

Antony Augoustakis

Burial and Lament in Flavian Epic: Mothers, Fathers, Children

In Flavian epic, as part of the story or as a digression from the narrative, babies are killed and buried by their parents (e.g., Pyrene and her baby in Silius; Psamathe and Linus in Statius). In Silius' *Punica*, in the civil war at Saguntum, the mothers are forced to kill their own offspring to avoid being caught by the Carthaginians; in Statius' *Thebaid*, the baby Opheltis is killed by a snake because of the neglectful nurse, Hypsipyle, who is distracted by the arrival of the soldiers; the young boy—and virgin hunter—Parthenopaeus dies on the battlefield and sends a lock of hair back to his mother, Atalanta. But mothers also stop the death of their sons, like Imilce in Silius, the wife of Hannibal, who effectively prevents the impending human sacrifice of her child. Conversely, Creon cannot stop the self-sacrificial suicide of his son, Menoeceus, in Statius. This paper examines in depth the meaning of female lament and of bereavement, as it analyses the poets' emphasis on female figures and their offspring, but also discusses how male lament confirms and consolidates male power as tyrannical and autocratic: as opposed to female lament, male grief and lamentation becomes a vessel for letting out the darkest side of human predisposition towards despotism.