

# The Arco dei Fileni: A fascist reading of Sallust's *Bellum Iugurthinum*

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*In March 1937, Mussolini, visiting Italy's Libyan colony, inaugurated the monumental Arco dei Fileni. Its name referred to a territorializing legend of Carthaginian brothers who sacrificed themselves to establish a boundary between Carthage and Cyrene, most fully narrated in Sallust's *Bellum Iugurthinum*. By explicitly taking inspiration from Sallust's text, the arch stood as a concrete expression of Fascist romanità. However, in turning Sallust's digression into a triumphal monument, the architect and Italian colonial authorities elided many of the ambivalences of Sallust's narrative which have been identified in recent scholarship. This article considers the arch's appropriation of Sallust's narrative within the wider context of Fascist romanità, arguing that its elisions and distortions betrayed the colonial anxieties of Italian Fascism in Libya.*

On the night of the 15th of March 1937, Mussolini, on the second of his three visits to Italy's Libyan colony, inaugurated the monumental Arch of the Philaeni (*Arco dei Fileni*). Its name referred to the legend of the Philaeni brothers, which was narrated most fully in a digression in Sallust's *Bellum Iugurthinum*. More than thirty metres high and faced with 350 tonnes of travertine, the arch was erected at the halfway point of the newly constructed road, the *Strada Litoranea*, running along the coast of Libya, all the way from the Egyptian to the Tunisian border.<sup>1</sup> It came to be a symbol of Italian Libya, appearing on the cover of tourist guides to the colony, on postage stamps, posters, maps, and in exhibitions which used it to demonstrate the immortality of the spirit of Rome.<sup>2</sup> The arch stood as a bold assertion of Fascist power in Libya, and a concrete manifestation of Fascist Italy's self-proclaimed status as the new Roman Empire.

In recent decades, the cultural aspects of Italian Fascism, particularly its spectacular and sacralising aspects, have been foregrounded in studies of the political phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> This approach has been coupled with Fascist modernity being seen

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<sup>1</sup> See Hom (2012: 291); Wright (2005) for Mussolini's visit.

<sup>2</sup> For examples, see De Agostini (1938); the Italian manifesto from *Ente Radio Rurale*, 25 November 1937; 50c and 1.25 lire postage stamps issued 15 March 1937.

<sup>3</sup> See especially Gentile (1996); Falasca-Zamponi (1997).

as underpinned by a ‘myth of palingenesis’, a narrative of returning to a glorious past.<sup>4</sup> Arising from this has been a concerted scholarly focus on the function of *romanità*, the political evocation of Ancient Rome, within Fascism’s ‘political religion’ of modernity. Looking at the ‘written imprint’ of Fascist *romanità*, its institutions, as well as its materiality, scholars have shown how Fascist appropriations of Roman antiquity are not simply symbolic or rhetorical but constitute a discursive field central to Fascist ideology and self-representation, a ‘coherent language’ by which to express its project for modernity.<sup>5</sup>

The arch represented a concretization of these Fascist discourses of *romanità*. The monument, then, is productively considered within the conceptual framework of what Edward Said termed ‘preposterous transitions’. Said, using ‘preposterous’ in its literal sense of taking things out of their logical order, argues that Orientalism created and ‘over-rode’ the Orient. Orientalist discourse created an idea of the Orient and projected this idea onto reality.<sup>6</sup> In this same way, Fascist *romanità* created its own Roman Africa, and enacted and concretized it in Italy’s Libyan colony through the exploitation of links between Ancient Roman and modern Italian imperialism.<sup>7</sup> The *Arco dei Fileni* constituted a moment in this process of the concretization of Fascist discourses on Roman Africa.

This article argues that the *Arco dei Fileni* represented a striking example of Fascist *romanità*’s reimagining of Roman literary discourses on Africa by giving physical form to a particular rereading of Sallust’s digression on the legend of the Philaeni brothers in his *Bellum Iugurthinum*. I will begin by discussing the arch itself, which strikingly embodied the philosophy of its architect, Florestano Di Fausto. At the root of his architectural thought was the idea of a shared Mediterranean identity rooted in Ancient Rome, an idea which emerges to the fore with this arch. After this, I will discuss the legend of the Philaeni brothers, the inspiration for the arch, before discussing its co-optation by Fascism in turning the Carthaginian heroes into proto-Fascists, and the colonial ambivalences that this identification exposes. By basing a triumphalist monument on a work by Sallust, the Fascist regime elided a paradox central to Sallust’s historiography.<sup>8</sup> Central to the Roman historian’s narrative is the sense that the destruction of Carthage was the beginning of the end for the Roman Republic, at the same time as the beginning of Roman supremacy in the

<sup>4</sup> Griffin (2007: 2).

<sup>5</sup> Arthurs (20: 2). See also, Nelis (2007); (2010) (2011a); (2011b); (2012); (2014); Lamers and Reitz-Joose (2016a); (2016b); Lamers (2017); Lamers, Reitz-Joose and Sacré (2014).

<sup>6</sup> For ‘preposterous transition’, see Said (2003: 96).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Munzi (2001) which focusses on the role of archaeology in promoting the idea of Italian imperialism returning to a prior possession in Tripolitania; Cagnetta (1979) which discusses the complicity of classicists and ancient historians in Fascist imperialism.

<sup>8</sup> Significantly, as Beard (2007: 45–46) shows, the close association between arches and triumphs is largely post-Roman.



Fig. 1. The *Arco dei Fileni*, shown on the cover of De Agostini (1938) *La Libia Turistica*. (De Agostini, G. (1938) *La Libia Turistica* (Milan: Prof. Giovanni De Agostini) [Giovanni De Agostini died in 1941])

Mediterranean. For this narrative to be explicitly evoked in a triumphal monument of the New Roman Empire, this ambivalence haunting Roman power had to be suppressed. I therefore argue that the *Arco dei Fileni*, which is yet to have been studied within the context of its appropriation of Sallust, represents a significant document of late Fascist discourse on Roman Africa, hardened into a physical



Fig. 2. The *Arco dei Fileni* in *Il Duce in Libia* (1938). (*Il Duce in Libia* (1938) (Milan: Mondadori) [This work does not credit anyone with photographs]).

imposition in Italy's Libyan colony, thus representing a particularly striking image of a *Fascism triumphans*.<sup>9</sup>

Characteristic of Di Fausto's eclecticism, the arch was a blend of architectural styles, staking claims to Classicising, Egyptianizing, and Orientalizing motifs, absorbed into the architects vision of a modernizing *Mediterraneità* (see Figs. 1 and 2).<sup>10</sup> Di Fausto himself stated that the arch synthesized 'lines of the pyramids with lines of a triumphal arch', while Ugo Ojetti, a contemporary Italian journalist who accompanied Mussolini on his tour, also remarked upon the pyramidal form of the arch.<sup>11</sup> This appropriation of Egyptianizing elements situates the arch within a tradition of imperial evocations of the antiquity of Ancient Egypt, stretching back to the Roman Empire.<sup>12</sup> As Edward Said explained, 'by taking Egypt, then, a modern power would naturally demonstrate its strength and justify history'.<sup>13</sup> Thus, by incorporating historical forms into this monument to Fascist modernism, the arch, in the eyes of the governor of Libya, Italo Balbo, signified the combination of past and present, brought into the service of the newly reborn majesty of Rome.<sup>14</sup> Contemporary writers claimed that the arch deployed Punic, Berber and Egyptian architectural features, demonstrating the duality inherent in Italian colonial architecture in aiming to preserve North African architectural traditions, at the same time as adapting and appropriating them into a metropolitan Italian culture.<sup>15</sup>

Many of Di Fausto's buildings in Libya, such as the hotel complex of Uaddan, strove towards these aims, which were seen as complementary.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the rationalist architect Carlo Enrico Rava had written that Berber architecture bore the distinctive influence of Roman architecture, citing the similarity between a Berber fort and a Roman amphitheatre.<sup>17</sup> Thus, for Enrico Rava, there was no Libyan architecture that was not Roman. Therefore, the preservation of Libyan architectural styles in the arch, for example its angular crenellations along the top, or its towering solidity reminiscent of a *kasbah*, a fortified Berber dwelling, was also a

<sup>9</sup> This is taken from the title of Welge's (2005) chapter on Fascist arches.

<sup>10</sup> See Kenrick (2009: 154ff.); Balbo (1937); De Agostini (1938: 25).

<sup>11</sup> Di Fausto (1937: 18); Ojetti (1961:1459). Cf. Cresti (1997: 62): 'the formidable front [of the arch] which gradually narrows towards the top, ends in four smooth steps, one on top of the other, in an African style, or, to be more precise, Punic, familiar to the monumental constructions of North Africa'.

<sup>12</sup> For example, on the Romanization of Egyptian obelisks see Sorek (2010); cf. Swetnan-Burland (2010); Zietsman (2009). Assmann (1997: 9) speaks of Europe's having been 'haunted by Egypt', that 'there was always the image of Egypt as the past both of Israel and of Greece and thus of Europe'.

<sup>13</sup> Said (2003: 85).

<sup>14</sup> Balbo (1937: 13).

<sup>15</sup> McLaren (2006: 8).

<sup>16</sup> See Santoianni (2008: 93–94).

<sup>17</sup> Rava (1931: 34).



project carried out in the footsteps of Rome.<sup>18</sup> In this way the arch represented an imperial museum, such as the Louvre, or the British Museum, in microcosm, putting global cultures on show, subjugated and claimed by the imperial metropolis.<sup>19</sup> The arch thus stood as a claim to Italian mastery over both history and geography.

This claim was explicitly articulated in the inscription across the arch's three-tiered attic. It was a quote from Horace's *Carmen Saeculare: alme sol possis nihil urbe Roma visere maius* — O nourishing sun, may you never see a city greater than Rome (ll. 9–12). By appropriating lines from a poem written in 17 BCE in praise of Augustus, the links made between Mussolini and the first Roman emperor, made through such works as the restoration of the Mausoleum of Augustus (begun in 1934), and the renovation and rehousing of the Ara Pacis (completed in 1938), were strengthened.<sup>20</sup> The use of this poem must have had particular resonance in the bimillenary of Augustus' birth and in the year of the opening of the *Mostra Augustea*. Its message was clear. Mussolini, like Augustus, claimed to have initiated a new era, necessitating a new calendar, in the history of Italy. Like Augustus, he had supposedly inaugurated an age of peace under the auspices of a new Roman Empire. And, like Augustus, who had won his most stunning victory against Egypt at Actium, Mussolini had ushered in a new era for Fascist Italy with his victory in Ethiopia, which he was now celebrating in Libya.

These lines from Horace transposed the limits of Rome to the Gulf of Sirte and beyond: they appeared not on a wall but on an arch, in effect a gateway. It was liminal in every way: situated between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, it relayed the message of Rome's timeless glory east and westwards. This sense of the arch straddling boundaries and forming links between different spaces and times is evoked in Balbo's description:

The arch is solidly anchored to the two sides of the *Litoranea* and forms a powerful embrace which challenges the centuries . . . it breaks the silent millennia of the region, joins the past to the present and the future, and documents how the Fascist civilisation, with the new imperial road, resuscitates the majesty of Rome.<sup>21</sup>

Purporting to incorporate Near Eastern, African, and European architectural styles, the arch brought the entire Mediterranean into its 'powerful embrace'. By amalgamating classicisms with modernisms, the arch joined together the past, present, and future in its image of the 'historic modern'.<sup>22</sup> In this way, Horace's message was amplified across the Mediterranean and across the millennia.

<sup>18</sup> See De Agostini (1938: 25). See also McLaren (2002); Fuller (1998).

<sup>19</sup> For the British Museum, see Bradley (2010).

<sup>20</sup> See Wilkins (2005); Aicher (1999); Marcello (2011); Nelis (2007: 406); Arthurs (2012: 91–123).

<sup>21</sup> Balbo (1939: 1205).

<sup>22</sup> This term is taken from Fuller (2007: 101).

The Latin inscription emblazoned across the attic of the arch represented the triumph of Latinity over other cultures. In addition to this, the use of Latin gave the arch a monumentality which would have eluded the Italian language. Although the monument also carried Italian inscriptions, announcing the return of empire and the construction of the *Litoranea*, these were on the inside of the arch, not projected outwards from its exterior as its Latin inscriptions were. The Latin inscriptions were physically elevated above the Italian, emblematic of Latin's elevated status in Fascist imperial *romanità*. According to Rispoli, the editor of Nicola Festa's Latin translation of Mussolini's proclamation of empire, the use of Latin inherently gives words 'monumental form', appropriate to a 'historical document destined to defy the centuries'.<sup>23</sup> Latin was uniquely able to convey meaning centred on the past, present, and future. Since Latin was the language of Ancient Rome, it was considered especially capable of expressing 'modern sentiments, thoughts and ideas – and especially Fascism, being modernity's self-declared "Roman" zenith'.<sup>24</sup> Vincenzo Ussani, who translated Mussolini's speech 'Romae Laudes', claimed that Latin was a language apt for Fascist propaganda, since the Romans had 'looked to the future while looking to the past'.<sup>25</sup> Another modern Italian who wrote in Latin, Alfredo Bartoli, similarly saw Latin as a timeless language. It 'still belong[ed] to the present and contain[ed] new spirits in ancient forms, being voice and echo at the same time'.<sup>26</sup> In short, as Han Lamers summarises, Latin was the language for 'past-anchored renewal'.<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, Latin would be instrumental in formulating an imperial, Italian *Mediterraneità*.<sup>28</sup> Not only was the idea of a common Mediterranean identity predicated upon the Roman Empire's *Mare Nostrum*, and thus Latinity, but Rispoli suggested that Latin translations might render Mussolini's speeches more intelligible to foreigners whose Italian might not be good enough to understand the complexity of il Duce's thought.<sup>29</sup> Thus, this Latin inscription across the top of the *Arco dei Fileni* aimed to bring Libya closer into the powerful embrace of *romanità*, forming links across the Mediterranean, and across centuries. In this way, it mirrored and complemented the architectural eclecticism of the arch, and its classicising modernism.

<sup>23</sup> Rispoli (1936: 5). Lamers, Reitz-Joosse and Sacré (2014). See Lamers and Reitz-Joosse (2016b: 37); Lamers (2017) for the centrality of Latin to Fascist *Romanità*

<sup>24</sup> Lamers (2017: 207).

<sup>25</sup> Ussani (1934: 7).

<sup>26</sup> Bartoli (1934: 228–32).

<sup>27</sup> Lamers (2017: 207).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Leonhardt's (2016) discussion of the emergence of Latin as a 'world language', as the language of the church, science and the 'higher professions'. Discussion of Fascist attempts to revive Latin as a (inter)national language is strikingly absent.

<sup>29</sup> Rispoli (1936: 5–6).

The arch had two other Latin inscriptions, translated from the Italian of Nello Quilici by Giorgio Pasquali.<sup>30</sup> One inscription, on the west side of the arch, presented the arch as a monument to the renewal of the Roman Empire under the aegis of the fasces.

*Ipsa media in via Syrtica  
a mari de caelo  
a litoribus Africae nostrae  
convenientibus  
hic arcus imperii maiestam testatur  
quam  
Rege Victore Emanuele III  
Benitus Mussolini  
summus rei publicae moderator idemque fascistarum dux  
a septem collibus huc attulit  
ut novum cultum humanitatemque  
toti terrarum orbi demonstraret  
summum gentibus donum  
Romae fortunae atque gloriae redditis  
Italo Balbo Libyae proconsule  
anno XV a fascibus restituitis  
primo ab imperio condito  
MCMXXXVII<sup>31</sup>*

The idea that Latin might be able to express the new civilisation to the entire world demonstrates the aspiration that Latin again attain the status of a world language. It further emphasized the fact that the arch is in the middle: in the middle of the *Litoranea*, and in the middle between the sky and the earth. The sense that this Fascist triumphal arch had been established in the very middle of everything evokes the fact that Rome was the centre of the civilised world, and that Rome was everywhere, announced by the appearance of the Horatian inscription. Concurrently, the arch announced that Libya had been brought to Rome. A function of a Roman triumph was to bring the peripheries into the centre: Pompey, following

<sup>30</sup> Munzi (2004: 88).

<sup>31</sup> Munzi (2001: 103). 'In the very middle of the Via Syrtica, between the sea, the sky, and the harmonious shores of our Africa, this arch bears witness to the majesty of Empire that, in the reign of King Victor Emmanuel III, Benito Mussolini, highest governor (*moderator*) of the *re publica* and leader (*dux*) of the Fascists, brought from the seven hills [of Rome] to here, to show the whole world the new culture and civilisation, the greatest gift for peoples who have been restored to the good fortune and glory of Rome restored. By Italo Balbo, Proconsul of Libya, in the 15<sup>th</sup> year since the restoration of the fasces, in the first year since the founding of empire, 1937'.



his 61 BCE triumph over Mithridates, had claimed to have found Asia a frontier province and left it at the very centre of the state (*mediam patriae*).<sup>32</sup>

On the west side of the arch was another inscription:

*Ubi corpora non memoriam  
Philaeni fratres vestram  
qui vosque vitamque rei publicae condonastis  
harenae nudae gignentium  
obruerant  
Roma per fasces restituta  
fata ulcisci  
pristina doctior  
brachiis Syrticae regionis inter se iunctis  
quae vitae renatae aestum exciperent  
sua signa statuit*<sup>33</sup>

This address to the eponymous Philaeni brothers, summarizing their legend while completely circumventing their Carthaginian origins, poses Fascist Italy as their avenger and the redeemer of their memories. The brothers could be seen high up in alcoves on each side of the arch, underneath the Horatian inscription across the attic: two colossal, prostrate bronze statues, sculpted by Ulderico Conti, writhing and choking as sand is heaped upon them. The triumphal tone of the inscription, announcing Fascist Italy's coming to Libya to exhume the memory of the Fileni, was undermined to an extent by the Italian journalist Ugo Ojetti, who in his account of the arch's inauguration admitted to having been previously ignorant, not only of the legend of the Philaeni, but even of their name.<sup>34</sup> The Philaeni seem hardly to have been a household name in Italy. Nevertheless, here was a monument to them, which came to define Fascist *romanità*'s self-presentation in Italy's Libyan colony.

It is possible that Sallust had heard the legend of the Philaeni brothers during his governorship of Africa Nova in 46–45/44 BCE.<sup>35</sup> Although Sallust was not the only ancient writer to refer to the *Arae Philaenorum*, it is he who provides us with the fullest account of the legend from antiquity, and it is from Sallust's narrative that the

<sup>32</sup> Beard (2007: 32), citing Plin. *Nat.* 7.99; Florus, *Epit.* 1.40.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 'Where the sands, bare of life, buried your bodies, but not your memory, Philaeni brothers, you who sacrificed yourselves and gave your lives to the Republic, Rome, by its restored fasces, avenged by fate, more learned from previous times, imposes its symbols, which absorb the breath of reborn life, between the adjoining spurs of the Syrtic region'.

<sup>34</sup> Ojetti (1961: 1457).

<sup>35</sup> Syme (2002: 37). See Devillers (2005); Ribichini (1991) who argue for a Greek origin for this legend. Malkin (1990) suggests that the legend is the result of long processes of Cyrenean territorialisation in Libya, while Quinn (2014) suggests that there is no reason to ascribe *prima facie* Greek foundations to the legend, and that a Carthaginian origin is just as likely.

architects of Italian imperialism in Libya drew inspiration.<sup>36</sup> The digression recounting the legend from which the arch takes its name comes about two-thirds of the way through Sallust's *Bellum Iugurthinum*. It appears at a point in the narrative when the events of the war against Jugurtha encroach into the region of the *Arae Philaenorum* in the Gulf of Sirte. Sallust introduces the digression by stating that 'since we have come to these regions through the dealings of the people of Leptis, it does not seem improper to relate the outstanding and remarkable deed of two Carthaginians; the place reminds us of the act' (*Iug.* 79). It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the Fascist retelling of the legend, Sallust emphasizes the fact that the Philaeni were Carthaginian. The sense of moving into this locale, a place of memory marked by the 'remarkable deed' of the two Carthaginians, is mirrored by the *Strada Litoranea* which speeds motorists along the coastline of Libya to this very same spot.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the rapid motion, interspersed with delays, which characterises Sallust's narrative,<sup>38</sup> is given physical form by the Fascist road whose gleaming, high-speed vector of modernity is interrupted by the imposing sight of the *Arco dei Fileni*.

In the same way, the legend of the Philaeni brothers pauses Sallust's narrative. The legend told by Sallust is centred on Carthage and Cyrene, a Greek colony on the Libyan coast, trying to fix a boundary between their respective domains, probably sometime in the fifth or fourth century BCE.<sup>39</sup> Both cities, at a pre-appointed time, would send out teams of runners, and where they met, there the boundary between the states would be established. The Carthaginian team, the Philaeni brothers, made it much further than Greeks from Cyrene, who refused to accept the result.<sup>40</sup> The Philaeni were therefore given a choice: to be buried alive on the spot which they claimed as the boundary, or to allow the same terms to the Greeks. The Carthaginian brothers therefore agreed to be buried alive to establish a frontier advantageous to Carthage. According to Sallust, the Carthaginians consecrated altars on the spot where the brothers were buried, the *Arae Philaenorum*. It was this ancient monument to an act of gaining territory that inspired this Fascist colonial monument.

The Fascist evocation of the Philaeni at this point in time was symbolically significant. As De Agostini's (1938) tourist guide to Libya proclaims, 'here [where the Carthaginians erected the *Arae Philaenorum*] the Rome of Mussolini, by the inspiration of Quadrumvir Balbo, erected a grand arch of Latin stone'.<sup>41</sup> The previous

<sup>36</sup> See also Strab. 5.3; V. Max. 5.6; Sil. It. *Pun.* 15.704; Plb. 3.39; Plin. *Nat.* 5.4.

<sup>37</sup> At least this was the claim made by the Italians Fascists. See Goodchild (1952) for a discussion of the location of the original *Arae Philaenorum*, if ever it existed.

<sup>38</sup> Kraus (1999: 221).

<sup>39</sup> Kenrick (2009: 154) suggests that this was sometime in the fifth century BCE; Bertarelli (1937: 311–12) gives 350 BCE as a possible date. Cf. Malkin (1990) seeing the myth as the result of a long process of Cyrenean territorialisation; Devillers (2005) suggests two phases of myth-making: Greek and Carthaginian.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. V. Max. 5.6 which has the Philaeni brothers cheat to achieve this result.

<sup>41</sup> De Agostini (1938: 25).

year, the invasion of Ethiopia had been concluded and the foundation of a New Roman Empire had been proclaimed as a result. In addition to this, the late 1920s and early 1930s saw a brutal campaign executed by Italy to suppress anticolonial resistance in Cyrenaica. Its suppression was celebrated in contemporary Italian discourse as the completion of the 'reconquest' of Libya, and marked the transformation of the colony into the *Quarta Sponda* of Italy, 'or better, the natural expansion of the polity and geography of Italy'.<sup>42</sup> The *Litoranea* and the *Arco dei Fileni* stood as monuments to the conclusion of this conflict, as the *Arae Philaenorum* marked the conclusion of the conflict between Carthage and Cyrene. As well as this, Cyrene and Tripolitania had been brought under a single colonial administration in April 1935. The location of the arch had been the historic boundary between the two provinces, thus the monument represented a unifying element of Italy's colony. The sense of a new beginning for Fascist Italy and the establishing of a *Pax Fascista* based on a shared Mediterranean identity was seen on two bas-reliefs on the arch showing 'the construction of the *Litoranea*, an affirmation of the Italian will and Roman sponsorship, in the name of civilisation, the spiritual communion between people of different races, languages and histories; and the foundation of empire – an affirmation of the renovated pre-eminence of Rome in the civilised world'.<sup>43</sup> An arch in celebration of the Philaeni brothers was deemed an apt vehicle for the communication of these ideas.

However, Sallust's reasons for narrating this legend are more complicated than to serve as a simple exemplar of patriotic self-sacrifice. Sallust was writing at a critical juncture in Late Republican history. He had retired from public life following the death of Julius Caesar and took to writing history. Detached from the stasis and conflict of the politics of the Late Republic, Sallust sought to make sense of the chaos by looking for when this process of political decline began, and events that accelerated it.<sup>44</sup> It was as part of this historiographical project that he chose to write about the Jugurthine War. According to this perspective, this was 'the first time that the arrogance of the nobility (*superbiae nobilitatis*) was obstructed, in which contest human and divine affairs were all thrown into the mix and progressed to such levels of frenzy, that war and the devastation of Italy put an end to civil contentions (*studiis civilibus*)' (*Jug.* 5.1–2). The war sees the ascendancy of Memmius, who Sallust describes as hostile to the *potentia nobilitatis* (*Jug.* 27.2) and who gives a formidable speech railing against aristocratic venality, and the institution of the *Quaestio Mamiliiana* which holds the corruption of aristocratic politicians to account. Most importantly, however, the war sees the rise of Marius, *novo homo par excellence*, and protagonist in the civil war against Sulla.<sup>45</sup> In a digression in the middle of Sallust's text, explaining the source of the political division in Rome, Sallust points

<sup>42</sup> Bertarelli (1937: 5).

<sup>43</sup> De Agostini (1938: 25).

<sup>44</sup> See Earl (1961).

<sup>45</sup> See Syme (2002: 166); Avery (1967).

to the fall of Carthage as the underlying cause of Rome's domestic conflict (*Iug.* 41). In Sallust's eyes, the removal of the fear of Carthage, the *metus hostilis* (*Iug.* 41.2) which had held Roman morals in check, as well as the wealth accrued by Rome's new Mediterranean hegemony, marked the beginning of Rome's moral decline and class conflict.

The struggle between the *populares* and the *optimates* runs through Sallust's work and his wider historiographical project. At the point of the narrative at which Sallust recounts the legend of the Philaeni brothers, we find the two Roman generals, Marius and Metellus, one a *novus homo*, the other an aristocrat, locked in a disagreement which is hindering the Roman war effort. Since Marius' career is significantly advanced by his role in the Jugurthine War, the spectre of civil war haunts Sallust's account of his campaigns. Thus, from Sallust's viewpoint, the Jugurthine War represents a significant phase in the narrative of decadence and social disintegration, contributing to an 'apocalyptic fiction'.<sup>46</sup> Such narratives construct a contemporary world in decline and in need of renovation.

Sallust looks back to the Jugurthine War to make sense of his present, and in so doing, digresses to look back further still to a territorializing legend of Carthage.<sup>47</sup> In Sallust's narrative, the legend of the Philaeni, exemplifying filial cooperation and self-sacrifice stands in contrast to the civil discord in Rome at the time of the Jugurthine War, as well as in Sallust's contemporary context. Perhaps there is also something to be made of the fact that Rome's foundational myth is centred on Romulus killing Remus, prefiguring Rome's long history of civil war. Romulus kills Remus after the latter leaps over the boundary that Romulus had established for his city; the Philaeni brothers, on the other hand, sacrifice themselves to establish a boundary for their city in an act of fraternal devotion. We have already seen how the digression on the *Arae Philaenorum* appears at a stage of the narrative at which the Roman war effort has ground to a halt as a result of the disagreements between Metellus and Marius. Thus, the *Arae Philaenorum*, in Sallust's narrative, appear in a barren expanse of shifting sands, as this example of brotherly cooperation arises in the midst of Roman civil discord.<sup>48</sup> By juxtaposing the virtue displayed by Rome's historic African enemy with Roman disunity and fratricidal conflict, Sallust paints a picture of Roman politics and society in complete disarray. A further consequence of Sallust's digression is to mark the Libyan landscape with exemplary deeds. As Sallust wrote in his introduction to the digression, the place recalls the deed, establishing the *Arae Philaenorum* as a place of memory for an African act which marks African space.

'Apocalyptic fictions' were also central to Fascist narratives of history. According to Fascist views of the history of society as one of bourgeois decadence and spiritual crisis, renewal could only be brought about by the cleansing and renewing power of

<sup>46</sup> This term is taken from Griffin (2007: 8).

<sup>47</sup> See Malkin (1990).

<sup>48</sup> Scanlon (1988: 161).

Fascism.<sup>49</sup> Here, Sallust is ripe for Fascist appropriation. Although the Roman historian did not live to see it, Augustus is frequently represented as such a figure of renewal and revolution. This was the image of the first Roman emperor promoted by historiography from Fascist Italy, such as in Giuseppe Bottai's (1938) *L'Italia di Augusto e l'Italia d'oggi*, as well as in the publications and events surrounding the bimillenary of Augustus.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Mussolini worked hard to foster an identification between himself and the figure credited with re-establishing *Pax Romana*.<sup>51</sup> For these reasons, Sallust represents, in many ways, the Roman historian most amenable to Fascist co-optation in painting a picture of society and politics in decline, in need of a strongman leader to establish a new order. Di Fausto's arch looks back to Sallust and implicates itself in Sallust's historiographical spiral.<sup>52</sup> However, in order for this legend to have been co-opted into this concrete expression of a Fascist *romanità* triumphant, Sallust's own apocalyptic fiction, centred on the destruction of Carthage, had to be suppressed.

Carthage acts as a point of orientation for Sallust, both spatially and morally. To return to his purported motivations for writing his history of the Jugurthine war, the identification of this relatively insignificant war as the cause for the destruction of Italy serves to focus attention to Carthage and the consequences of its removal.<sup>53</sup> Carthage appears in all three digressions of the monograph. In the first digression, which is posed as a geography and ethnography of Africa, Carthage represents an unspeakable place: when his description of the towns along the North African littoral nears Carthage, Sallust claims that 'it is better to remain silent rather than say too little about Carthage' (*Jug.* 19), demonstrating by praeteritio the significance of the city to his imagination. Yet at the same time, Carthage remains a place that delimits Sallust's narrative and provides a stable reference point. In the second digression, on faction in Rome, the North African city, as polar opposite but parallel to Rome, mediates Roman social categories which disintegrate with Carthage's destruction (*Jug.* 41). Likewise, the digression on the Philaeni brothers has Carthage again representing a point for orientation, a physical as well as narratological boundary (*Jug.* 79).<sup>54</sup> Therefore, while Sallust's monograph is ostensibly about the war

<sup>49</sup> See, for example G. Gentile (2003: 1–32). Giovanni Gentile was seen by Mussolini himself as *the* philosopher of Fascism: see Clayton (2009). See also Guglielmi (1935) for how Romanizing imperialism is deployed as a counter to this decadence. Cf. Levinger and Lytle (2001) on the triadic structure of nationalist rhetoric, between glorious past, degraded present, and utopian future.

<sup>50</sup> See Bottai (1938); *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*. Catalogo (1937–38).

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Aicher (1999); Arthurs (2012: 91–123) on the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* on the bimillenary of Augustus' birth; Fleming (2007: 344); Nelis (2007: 406); Wilkins (2005).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Mussolini in Ludwig (2001: 96). For Mussolini, the concept of history was a constant returning to the past, 'a spiral'.

<sup>53</sup> Kraus (1997: 28).

<sup>54</sup> See *ibid.*

against Jugurtha, the antagonism between Rome and Carthage remains at the heart of the work. Without Carthage, Sallust's narrative would be lost. Indeed, without Carthage, Rome is lost.

Is this what the Fascist architects of the *Strada Litoranea* and the *Arco dei Fileni* had in mind when they imposed their vision of *romanità* on African soil? According to some accounts contemporary to the arch's construction, it was simply a 'celebration of the victorious faith of Fascist Italy and of the foundation of empire', with no mention of the ancient source material for the arch.<sup>55</sup> Italo Balbo saw Sallust's digression as simply an exemplary tale for the Romans. Thus, according to the Fascist governor of Libya, 'the arch does not only record the sacrifice of the Philaeni brothers, which Sallust already recounted as an example to the Romans . . . But exalts the construction of the *Litoranea* and imperial conquest'.<sup>56</sup> The legend of the Philaeni brothers as the theme for the arch may have seemed like an easy choice to make, since the place itself recalls the deed, as Sallust states. This could also be used to explain the evocation of Carthaginian, rather than Roman heroes. Yet this would surely pose a significant dilemma, especially since, in Petrarch's mediæval epic of the Hannibalic War, the Roman general Laelius gives a host of examples of Roman heroic self-sacrifice to match and outdo that of the Philaeni.<sup>57</sup> Petrarch's *Africa* enjoyed a certain level of renewed popularity in Fascist Italy, so it is unlikely that this debate of Carthaginian heroism embodied by the Philaeni opposed to Roman heroism was unknown.<sup>58</sup> Yet, the problem posed by the fact that this example is given by Rome's great enemy is sidestepped, absorbed into an exaltation of Italian imperialism. Other contemporary accounts for the motivation behind the choice of this legend as the inspiration for this Fascist monument dehistoricise Sallust's digression and turn it into an abstraction of universalised virtue. A contemporary Italian journalist explained it in this way:

The Latin narrator [Sallust] has in fact inspired the governor of Libya who loves the stories of Rome, not as dusty pages of a book, but as inspirational sources for works that are in harmony with the constructive sense of fascism . . . History or legend, this sacrifice belongs to the ethics of heroism, which developed in a thousand episodes in the course of Roman civilisation and which represents today the most refined spiritual nourishment of the young, Fascist generations. It inspires the desire that the fatherland should extend to the point to which the blood of its best sons aspires.<sup>59</sup>

This explanation fails to take into account the Philaeni's Carthaginian origins, instead seeing it as a 'story of Rome' and a lesson for contemporary Fascist heroism.

<sup>55</sup> U.C.I.P.I. (1937: 20–21).

<sup>56</sup> Balbo (1939: 1205).

<sup>57</sup> Petrarch (1977: 3.684ff.).

<sup>58</sup> See Festa (1926).

<sup>59</sup> Alessi (1938: 124, 126), cited in Welge (2005: 88).



In fact, none of the context of Sallust's digression seemed to matter to Fascist commentators: the only thing that the Philaeni represented was an exemplification of abstract virtues. Balbo saw the arch, not as a celebration of Carthaginian heroism, but as heroic virtue as an ideal.

It does not lessen the glory of the Philaeni, in the eyes of the Roman writer [Sallust], that they were from Carthage, the implacable enemy of Rome: Sallust's prose gives proof of it. Rome exalted virtue as the highest expression of the human spirit, wherever and however it could be manifested: universal in scope. Thus, and not otherwise, so does fascism today.<sup>60</sup>

Balbo entirely circumvents the fact that Sallust uses Carthaginians as a metaphor for civic virtue, nor does he pause to consider the implications of identifying Carthaginians as exemplary of Fascist heroism. Perhaps, by representing legendary Carthaginians as worthy role models, Balbo was hoping that the arch would contribute to his vision of a Fascist *Mediterraneità*. However, in using North Africans to think through Italian cultural identity, Balbo was following a well-established precedent. Focussing solely on Sallust's historiography, we have already seen how Carthage is conceptualized as a moral compass for Rome: when Rome is constrained by the *metus hostilis* embodied by Carthage, morals are held in check, but when Carthage is destroyed, moral decline is given free reign. We have also seen how the Philaeni brothers are used to emphasize Roman civil discord. In addition to this, the Latinist Christina Kraus has shown how the Numidian Jugurtha himself, to whom Sallust transfers the stereotypes of Punic perfidy, is used as an embodiment of Roman Republican venality and corruption, as well as the social disorder that illicit economic exchange causes.<sup>61</sup> Thus, for Sallust, the relationship between Roman power and Roman virtue, represented in relation to the presence and absence of Carthage, is paradoxical. Rome is at its moral best when it is threatened by Carthage, although it is at its strongest when Carthage is destroyed. Thus, Cato's famous *Carthago delenda est* is contradicted by Sallust's nostalgia for *metus hostilis*. Balbo, by avoiding this problem at the heart of Sallust's historiography, is forced to suppress the role of Carthage in Sallust's text.

Sallust's digression on the Philaeni brothers represents a new beginning in a number of ways. In the legend itself, the self-sacrifice of the brothers enacts a new beginning for Carthage, when the dispute with Cyrene is resolved with the establishment of a boundary between the two states. Beyond the digression, when Sallust resumes his narrative of the war's progress, Marius and Metellus begin to cooperate more effectively, and the Roman war effort takes a positive turn. Thus, the legend of the Philaeni brothers represents a new beginning for the Romans too.

<sup>60</sup> Balbo (1937: 138–9), cited in Hom (2012: 293).

<sup>61</sup> Kraus (1999).

Such myths of new beginnings, and rebirth, are central to the myths of Fascism. Griffin characterises Fascism's 'sense of a beginning' as a 'mood of standing on a threshold of a new world'.<sup>62</sup> The arch, announcing the timeless might of Rome, and standing on the threshold between modernisms and classicisms, past and present, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, the land and the sea, east and west, embodies this mood, given full, physical expression. The liminality of the arch echoes the words of Filippo Marinetti in his *Futurist Manifesto*, written a decade before he joined the first *Fascio*: Futurism stood on a 'promontory of the centuries' announcing the death of 'Time and Space',<sup>63</sup> and he saw Fascism as the political expression of these sentiments. By reviving the Philaeni brothers only to kill them again, this monument announces its temporal transcendence with explicit references to the Carthaginian past and the Roman future as it straddles the road which monumentalises Fascist modernity in its Libyan colony. Fascist imperialism had thus conquered Time and Space.

The new beginning represented by Fascism was presented as a response to 'a perceived crisis, not only in contemporary society, but in the experience of history and time itself'.<sup>64</sup> For society to be guided through this historical rupture, the 'New Man' of Fascism must come forward to provide leadership, through charisma and violence, as well as to sacrifice themselves to the community.<sup>65</sup> The Philaeni were such New Men.<sup>66</sup> It was therefore significant that, in the room themed around the immortality of the spirit of Rome at the *Mostra Augustea*, in which a representation of the *Arco dei Fileni* was displayed, a quote from Mussolini was inscribed, extolling the strength of will and self-sacrifice necessary to realize the imperial dreams of Italy. Fascist imperialism had found its New Men in the Philaeni, who were 'ready to exact the sacrifice . . . demanded by the process of regeneration'.<sup>67</sup>

The ultimate sacrifice of the Philaeni represented a metaphor for the sacrifice expected of every Fascist. By monumentalizing their extreme example, the Fascist colonialists were distorting the sacrifice of individuals to the *patria* into a subordination of the individual to the Corporate State.<sup>68</sup> This involved the subjugation of the individual to a rigidly vertical hierarchy policed by an adherence to the *mos maiorum* of nationalist myths of palingenesis. Thus, despite its cult of heroes and the prominence given to 'strong men', Fascism is highly hostile to the autonomy of the

<sup>62</sup> Griffin (2007: 1).

<sup>63</sup> Marinetti (1973: 21–22).

<sup>64</sup> Griffin (2007: 10).

<sup>65</sup> See *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>66</sup> It is important to note that, for Italian Fascism, the idea of the 'New Man', and 'Aryan', was not always as intimately bound up with biological or genetic racist 'science' as it was in Nazi Germany. For example, the eccentric, anti-modern Fascist racial theorist Baron Julius Evola (1941) saw the 'Aryan New Man' as a combination of mind, body, and spirit, as opposed to biology or genetics.

<sup>67</sup> Griffin (2007: 7).

<sup>68</sup> See Aicher (1999: 117), with reference to the *Foro Mussolini*.

individual. The monument to the Philaeni, although ostensibly centred on individuals who exercised their autonomy in the name of the state, underlines this subsuming of the individual to the statist collective. The community is founded by their death, or perhaps, the state could not be established without their deaths, as individuals. This echoes Mussolini's well-known assertion that there should be 'everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state'.<sup>69</sup> The Philaeni can therefore be read as representing what is expected of every individual living under Fascism. They could be the Italian agricultural pioneers in Libya, praised by Mussolini during his visit to the colony in 1926, the twenty-thousand colonists, the *ventimilia* who arrived in Libya the year after the inauguration of the *Arco dei Fileni*, or the Italian dead of the colonial wars in Africa, monumentalized the year after the completion of the war in Ethiopia. The bronze, lifeless statues of the brothers are suitably generic in order to be rendered malleable to any number of identifications.

It is unlikely that these Carthaginians, characterized as both African and Semitic, could have acted as the models for Fascist New Men a year or so after the inauguration of the *Arco dei Fileni*. After the increasingly racist turn in the late 1930s, including the promulgation of racist and anti-Semitic legislation in 1938–39, the Semitic origins of the Carthaginians was increasingly emphasized. Prejudicial historiographical attitudes were further promoted as a result of Italy's involvement in the Second World War. A foremost theoretician of Fascist imperialism, Giorgio Maria Sangiorgi, described the British Empire as '*cataginese-semitico*', while the racist journal *La Difesa della Razza* saw the eternal enmity between Italy and Semitic peoples as going back to Dido's curse against Aeneas.<sup>70</sup> Mussolini characterized the Second World War as the Fourth Punic War, while a volume of the *Istituto di Studi Romani* presented the conflict as part of the eternal struggle between the civilizing Aryan element and the destructive Semitic element.<sup>71</sup> The *Arco dei Fileni* is therefore a monument very much of its time, at the moment of a new beginning for Fascist Italian imperialism, which required the legendary act of the Philaeni brothers to give expression to this historical rupture, but before favourable representations of Africans or Semitic peoples became politically inappropriate.

The deaths of the Philaeni represent another sort of death besides voluntary self-sacrifice: that of the colonized. The brothers had been buried alive and now the colonial architects had exhumed them, only to be reburied, in alcoves high-up in the arch's façade. Above them looms the monumental lettering of the inscription of Horace's celebration of Roman majesty. It appears that the letters physically weigh down on the brothers, as if this time, instead of being buried in Libyan sands, they are being buried by Latin textuality. The arch puts their death agony on display, this

<sup>69</sup> Mussolini *Opera Omnia* XXI, p.425.

<sup>70</sup> Sangiorgi (1939: 7); Arthurs (2012: 140). See also Paribeni (1930: 3–8) for an earlier expression of this allegory.

<sup>71</sup> See Munzi (2001: 82); *ISR* III (1937): 3–4.

excruciating moment frozen in bronze for perpetuity, raised up from the ground which they died to make Carthaginian, rendering their sacrifice meaningless. They are, in this way, the Africans killed by Italian imperialism, in the recently concluded invasion of Ethiopia, or the ‘pacified’ resistance in Cyrenaica and the Fezzan. Horace’s words standing over their tortured bodies thus take on a particularly cruel edge, glorying in their deaths — indeed, Horace’s words could only have been imposed onto the Libyan landscape with the deaths of the African Philaeni. The statues of the Philaeni brothers therefore represent the ambivalence of identification upon which colonial discourses are predicated.<sup>72</sup> The colonisers’ positional superiority rests on discourses of difference, but this is underpinned by the suppressed knowledge that this difference is an illusion. This, according to Bhabha, perpetuates a colonial anxiety arising from the tension between the illusion of difference and the suppressed reality of sameness. Thus, with the Fascist arch’s figurative exhumation of the Philaeni, who could simultaneously be the colonized and the colonizers, this colonial anxiety is brought to the surface.

Destroyed in the early 1970s under Gaddafi’s dictatorship, the *Arco dei Fileni* was a remarkable document of a concrete manifestation of the idea of Roman Africa in the cultural imagination of Fascist Italian imperialism. After Mussolini had proclaimed the foundation of a new Roman Empire the previous year, Fascist imperialism had the ideological means to impose its reading of *romanità* onto its North African colony. The fact that this region of Africa had its own Roman history meant that Fascism had a significant symbolic repertoire in which to anchor its idea of a new *mare nostrum*. In 1937, this meant appealing to a shared Mediterranean identity, subsumed into a Romano-centric Fascist modernism. No feat of engineering embodied Fascist ideology as powerfully as a road, and for the *Arco dei Fileni* to be the centrepiece of this triumph of the Fascist will to power marks it out as a monument of critical importance for Fascist, imperial self-promotion.

Significant ideological labour went into the arch to reshape the meaning given to the legend of the Philaeni brothers as told by Sallust. The specificity of Sallust’s historiographical context was eroded in order for the legend to be abstracted into an image of Fascist universality. Perhaps it is this concerted inattention to detail which lay behind the choice to have the sculptures of the brothers, already impressionistic in their design, too high up in the arch for a close-up view — from that distance, contesting the message of the Philaeni brothers is difficult. This is emblematic of the Fascist imperial imagination’s use of *romanità*. The legend of the Philaeni was emptied of all its content and remoulded into an exemplary tale of proto-Fascist heroism, which was concretised by the arch. More radically, the *Arco dei Fileni* offers a reading of Sallust which elides the complex dialectical relationship between Rome and Carthage in his works: rather than dwell on the moral decadence initiated by the defeat of Carthage, we are presented with an interpretation of Sallust’s digression as representative of unambiguous and universal virtue. Of course, for the Fascist

<sup>72</sup> See Bhabha (2004).

regime to acknowledge the moral dilemma between power and virtue in the aftermath of the conquest of Ethiopia would have been to face some unpalatable thoughts. If Ethiopia was the new Roman Empire's Carthage, what would the future hold for Fascist Italy?

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