

XVI.—Elissa

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This paper is summarized in the concluding paragraph.

Virgil in referring to the queen of Carthage usually used the name *Dido*, but in three passages he called her *Elissa*. In the pre-Virgilian tradition she bore the latter name in her native city of Tyre, the former name she received only after her flight, particularly at the end of her life and after her death. Servius Danielis gave this explanation:

*'Elissae' autem Didonis, quae appellata est lingua Punica virago, cum se in pyram sponte misisset, fingens placare manes prioris mariti, cum nubere se velle Iarbae mentiretur.*¹

Virgil obviously does not follow tradition since the name *Elissa* occurs only in later passages. Here as elsewhere the poet used only those parts of the traditional story which suited his purposes and did not confine himself to the traditional use of the names. Several explanations of his usage have been suggested. A. S. Pease in his comment on the first appearance of the name says: "*Elissa* is used by Virgil . . . apparently to avoid the form *Didonis* . . . and it is noteworthy that he does not employ oblique cases of *Dido*."² J. W. Mackail makes the following comment: "*Elissa*, traditionally the Phoenician name of *Dido*, is only used twice elsewhere in Virgil, by herself in 4.610, and in the narrative, 5.3. In none of these cases is any special reason for the variation apparent; but it is to be observed that the name *Dido* is only used in its uninflected form, and always as a nominative, or, which is much the same thing, as a vocative; for in *nomine Dido saepe vocaturum* (4.383) it need not be an accusative. It would seem therefore that Virgil was unwilling to inflect the uninflected Punic word."³ Buscaroli quotes

¹ *Ad Aen.* 4.335 (*schol. Dan.*): cf. also *ad Aen.* 1.340 (*schol. Dan.*); 4.36, 674. For the evidence on *Dido* cf. O. Rossbach, *RE s.v.* "*Dido*" and A. S. Pease (ed.), *Publi Vergili Maronis Aeneidos liber quartus* (Cambridge, 1935) pp. 16f., 22, 300 (*ad* 335).

² *Ad* 335.

³ *The Aeneid* (Oxford, 1930) p. 146 (*ad* 4.335).

with apparent approval the view of Sabbadini that the second name of Dido was used by Virgil in the genitive only to avoid the forms *Didus* and *Didonis* and for metrical convenience.⁴ Buscaroli also quotes Pascoli's view that this use of her earlier name at the time of her tragic death is pathetic.⁵ W. F. J. Knight in commenting on the use of the name *Elissa* says: "The explanation is surely incomplete without the recognition that the weak high vowel-tones, especially as they are reinforced, for example, in *nec me meminisse pigebit Elissae* (335; compare 610), carry a tearful pathos of their own."⁶

These exegetical comments give in varying combination five explanations: chance variation, the pathos of the sound, the pathos of the use of her earlier name, metrical convenience, and avoidance of oblique forms. The first explanation is the only one of these that seems valid. The "tearful pathos" of "the weak high vowel-tones" which Knight recognized in this passage would be hard to prove. Indeed the deep low vowel-tones of *infelix Dido* have just as much pathos. Moreover one name seems no more pathetic than the other unless there is a special reason for using the name *Elissa* more cogent than that it was Dido's earlier name. To use metrical convenience as an explanation of Virgil's usage is a denial of the very evident skill with which the poet used the hexameter. It is an acceptable explanation only in passages such as the one where Virgil used *Scīpīādas* without the patronymic sense instead of the metrically impossible *Scīpīōnes*.⁷ The variants of the genitive of *Dido* (*Didonis*, *Didus*) are perfectly possible metrically, nor are they offensive to the ear. While Virgil might possibly have avoided oblique forms of an uninflected Punic word, there is no particular reason for doing it in this case and it is not in accordance with the

⁴ Corso Buscaroli (ed.), *Virgilio, il libro di Didone* (Milano, 1932) p. 236 (ad 335): "questo secondo nome di Didone è da V. usato nel solo gen. per evitare le forme *Didus* e *Didonis*, e per comodità metrica." This is cited by Buscaroli from *L'Eneide*, comm. da R. Sabbadini (Torino, 1885) which I have not seen.

⁵ Buscaroli, *loc. cit.*: "in questo nome, che è quello di Didone giovane, quello forse da loro tra loro più usato, che il poeta adoprerà poi quando ella è per morire (*morientis Elissae*, 610), e quando non è più (*infelicitis Elissae*, V, 3), si rivela un rimpianto." This is cited from Pascoli, *Epos* (2nd ed., Livorno, 1911) which I have not seen.

⁶ *CW* 26 (1932-33) 203, note 28 (in a review of Buscaroli). Pease considers the evidence for this inadequate.

⁷ 6.843.

Roman custom of Virgil's day to shrink from the inflection of foreign proper names.

The care which Virgil lavished even on the *minutiae* of his poems justifies a consideration of a further possibility. Recently it occurred to me that Virgil used this variant form of Dido's name as an affectionate name applied by Aeneas alone to Dido. This idea had already been suggested by Fiore⁸ who mentioned it casually without further discussion. Investigation shows that this may be the explanation of Virgil's choice.

Throughout the *Aeneid* the name *Dido* appears thirty-four times: twenty-one times in narrative; thirteen times in speeches. In these latter cases the speakers are Venus (4), Juno (3), Dido (3), Aeneas (2) and Ascanius (1).⁹ The name *Elissa* is used once by Aeneas, once by Dido and finally in a passage which reflects the thoughts of Aeneas.¹⁰ A discussion of eight passages may throw some light on Virgil's usage.

1. When Aeneas and Achates went to explore the land after being wrecked in Africa, Venus met them and told them the story of Dido. Veiled from sight by a cloud, they arrived at Carthage and after viewing the temple of Juno overheard Dido's interview with Ilioneus. When the cloud had been dispersed, Aeneas announced his presence in a speech addressed to the queen. After naming himself he continued:

o sola infandos Troiae miserata labores,
quae nos reliquias Danaum terraeque marisque
omnibus exhaustos iam casibus, omnium egenos
urbe domo socias, grates persolvere dignas
non opis est nostrae Dido nec quidquid ubique est
gentis Dardaniae, magnum quae sparsa per orbem.¹¹

In the first speech which Aeneas addressed to Dido he used the name he had just heard from his mother Venus. This is a public

⁸ Tommaso Fiore, *La poesia di Virgilio* (Bari, 1930) 257: "... la richiama col dolce nome dell' intimità, Elissa." Pease says of this suggestion: "There seems inadequate evidence for the view expressed by T. Fiore. . . ."

⁹ In the narrative—1.299, 446, 496, 503, 561, 613, 718, 749; 4.60, 68, 165, 171, 192 (within indirect discourse—*Fama loquens*), 263, 291 (within indirect discourse—*Aeneas loquens*), 408, 450, 642; 5.571; 6.450; 11.74. In speeches by the following characters: Venus, 1.340, 360, 670, 685; Juno, 4.101, 117, 124; Dido, 4.308, 383, 596; Aeneas, 1.601; 6.456; Ascanius, 9.266.

¹⁰ 4.335, 610; 5.3.

¹¹ 1.597–602.

speech and is formal as is proper in a speech from one ruler to another.

2. After Aeneas and his followers had been entertained by Dido, at the queen's request Aeneas started his narrative which fills the second and third books of the *Aeneid*. The first few lines are a direct address to Dido before the beginning of his tale. He starts:

infandum regina iubes renovare dolorem.¹²

Here as before he addresses her formally.

3. After Aeneas had been warned by Mercury of Jupiter's command that he must delay no longer in Africa, he was greatly troubled:

atque animum nunc huc celerem, nunc dividit illuc
in partisque rapit varias perque omnia versat.
haec alternanti potior sententia visa est:
Mnesthea Sergestumque vocat fortemque Serestum,
classem aptent taciti sociosque ad litora cogant,
arma parent et, quae rebus sit causa novandis,
dissimulent; sese interea, quando optima Dido
nesciat et tantos rumpi non speret amores,
temptaturum aditus et quae mollissima fandi
tempora, quis rebus dexter modus. ocuis omnes
imperio laeti parent et iussa facessunt.¹³

Aeneas, having finally made up his mind what he should do and having called three of his followers, gave his orders and then explained to them what he would do concerning Dido. Because of the construction in *oratio obliqua* there can be no doubt that the whole passage *sese . . . modus* is a representation of his speech, strange as it may seem that Aeneas should make such a revealing statement. Since it was a speech to his men he spoke of the queen as *Dido* even adding *optima*, an adjective which Mackail considers particularly appropriate to high rank.¹⁴

4. When Aeneas approached Dido to tell her of his coming departure, she already knew of it—*quis fallere possit amantem?*¹⁵ In her first speech to him she had addressed him *nate dea*,¹⁶ later

¹² 2.3.

¹³ 4.285–295.

¹⁴ *Ad* 4.291.

¹⁵ 4.296.

¹⁶ 1.615.

she had said *hospes* ¹⁷ at the banquet in his honor. But now in a rage she first said *perfide* ¹⁸ and later as anger gave way to sorrow added:

cui me moribundam deseris—hospes,
hoc solum nomen quoniam de coniuge restat? ¹⁹

Aeneas in answering her reproaches began:

ego te, quae plurima fando
enumerare vales, numquam regina negabo
promeritam nec me meminisse pigebit Elissae,
dum memor ipse mei, dum spiritus hos regit artus.²⁰

Here Aeneas taken aback by her violence and anger addressed her first as *regina* then turning to the use of the third person says *Elissae*. It is as if he were thinking of two different women: distinguishing between the angry queen and the loving Elissa. Here it is my suggestion that the name *Elissa* may be one he had already applied to her—a name he had affectionately used when they had been passing the winter in brief happiness.

5. Dido in her angry reply bitterly inveighed against Aeneas reproaching him for his cruelty and finally said:

i, sequere Italiam ventis, pete regna per undas.
spero equidem mediis, si quid pia numina possunt,
supplicia hausurum scopulis et nomine Dido
saepe vocaturum.²¹

When Dido imagined Aeneas calling upon her for aid in danger, she pictured him as using her ordinary name. If the distinction suggested is valid, it is hinted here that he no longer had the right to use a more familiar name.

6. When the Trojan fleet was sailing out of the harbor at dawn, Dido watched it from the towers of the palace and expressed her feeling in a soliloquy of mixed regret and anger. Regretfully she applied to herself the words *infelix Dido* ²² already applied to her by the poet.²³ Angrily she called down a curse on Aeneas and his descendants:

¹⁷ 1.753.

¹⁸ 4.305. This idea recurs in *perfide* (366), *improbe* (386).

¹⁹ 4.323f.

²⁰ 4.333–336.

²¹ 4.381–384. Mackail (*ad* 4.335) suggests quite correctly that *Dido* is vocative.

²² 4.596.

²³ 1.749; 4.68.

Sol qui terrarum flammis opera omnia lustras,
 tuque harum interpret curarum et conscia Iuno,
 nocturnisque Hecate triviis ululata per urbes,
 et Dirae ultrices et di morientis Elissae

. . .²⁴

When still regretting her lost kingdom and good repute she called herself Dido, but in her curse on Aeneas the name *Elissa* is used. Although there would be no hint of special significance in the name if this passage stood alone, it may be that at this vital moment a name with a tender association returned to her distraught mind.

7. The tragic death of Dido is followed by a description of Aeneas' departure:

interea medium Aeneas iam classe tenebat
 certus iter fluctusque atros aquilone secabat,
 moenia respiciens, quae iam infelicis Elissae
 conlucent flammis. quae tantum accenderit ignem
 causa latet; duri magno sed amore dolores
 polluto notumque, furens quid femina possit,
 triste per augurium Teucrorum pectora ducunt.²⁵

Here the poet represented the thoughts of Aeneas as he looked back at Carthage and reflected on the unhappiness of his departure from Dido. In his mind the name *Elissa* may have had a special meaning. The poet added two subtle minor touches of great effectiveness. Here *infelicis Elissae* recalls the earlier repeated phrase *infelix Dido*. The *triste augurium* is surely the *verus nuntius* in the next passage,²⁶ which is further linked to this one by the first two words.

8. After Aeneas had crossed the Styx in the Underworld he met Dido among those who had died on account of cruel love. He wept and said:

infelix Dido, verus mihi nuntius ergo
 venerat exstinctam ferroque extrema secutam;
 funeris heu tibi causa fui; per sidera iuro,
 per superos et si qua fides tellure sub ima est:
 invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi.²⁷

As in his first speech to her he called her Dido. Here abashed by

²⁴ 4.607-610.

²⁵ 5.1-7.

²⁶ 6.456: cf. Mackail *a.h.l.*

²⁷ 6.456-460.

her silence and hostile appearance—*quam si dura silex* ²⁸—he would scarcely dare use a name with affectionate overtones.

The consideration of these eight passages should be supplemented by a brief glance at later authors who allude to or treat the story of Dido. Passing references to the queen of Carthage whether in prose or poetry usually contain the name *Dido*. Four authors—Ovid, Silius Italicus, Statius and Justinus (Trogus)—deserve further discussion.

Ovid who frequently referred to the story of Dido and Aeneas used both names.²⁹ One reference in the *Amores* may hint that he saw some subtlety in the choice of names:

Iam pius Aeneas miserae rescripsit Elissae.³⁰

In the seventh epistle of the *Heroides*, the letter from Dido to Aeneas, Ovid discriminated between the two names, but used the name *Elissa* very specifically in relation to Dido's first husband. Once she heard Sychaeus calling her when she was in a shrine in which his statue stood:

ipse sono tenui dixit 'Elissa, veni.' ³¹

Again she said:

nec consumpta rogis inscribar Elissa Sychaei.³²

Otherwise she speaks of herself as *Dido*.³³ Ovid has seized here on the earlier version which connects one name with Tyre, one with Carthage. In the *Fasti* Ovid told the story of Anna, sister of Dido, in his account of the festival of Anna Perenna under the date of March 15.³⁴ The queen is named seven times. The name *Dido* is used in three instances where the poet is speaking ³⁵ and in a fourth instance where Dido's epitaph on herself is given.³⁶ The

²⁸ 6.471.

²⁹ Dido: *Amores* 2.18.25 (n.); *Fasti* 3.545 (n.), 550 (n.), 597 (n.), 640 (n.); *Heroides* 7.7 (ac.), 17 (n.), 68 (n.), 133 (ac.), 168 (n.), 196 (n.); *Remedia Amoris* 57 (n.). Elissa: *Amores* 2.18.31 (d.); *Ars Amatoria* 3.40 (v.); *Fasti* 3.553 (g.), 612 (v.), 623 (d.); *Heroides* 7.1 (g.), 102 (v.), 193 (n.).

³⁰ 2.18.31.

³¹ 7.102.

³² 7.193.

³³ 7.7, 17, 68, 133, 168, 196. Line 1 in which *Elissae* occurs is bracketed by Ehwald.

³⁴ 3.523–696.

³⁵ 3.545, 597, 640.

³⁶ 3.550.

last passage is the same line that Ovid used earlier in the *Heroides*.³⁷ The three uses of the name *Elissa* are such that they may indicate Ovid's recognition of this name as a special name for Dido. In the first Iarbas after he had captured the palace of Dido speaks in a way which may have appealed to Ovid's irreverent spirit of irony:

seque memor spretum, 'thalamis tamen' inquit 'Elissae
en ego, quem totiens reppulit illa, fruor.'³⁸

In the second the poet addresses Dido when he explains the sorrow of Aeneas:

flet tamen admonitu motus, Elissa, tui.³⁹

In the third Aeneas speaks:

multa tibi memores, nil non debemus Elissae.⁴⁰

Silius Italicus in his historical epic on the Second Punic War alluded to Dido many times because his subject called for such references and because he was so familiar with the Virgilian version of the story. Hamilcar was descended from Belus who accompanied Dido⁴¹; Hannibal took his oath of vengeance against the Romans in a temple sacred to Dido⁴²; the cuirass given by Spanish tribes to Hannibal contained scenes from the story of Dido and Aeneas⁴³; when Hannibal was discouraged, Juno sent Anna, sister of Dido, to encourage the Punic hero.⁴⁴ The third of these passages in the most interesting. Not only the motif but also the story is Virgilian:

nec procul Aeneadum vacuo iam litore classis
aequora nequicquam revocante petebat Elissa.
ipsa, pyram super ingentem stans, saucia Dido
mandabat Tyriis ultricia bella futuris;
ardentemque rogem media spectabat ab unda
Dardanus et magnis pandebat carbasa fatis.⁴⁵

³⁷ 7.196.

³⁸ 3.553f.

³⁹ 3.612.

⁴⁰ 3.623.

⁴¹ 1.72-76.

⁴² 1.81-122.

⁴³ 2.406-425.

⁴⁴ 8.25-241.

⁴⁵ 2.420-425.

There is no indication here nor in the other passages that Silius attached any significance to the choice of name. The restriction by case can be observed in Silius: *Dido* occurs in the nominative or accusative, *Elissa* in the genitive or ablative.⁴⁶

Three passages in the *Silvae* of Statius echo the story of Dido and Aeneas as told by Virgil and use the name *Elissa*. In the first a storm is compared to the one which was aroused by Juno to conceal the union of Dido and Aeneas:

. . . qualem Libyae Saturnia nimbum
attulit, Iliaco dum dives Elissa marito
donatur testesque ululant per devia nymphae.⁴⁷

In the second the poet is compared to Virgil:

Regia Sidoniae convivia laudat Elissae,
qui magnum Aenean Laurentibus intulit arvis.⁴⁸

In the third Crispinus is compared to Ascanius:

Gaetulo sic pulcher equo Troianaque quassans
tela novercales ibat venator in agros
Ascanius miseramque patri flagrabat Elissam.⁴⁹

In each case the love story was so much in the mind of Statius that his usage may show a hint of special meaning for the name he used.

Justinus (Trogus) in a chance reference in his narrative of the siege of Tyre used the name *Dido*,⁵⁰ but throughout his narrative concerning the founding of Carthage by the Tyrians called the queen Elissa.⁵¹ Presumably following historical sources Justinus (Trogus), uninfluenced by Virgilian usage, preserved the older form of the name.

In summary the view here presented is this. In the ordinary narrative or in speeches by Juno, Venus or Ascanius Virgil always used the name *Dido*. In speeches by Dido or Aeneas, as appears in the eight passages discussed above, the names *Dido* and *Elissa*

⁴⁶ Dido: 1.23 (n.), 74 (n.); 2.406 (n.), 422 (n.), 765 (n.); 8.50 (n.), 122 (ac.), 166 (n.), 231 (ac.); 15.746 (n.). Elissa: 1.81 (g.), 98 (g.); 2.391 (g.), 421 (ab.); 7.488 (g.); 8.47 (g.), 78 (g.); 14.573 (g.); 17.244 (g.). In addition the adjective *Elissaeus* as a synonym for *Punicus* is used six times: 2.239; 3.82; 6.346; 14.258; 15.521; 16.614.

⁴⁷ 3.1.73-75.

⁴⁸ 4.2.1f.

⁴⁹ 5.2.118-120.

⁵⁰ 11.10.13 (g.).

⁵¹ 18.4.3 (ab.), 4.5 (n.), 4.9 (n.), 4.12 (n.), 5.2 (g.), 5.5 (n.), 5.8 (n.), 6.1 (g.).

both appear. Virgil used or avoided the name *Elissa* in such circumstances that he may have intended to give it a special meaning as a name of affection applied to Dido by Aeneas. The appearance of the two names in later authors does not show that such a usage was definitely recognized although certain passages in Ovid and Statius might indicate such recognition.