidae, Gysantians, Gaetulians, Pharusians, Caunians, Macarians, Marusians, Ethiopians, Tillabarians and a people, whom Flaubert calls “Eaters of Uncleanness”:

*They were not Libyans from the neighbourhood of Carthage, who had long composed the third army, but nomads from the tableland of Barca, bandits from Cape Phiscus and the promontory of Dernah, from Phazzana and Marmarica. They had crossed the desert, drinking at the brackish wells walled in with camels' bones; the Zuaeces, with their covering of ostrich feathers, had come on quadrigae; the Garamantians, masked with black veils, rode behind on their painted mares; others were mounted on asses, onagers, zebras, and buffaloes; while some dragged after them the roofs of their sloop-shaped huts together with their families and idols. There were Ammonians with limbs wrinkled by the hot water of the springs; Atarantians, who curse the sun; Troglodytes, who bury their dead with laughter beneath branches of trees; and the hideous Auseans, who eat grass-hoppers; the Achyrmachidae, who eat lice; and the vermilion-painted Gysantians, who eat apes. (Flaubert 2006, p. 158)*

*Ma kinux il-Libjani tal-inħawi ta' Kartaġni; li għal żmien twil kienu jiffurmaw it-tielet eżerċtu; iżda n-Nomadi tal-Medda tal-Barka, il-briganti tal-Kap Fisku u tal-Promontorju ta' Derna, dawk ta' Fazzana u ta' Marmarika. Kienu qasmu d-deżert huma*

*u jixorbu mill-bjar salmastri b'ħitan tal-għadam tal-iġmla; iż-  
Żwaezi mgħottijin bir-rix tan-nagħma, kienu ġew fuq imriekba  
miġbudin b'erba' żmiemel; il-Garamantjani, wiċċhom mgħotti  
b'velu iswed, bilqiegħda wara fuq żmiemel miżbugħin; oħrajn  
fuq il-ħmir, fuq l-onagri, fuq iż-żebri, fuq il-buffli; u xi wħud  
kienu qed ikaxkru ma' familthom u l-idoli s-saqaf tal-għerejjex  
tagħhom għamla ta' kurvetta. Kien hemm Ammonjani b'erba'  
dirgħajn imkemmxin bl-ilma ikħal tal-funtani; Atarantjani, li  
kienu jisħtu x-xemx; Trogloditi, li jidfnu l-mejtin tagħhom huma  
u jidħku taħt il-friegħi tas-siġar; l-Awsej koroh pesta, li jieklu  
l-ġurati; l-Axirmaxidej, li jieklu l-baqq, u l-Ġizantjani, miżbugħin  
bin-nogħra, li jieklu x-xadini. (Flaubert 2014, p.203)*

- In the French text, the reader frequently comes across hyphenated epithets, a distinctive characteristic of Homeric narrative style, typical examples are: “Moloch-à-tête-de-taureau” / “bull-headed Moloch” / “Molok b'ras ta' barri”; “Moloch-le-dévorateur” / “Moloch the Devourer” / “Molok id-Devoratur”; “Mangeurs-de-choses-immondes” / “Eaters of Uncleaness” / “Wikkiela tal-Ħwejjeġ Imniġġsin”; “Chef-des-odeurs suaves” / “Chief of the Sweet Odours” / “Kap tal-Fwejjaħ”; “buveurs-de-jusquiamme” / “henbane-drinkers” / “dawki li jixorbu l-mammažejża”; “Suffète-de-la-mer” / “marine Suffet” / “Sufet tal-baħar”; and “Salammbô la fille de Hamilcar” / “Hamilcar's daughter” / “bint Ħamilkar.
- Furthermore, in his own way and following the example of epic poets, Flaubert scrutinizes the concept and the essence of the gods and their intervention in human affairs. Effectively, embedded in the novel, we come across the same theme of divine intervention in human doings as we find in Greco-Latin epic narration, a case in point is the episode of the crows, representing the messengers of the goddess, fighting it over the dead bodies of the Barbarian horde (Blix 2013, p. 731).
- Certain episodes in *Salammbô* are also similar to other themes found in Greek and Latin epics. For instance, like Odysseus, who had to deal with the insolent and arrogant Suitors, Hamilcar, returning home *in medias res*, discovers that his former mercenaries had brazenly wreaked havoc on his palace gardens, killed his sacred fish, and behaved disrespectfully towards his daughter. And like Odysseus, he exacts retribution for this unpardonable outrage to the law of hospitality both from his former mercenaries, who had committed the atrocities, and from his household servants, who had allowed them to take place.

- Flaubert's use of animal imagery and similes is also comparable to Homer's handling of such literary devices. In their narrative discourses Homer and Flaubert frequently use zoomorphism both for symbolic and dramatic purposes: in the *Odyssey*, Circe turns Odysseus companions into swine, while in *Salammô*, Flaubert constantly attributes animal individualities to his characters (Blix 2013, pp.724-743).
- Like Virgil, Flaubert uses a female character to symbolise the future demise of Carthage. The legendary Dido and fictitious Salammô both meet a tragic death; the two of them leave the reader with a sense of heart-rending loss. There are other several intertextual similarities between these two female characters foremost of which is the fact that they come alike from Carthaginian noble families. More than this, the bejewelled "daughter of Hamilcar", can even be compared to "white-armed" Helen, daughter of Tyndareus and *casus belli* of the Trojan war, not just for her beauty but also for being the principal cause that motivated Mathô to breach the walls of Carthage. [Throughout this paper, I am retaining, as found in the original French text, the spelling of the name Mathô, instead of Mathos. Flaubert, deliberately uses the /o/ with a circumflex accent on it (which essentially substitutes the /s/), both for aesthetic and literary purposes, to link Salammô's name with that of Mathô.]
- Even, the initial presence of the Barbarian contingents outside Carthage echoes to a certain extent the image of an enemy reaching the coasts of Carthage with the same looting purpose that the Achaeans had when they reached the shores of Troy.

### **Influences: Mythology, Legend and Cosmology**

Congruently to what has been said above regarding the presence of epic elements, there are in Flaubert's novel recurring mythological and legendary borrowings that are essentially used both for thematic reasons and for the amplification of actions and descriptions. For instance, Mathô, like Hercules, goes into battle wearing a lion skin and the starving Carthaginian Moloch, like his half-man and half-bull counterpart the Minotaur of Knossos, remorselessly devours his human victims (Taillandier 1863).

The *zâimph*, the holy mantel of Tanit, on which the safety of Carthage depended, reminds the reader of the Trojan *palladium*, the cult image on which the safety of Troy similarly relied. Both the *palladium* and the *zâimph* are stolen (yet, it must be remembered that only the theft of the *palladium* by Diomedes and Odysseus had dire consequences, the theft of the *zâimph* which mid-way through the novel is retrieved by Salammô herself, could not bring about the destruction of Carthage

for historically the city's doom was predestined for later years and in different circumstances). From a narrative perspective, the theft of the cosmic *zaimph* also reminds us of Jason's legendary theft of the Golden Fleece. Additionally, it also introduces the notion of sacrilege, which leads Stuart Barnett to consider that "The siege of Carthage that comprises most of the novel's narrative is, in effect, a siege of the gods of the Carthaginians." (Barnett 1991)

In his novel, correspondingly to what Hesiod does in the *Theogony* and to what Homer and Virgil do to a certain extent in their epics, Flaubert also expounds the cosmological origins and genealogy of the Punic gods and brings the reader face to face with "the enigmatic nature of the gods" (Barnett 1991).

### **Historical Details from Ancient and Classical Sources**

*Salammô* includes also borrowings from historical texts and effectively, as noted above, the storyline is intentionally based on the war's historical details as found in Polybius and to a very limited extent on the historical information obtained from Appian. In *Salammô*, Flaubert follows Polybius to the letter and changes almost nothing of importance in his novel. However, this does not mean that he did not rework some of the historical details when he felt that alterations were required. In fact, several instances of reworking can be spotted. For example, from the historical point of view, the most germane modification found in the novel is the absence of Hannibal, the historical *suffet*. Flaubert purposely does this to avoid the confusion that it may cause with Hannibal, Hamilcar's son, the future bane of Rome, mentioned in the novel, but not in Polybius, as being just a small child. Flaubert required the child Hannibal namely to develop the thematic dilemma that Hamilcar faces when he is asked to hand over his young son for ritual burning. In an other insignificant deviation from the historical storyline as developed by Polybius, Flaubert attributes extraordinary physical strength to Mathô and not to Spendius. Also, in Polybius' account, contrary to what is found in Flaubert, Hamilcar has several nameless daughters. Flaubert mentions only one of them, naming her *Salammô*, whom Hamilcar promises to the Numidian *Narâvas*. Her name is not historically recorded in Polybius. It is purely the fruit of Flaubert's artistic imagination.

The novel also rigorously retains the historical facts regarding siege craft, armaments, combat tactics as found in ancient sources (Bourguinat 2010, pp. 35-62). And alongside these overt historical details Flaubert's imagination draws on covert and not so covert imageries as found both in Classical and Hellenistic literature. One particular Hellenistic source is the New Testament. Compounded from Jewish and Hellenistic cultures, the New Testament should for our present purpose be considered as a Hellenistic and not as a Christian source of reference. Consequently, from a purely historical point of view, both the story of the Passion and crucifixion of Christ are considered here as belonging to Hellenistic literature. Based on this

premise, the crucifixion of the lions and of the Mercenaries as described in the novel remind us on the one hand of the crucifixion of Christ in the New Testament and on the other of the crucifixion of Spartacus and his followers along the Appian way as narrated in Roman historical sources:

*They ran thither. It was a lion with his four limbs fastened to a cross like a criminal. His huge muzzle fell upon his breast, and his two fore-paws, half-hidden beneath the abundance of his mane, were spread out wide like the wings of a bird. His ribs stood severally out beneath his distended skin; his hind legs, which were nailed against each other, were raised somewhat, and the black blood, flowing through his hair, had collected in stalactites at the end of his tail, which hung down perfectly straight along the cross. The soldiers made merry around; they called him consul, and Roman citizen, and threw pebbles into his eyes to drive away the gnats.*

*But a hundred paces further on they saw two more, and then there suddenly appeared a long file of crosses bearing lions. Some had been so long dead that nothing was left against the wood but the remains of their skeletons; others which were half eaten away had their jaws twisted into horrible grimaces; there were some enormous ones; the shafts of the crosses bent beneath them, and they swayed in the wind, while bands of crows wheeled ceaselessly in the air above their heads. It was thus that the Carthaginian peasants avenged themselves when they captured a wild beast; they hoped to terrify the others by such an example. The Barbarians ceased their laughter, and were long lost in amazement. "What people is this," they thought, "that amuses itself by crucifying lions!" (Flaubert 2006, p. 18)*

Ġrew lejha. Kien iljun, marbut ma' salib mill-erba' dirġhajj bħal kriminal. Gedduom enormi mwaqqa' fuq sidru, u ẓ-żewġ saqajn ta' quddiem, nofshom moħbijin taħt il-kriniera folta, kienu miftuħin beraħ bħal ġwienah ta' ġħasfur. Il-kustilji, waħda waħda, kienu maħruġin 'il barra taħt ġildu mġebbd; saqajh ta' wara, imsammrin waħda ħdejn l-oħra, kienu xi ftit imtellġhin; u d-demm iswed, inixxi bejn sufu, kien inġema' bħal stalaktiti fit-tarf ta' denbu mdendel dritt ġħall-aħħar tul is-salib. Is-suldati ẓẓufjettaw madwaru; sejhulu konslu u ċittadin ta' Ruma u tefġhulu ċ-ċaġħak f'ġħajnejh, biex ikeċċu d-dubbien.

*Mitt pass aktar 'il bogħod raw tnejn oħrajn, imbagħad f'daqqa waħda dehret filliera ta' slaleb bl-iljuni magħhom. Xi wħud kienu ilhom mejtin ġħal tant ẓmien li ma kienx baqa' mal-injam ħlief il-fdalijiet tal-iskeletri tagħhom; oħrajn nofshom imgerrmin b'xedaq imdawwar bi tkerrih tal-wiċċ tal-biża'; kien hemm uħud enormi, l-ġħuda tas-salib kienet mġhawġa bil-piż tagħhom u kienu qed jixxenglu fir-riħ, filwaqt li fuq rashom qatet ta' ċawl kienu qed iduru fl-arja, mingħajr waqfien.*



*Kien b'dan il-mod li l-bdiewa Kartaġiniji kienu jivvendikaw ruħhom meta jaqbd u bhima feroċi; kienu jittamaw li b'dan l-eżempju jbeżżgħu lill-oħrajn. Il-Barbari, waqfu jidħku, u ħassewhom mitlufin skantati. "X'nies huma dawn," ħasbu, "li jieħdu gost isallbu l-iljuni."* (Flaubert 2014, p. 25)

The ordeal of Mathô, at the end of the novel, is also heavily influenced by the Passion of Christ as narrated in the Gospels.

Further traces of ancient historical borrowings are also present in other occurrences. Amongst others we find the following instances:

- The fate of Gesco, Hamilcar's Punic fellow general in the Sicilian War, and that of some seven hundred Carthaginian nobles held captive by the Barbarians remind us of the same misfortune suffered by the Athenians in Thucydides, following their debacle at the siege of Syracuse, when they find themselves dumped into a quarry, where they slowly wither to their deaths. This similarity is repeated once more at the end of Flaubert's novel, when the Mercenaries also experience the same sufferings, which they previously inflicted on their Carthaginian captives, thus reminding us a second time of the Athenians' predicament in Thucydides.
- Hamilcar Barca recalled by Carthage and arriving in the teeth of the revolt puts an end to Carthaginian military practices based on class distinction. Then, he recruits, fits and hardens enough soldiers from the lower classes to gain control of the situation. Hamilcar's measures to recruit Carthaginian soldiers reminds us of the Roman Consul Marius (157 BC – 86 BC), who conscripted the plebs for the Roman army to be able to encounter with sufficient military strength the barbarians threatening Rome.
- In the novel, Hamilcar's battles and strategic manoeuvres outshine even those of his son's campaigning in Italy as narrated in Titus Livius. Thus, depicted by Flaubert as a military genius, Hamilcar also reminds us of the campaigns of Julius Caesar in the *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*. In the novel, Hamilcar, like Caesar who was always outnumbered against the Gauls, dexterously handles complicated adverse military situations turning them from certain defeat into resounding victories.

### **Authenticity: A Voyage to the Levant, a Short Stop in Malta, a Visit to Gozo and Numismatics**

For the sake of authenticity, Flaubert was not just happy to use simply what Greco-Latin written sources offered. He preferred to adopt an inclusive approach and

not just solely rely on ancient historiography or on the writings of contemporary armchair historians. For him, authenticity required first-hand experience, so he turned his attention mainly towards two other related, yet at the same time, different sources: archaeology (i.e. the physical ruins, the statuary and the lapidary remains associated with Phoenician and Punic cultures) and numismatics, where he hoped to find pictorial elements that could help him vividly describe Carthage and her inhabitants.

As, Bourginat states, in resuscitating Carthage by going to archaeological sites, Flaubert anticipated the inclusive approach to history writing which till then was still highly compartmentalised. His quest to see for himself the remaining physical evidence that could be used for his reconstruction of ancient Carthage took him therefore to the Levant, where, between 1849-1851 together with his friend Maxime Du Camp, he visited Lebanon and Egypt and later on North Africa about which he writes:

*J'ai visité à fond la campagne de Tunis et les ruines de Carthage, j'ai traversé la Régence de l'est à l'ouest pour rentrer en Algérie par la frontière de Kheff, et j'ai traversé la partie orientale de la province de Constantine jusqu'à Philippeville, où je me suis embarqué.* (Flaubert 1902, p. 271) [*I thoroughly visited the countryside of Tunis and the ruins of Carthage, crossed the Eyalet of Tripolitania from East to West to enter into Algeria through the border of Kheff, and traversed the Oriental part of the province of Constantine as far as Philippeville, where I re-embarked.*] (Unless otherwise stated translations from French sources are my own.)

To our credit, at the beginning of his Oriental tour, he stopped for a few days in Malta. During his stay, he visited Gozo to see the freshly discovered Ġgantija Temples which, at that time, were still wrongly considered to be Punic sanctuaries. As a result of this visit the Gozitan temples at Ġgantija, alongside the Temple in Jerusalem, constitute the genesis of the reconstructed shrine of Tanit as described in *Salammbô*. [It is to be noted that in the 19th century, French and other European travellers still considered Malta to be the antechamber to the Levant. This trend inherited from previous centuries, is amply felt for instance in Théophile Gautier's travelogue *Constantinople* (1853), in which a whole chapter, which I translated into Maltese and published in *Il-Malti* (Hargà Letterarja XCI 2018), is dedicate to his brief stay in Malta before heading for Constantinople.]

As for numismatics Flaubert studied the ancient coinage in circulation at the time of and prior to the First Punic War. In "Flaubert, Salammbô et le Cabinet des Médailles", Florence Codine and Julien Olivier (2017) give a thorough and well-illustrated explanation on how Flaubert consulted the Cabinet des Médailles of the Bibliothèque impériale (today's Bibliothèque nationale) as part of his intensive research to write his novel. According to Codine and Olivier, Flaubert consulted three

eminent personalities in connection with his visits to the Cabinet des Médailles. These were the archaeologist Félicien de Saulcy (for information about the region and the period of time concerned), Ernest Muret (who also showed him Assyrian clay tablets) and mostly Henry Cohen, the numismatics expert and collector of ancient coins. From the coins he consulted at the Cabinet des Médailles and with the help of these three learned gentlemen, Flaubert obtained details about the names of the cities and inhabitants that later on were to figure in his work. Amongst these coins, as stated by Codine and Olivier, there were some that originated from *Gaulos* (present-day Gozo). The coins mentioned in the novel include, amongst others, the gold and silver *shekels* used in Carthage and in the Near East, the *kesitah* and the *kikar* referred to in the Bible and the *drachmas*, the *talent* and the *minae* used by the Greeks. From these coins Flaubert extracted details to describe the Carthaginian way of life including men, animals, places and gods. A case in point is the description of the walls of Carthage, that is partly based on a Sidonian *shekel* representing crenelated walls.

### ***Salammbô*: the Allegory**

The novel is also in Jacques Harmand's words, as specified in Bourginat, "a first-class sociological document" (Bourginat 2010, pp. 35-62). Bourginat, himself, rightly maintains that the novel, because of its barbarians, decadence and war themes, constitutes a historical discourse. As such, it presents a sort of allegory in which the payment disagreements of Punic high society with the Mercenaries represent the perpetual conflict between the bourgeoisie and the interests of the working classes. Goddar also agrees with Harmand and Bourginat saying that: "Flaubert emphasizes Carthage's greed and financial acumen, consistent with ancient sources, throughout *Salammbô*, referring to 'Son éternel souci du gain' ['Her eternal concern with profit.'] ..., and making the republic's reluctance to pay the mercenaries the war's central cause" (Goddard 1998, p. 276). Consequently, by transmuting Polybius' narrative into a modern richly textured and layered allegory of the struggle between the working and governing classes Flaubert gives it a universal dimension, extending it beyond time and space.

Seen from another angle of this allegorical perspective, the novel echoes the decline of civilisations. The idea of decadence is symbolised, among other things, by the illness which eats Hanno's body, the lamentful song which Salammbô demurely sings to the mercenaries (Bourginat 2010) and to a certain extent by temple prostitution. In the book, we find a repeat of the historically fine line separating civilisation from barbarism as propagated from Heroditus to Strabo by way of Diodorus into modern history. Flaubert's intention is mainly to make us aware of how this fine line can easily be crossed in dire situations. Actually, the line is crossed and blurred several times. This happens most conspicuously on two separate occasions:

(a) when, the Mercenaries, mostly coming from cultures as old as Carthage herself, recur to cannibalism and (b) in Carthage herself, where the supposedly civilised Carthaginians recur to the aberration of human sacrifice:

*The Ancients assembled. The sitting was a long one. Hanno had come to it. As he was now unable to sit he remained lying down near the door, half hidden among the fringes of the lofty tapestry; and when the pontiff of Moloch asked them whether they would consent to surrender their children, his voice suddenly broke forth from the shadow like the roaring of a genius in the depths of a cavern. He regretted, he said, that he had none of his own blood to give; and he gazed at Hamilcar, who faced him at the other end of the hall. The Suffet was so much disconcerted by this look that it made him lower his eyes. All successively bent their heads in approval; and in accordance with the rites he had to reply to the high priest: "Yes; be it so." Then the Ancients decreed the sacrifice in traditional circumlocution, — because there are things more troublesome to say than to perform. (Flaubert 2006, p. 197)*

*Ix-Xjuħ ingabru. Il-laqqħa kienet twila. Hanno ġie għaliha. Billi ma setax joqgħod aktar bilqiegħda, baqa' mimdud ħdejn il-bieb, nofsu mistoħbi fil-borduri tat-tapizzerija għolja; u meta l-qassis il-kbir ta' Molok staqsiehom jekk kinux se jaċċettaw li jagħtu lil uliedhom, leħnu, f'ħin bla waqt, instema' jgħajjat fid-dell donnu l-għajta ta' Spirtu minn qiegħ ta' għar. Kien qed jiddispjaċih, qal, li ma kellux biex jagħti minnhom minn demmu; u kien qed jikkuntempla lil Hamilkar, quddiemu fit-tarf l-ieħor tas-sala. Is-Sufet kien tant imħawwad b'din il-ħarsa li kellu jbaxxi għajnejh. Ilkoll qablu huma u jbaxxu rashom wiehed wara l-ieħor; u, wara r-riti, hu kellu jwieġeb lill-qassis il-kbir: "Iva, ħa jseħħ dan." Imbagħad ix-Xjuħ ħarġu digriet għas-sagrifiċċju bid-dawran ta' kliem tradizzjonali, — billi jeżistu ħwejjeġ aktar inkwetanti li wiehed ilissen milli jesegwixxi. (Flaubert 2014, p. 227)*

## Archaeological Impact

It must be remembered that the Romans concluded the Third Punic War by inflicting complete destruction on Carthage. The city was literally wiped off the map. Scipio's troops carried out on Carthage a complete infamous execution of a cultural *damnatio memoria*. Thus, archaeologists, digging in the 19th century, did not expect to find anything spectacular as in Pompeii or the Egyptian Valley of the Kings. In a letter dated October 1858 addressed to Ernest Feydeau, Flaubert says that:

Carthage needs to be done all over again – or rather, just done. I'm demolishing everything. It was absurd! Impossible! Wrong! *Delenda*

*est Carthago*. But only in order to be rebuilt, and this time with feeling.  
(Brown 2009, p. 124)

And this is precisely what Flaubert's hallucinatory conjunctures managed to do. In fact, these conjunctures are too strong to be refuted and because of this they have left their impact on the archaeological ruins of ancient Carthage herself. Thus, ever since Flaubert's novel appeared, almost in every history or archaeology book on Carthage, one is bound to come across *Salammô*'s name, mentioned in the text and duly listed in the index, in connection with the tophet discovered there in 1921. The naming of the tophet after Flaubert's eponymous novel is a direct allusion to the ritual described in it, where Carthaginian children are shown being burnt as offerings to the child-devouring Moloch. It is also, retrospectively, an archaeological tribute to Flaubert for his efforts to raise public awareness about the city and her inhabitants.

### Historical Inaccuracies

Bourginat further states that the reconstruction of the Punic civilisation in *Salammô* aims at the whole rather than at the detail. In fact, Flaubert's first aim is to give a coherent and harmonious vision and not an absolute and fastidious precision of Carthaginian history. He understood that erudition should never close the doors to the imagination. To Flaubert we, therefore, owe this quasi-historical reconstruction of Carthage. But as a quasi-historical novel, from the historical point of view his narrative is marred by a number of striking anachronisms. One of the most conspicuous anachronisms, that immediately strikes the reader, is the aqueduct of Carthage through which Mathô and Spendius manage to enter Carthage and steal her sacred *zaimph*. The aqueduct in the novel serves as a means of entry into beleaguered Carthage and its severing, thematically, forces Carthage to recur to human sacrifice. There is, however, no supporting documented or archaeological evidence that such an aqueduct existed in Carthage at the time of the Mercenary War. The archaeological remains of the aqueduct, seen by Flaubert and still visible in Tunis today, are those of the Roman aqueduct, which was probably built after Hadrian's visit to the city in A.D. 128 and later destroyed by Belisarius and his Byzantine forces, when the city was re-taken from the Vandals. And yet many, like Jehlen, believe that: "If Flaubert invented his aqueduct, it was not with a light heart, nor without a sense (aesthetic, intuitive) that it must somehow have existed." (Jehlen 2008, p. 23)

In addition, one can argue that Flaubert seems to Latinise Carthaginian society, dividing it between patricians and plebs: these terms, unequivocally, refer to Roman class distinctions and not to those in Carthage. He also, wrongly, assumes that the Carthaginian army consisted of legions while, at the same time, describing its battle

formation as belonging to the phalanx! As for the goddess Tanit, he describes her as being “la Venus Carthaginoise” [“the Carthaginian Venus”]. Such inaccuracies can only be considered as being out of tune for the historically minded reader but perfectly in tune with Flaubert’s authorial licence.

## Conclusion

As Alfred J. Church states it is “difficult to tell the story of Carthage, because one has to tell it without sympathy, and from the standpoint of her enemies.” (Church 1880, p. ix) But, Flaubert handles this problem with dexterity turning her story into what J. Dugan describes as “a historical novel in the great tradition of Sir Walter Scott, a long prose poem with a markedly “Parnassian” flavour, or simply a novel in the most conventional sense of the word.” (Dugan 1969, p. 13) And yet, in spite of Flaubert’s perceptive abilities and its immediate success, the publication of *Salammô* still caused a great deal of contemporary adverse criticism especially from Saint-Beuve, a literary critic, and Guillaume Frœhner, an archaeological researcher and collector of antiquities in Paris. Thus, in 1862, immediately after its publication, opinions were divided. Some even considered it to be an anti-classical text (Goddard 1998, p. 272). But, what precisely Flaubert’s detractors refused to understand was that, in the absence of concrete historical evidence, artistic licence justifiably allowed him, by means of his extraordinary imagination, the freedom to reconstruct a tangible and realistic Carthage, and thus, to lift for a brief and specific time span the veil that shrouded her in almost complete mystery throughout her history. Indeed, it was not appropriate, on the part of his detractors, to level accusations that *Salammô*’s Carthage had nothing historical about it. The historical research and archaeological notes, that Flaubert undertook to collect before stitching the final version of his novel, were evidence enough to prove this to the contrary. In 1862, they were valid and up-to-date. Yet, having said this, it would still be foolish to consider that after almost 150 years *Salammô* may not have lost some of its original historical validity. Today, its historical legitimacy can justly be claimed to be less so than in 1862, but the novel has nevertheless lost none of its literary and artistic qualities that, in certain instances, exceed even the imagination as found on canvas paintings which Flaubert rigorously consulted while writing the novel. *Salammô* belongs to a dream world, where the author’s/reader’s imagination is at its centre. Flaubert is even recorded to have refused the text to be accompanied by illustrations that in his opinion could hinder the reader’s resourcefulness. To my mind, both as a reader and translator-turned-analyst of the novel, *Salammô* remains a unique and fascinating mix of all that epic and narrative prose, mythology, ancient and classical history, symbolism and allegory have to offer and this, ultimately, makes it more exquisite and interesting to the reader/translator of historical fiction, set in ancient times, as he needs to crack the code of its “many intertwined strands” (Mullen Hohl 1995,

p. 3) masterly woven by an author, whom like Herodotus the father of History, was able to stitch together both History and Literature by the transcendental power of the imagination.

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