Reviews


Brill’s companion to Silius Italicus is a most useful addition to the study of Silius Italicus and the Punica. The volume is well-constructed with a sense of flow from one section to the next and from one essay to the next. Over the course of four sections (Introduction; Context and Intertext; Themes and Images; Reception and Criticism) the various contributors provide seventeen essays that locate Silius Italicus in his biographical and Flavian contexts, and discuss the Punica in terms of its historical and literary contexts as well as explore some of the intertextual connections to present a range of themes and images from the poem. The volume closes with a detailed summary of the reception and criticism of Silius Italicus and the Punica in the Italian Renaissance and through to modern scholarship. There is an extensive bibliography, General Index, and a useful Index locorum for Silius thoughtfully separate from the Index locorum for other ancient authors.

The Introduction and first chapter are combined. Not listed in the Contents are the six sub-divisions under which Augoustakis presents the meagre biographical information about Silius, the scholarly discussion over the dates of the composition of the Punica, as well as various issues around the structure of the poem. The necessarily substantial third section on the sources for the Punica leads into the introductions for the essays that follow, ‘sources’ being interpreted in its widest possible sense.

In Chapter Two, Arthur Pomeroy observes that the extent of the conflict between Rome and Carthage across the Mediterranean was remarkable for its period and much written about long before Polybius began his Histories. Pomeroy surveys the scholarly attempts

Prudentia 40.1&2 (2008) 79
over the last century and a half to reconstruct an historical annalistic tradition and locate lost sources through comparing the extant texts, rightly noting the problem of coincidental correspondences. However I am less convinced by Pomeroy's highlighting of the omen of the sacred chickens refusing to eat before battle at Trasimene, an example which he notes exists today only in Silius (Pun. 5.59-62) and Cicero (Div. 1.77.) Omens are arguably ahistorical events and demonstrably serve other, more literary, purposes even in a text such as Livy. For example Silius often applies omens to create particular intertextual connections while Livy patterns omens to create connections within his own text. The omen in which the chickens refuse to eat appears in Livy's second decad presaging a significant Roman defeat at the hands of the Carthaginians in the First Punic War; it reappears in the third decad in the Roman camp shortly before Cannae (Livy, 22.42.8; Livy, Per. 19.2.22).

In Chapter Three Bruce Gibson argues for taking more account of Silius' response to and incorporation of the ancient historiographical tradition in the wider sense of both Latin and Greek practices. This latter point in particular corresponds to my own belief that there is a greater response to the Greek historiographical tradition in the Punica, nowadays represented primarily, but not exclusively, by Polybius' Histories. Gibson discusses some select features that are important to both historiography and epic poetry: openings, speeches and geography (Sicily). He shows that Silius' opening for the Punica evokes not only the opening of Livy 21 but also Polybius 1.3.7. In addition, Gibson notes that in some instances, such as content and arrangement of speeches, Silius could be said to improve on the historical narratives.

No volume on Silius would be complete without a chapter discussing something of the complex influences of Virgil's Aeneid on the Punica. In Chapter Four Randall Ganiban picks up a theme from Dido's prayer (Aen. 4.622-7) to argue that the mythical queen shapes the character and tragic heroism of Silius' Hannibal as the Punica takes the cause of the Second Punic war back to the realm of myth. Hamilcar's motivational speech in the oath scene
in front of Dido's shrine recalls *Aeneid* 1.254-56 and Hamilcar is again connected with Dido's revenge in the *ekphrasis* on Hannibal's shield. Juno's anger against Rome allows her to infuse Hannibal with a dynamic energy which Ganiban believes derived from the epic tradition, not the historical one. This dynamism does not make Hannibal the hero, a point which Ganiban argues locates the *Punica* closer to Lucan than Virgil. On the other hand, such a portrait of Hannibal arguably concurs with the energetic historical figure presented in Polybius and Livy.

In Chapter Five Klassen argues that Hannibal is repeatedly depicted as the antithesis of Virgil's Aeneas, paradoxically through a scheme of 'imitation'. The two figures dominate their respective texts but where one sets out to destroy Rome the other set out to found the city. Both are blocked in each half of their epic quests by particular figures, Fabius and Scipio for Hannibal, Dido and then Turnus for Aeneas. Klassen also selects certain episodes that feature Hannibal as a type of Aeneas (the duel with Murrus cf. Aeneas' fight with Turnus; the description of Hannibal's armour; the banquet scenes in *Punica* 11 and *Aeneid* 1; the storms that drive each of them from Italy). The arrangement of the episodes is reversed in the *Punica* in comparison to the *Aeneid*. While not disputing these similarities and contrasts between the *Punica* and the *Aeneid* (and, indeed, Homer) for these episodes, it does revive the question as to how far Silius, by including such episodes, follows or adapts the epic tradition.

Chapters Six and Seven discuss the relationship between the *Punica* and two post-Augustan epics, Lucan's *De bello civili* and Statius' *Thebaid*, respectively. Lucan's *De bello civili* was based on a pivotal historical event; both the text and events it described interested Silius sufficiently to leave an impression on the *Punica*. Marks identifies a range of allusions, textual and thematic, between the *Punica* and Lucan's *De bello civili* by which he argues that Silius connects a number of Romans in the Cannae books, and especially Paulus, to Lucan's Pompey. Interestingly Marks shows that, in the post-Cannae books, Silius then connects the losing

---

Reviews

81 *Prudentia* 40.1&2 (2008)
side, Hannibal and the Carthaginians, to Pompey. Apart from the recognisable allusions in the *Punica* to *De bello civili*, it is worth noting that the *Punica* also contains allusions to Pompey found in other texts. Silius' Varro, for example, is paralleled to Pompey through their common trait of ignoring omens but the tradition about Pompey is recorded in Valerius Maximus' claim that Pompey was dismissive of thunderbolts fired against his men (Val. Max. 1.6.12). Silius strengthens the connection to the tragedy of civil war through Varro's rejection of the omen of parricide and the warning on the shield: *fuge proelia Varro* (Pun. 9.175). On the other hand, in support of Marks, Silius' description of the swarms of bees around the Roman standards at Cannae as 'thick' *densae* (Pun. 8.635) has a parallel to the description in *De bello civili* where the swarms are so thick that the standards are hidden (7.187). Both Lucan and Silius personify the standards with feelings of terror, *trepidis... aquilis*, metaphors, perhaps, for the soldiers who will march to them on behalf of Pompey and Varro respectively.

In an interesting essay Helen Lovatt identifies possible interplay between Silius and Statius as she argues that sections of their poems may be read to reflect a mutual competition between the two authors. The genre of epic poetry means that there are a few common features of content between the *Thebaid* and the *Punica*, such as commemorative games, even though their respective subject matter is quite different. Lovatt compares the games for the two Scipios in *Punica* 16 and the funeral games for Opheltes in *Thebaid* 6. She reads the texts both ways, at micro and macro level, resting her argument on a supposition that Silius and Statius were composing their epics contemporaneously, and as a consequence, they each heard or read sections of the other man's work and responded through his own text. There is a useful Table (159) that illustrates a connection between the texts by summarising the ordering of the events in the two sets of games; and, by including the order of events from the rites given for Anchises in *Aeneid* 5 and for Patroclus in *Iliad* 23, the Table also highlights the differences from these other texts.
Reviews

The third section of this volume covers themes and images in the Punica. It is divided into four subsections covering exemplary heroism; ekphrasis and imagery; gender; epic and society respectively. It opens with Paolo Asso's essay on Hercules as a paradigm of Roman heroism in which Asso argues that Silius depicts Hercules firstly as a model for Hannibal and then as a model for Scipio. There are a few features in the essay that I find puzzling. For example, I am unsure why Asso believes the inclusion of deities in the Punica to be problematic; it is, after all, very traditional, notwithstanding Lucan. I am not fully convinced that Hercules is presented as a model for Hannibal. Silius depicts Hannibal attempting, and ultimately failing, to prove himself stronger than Hercules. Hence Hannibal takes Hercules' town of Saguntum and makes his own pathway through the sacred domains of the Alps; his impiety locates him beyond the support of Hercules. Although Livy's version of Scipio's address to his men in which Scipio makes an explicit link between Hannibal and Hercules, indicates that the two figures were linked in ancient times (Livy 21.4.7), Asso's attempt to link them through the external numismatic evidence as well is very circumstantial. There is nothing specific to tie the Hellenistic-style coin types from New Carthage to Hannibal; they could belong to any Carthaginian general.

Ben Tipping explores virtue and narrative in the Punica, particularly in relation to Scipio and the interpretation of ethical shortcomings depicted in Scipio. Tipping argues for Scipio as representative of the tension between a powerful individual and the subjection of that individual to the republican system of governance, and that the depiction in the Punica echoes the extant portraits of the historical Scipio. Tipping acknowledges the problem for any society dealing with powerful individuals. The society of the Roman republic could only moderate such power on a limited scale.

The following essays focus on some of those individuals. Marco Fucecchi concentrates on Q. Fabius Maximus and M. Claudius Marcellus who became known as the Shield and the Sword of Rome respectively for their different but ultimately complementary and,
as argued by Fucecchi, exemplary, approaches to the war against Hannibal. However, I would not read Silius (Pun. 12.273-75) as ‘correcting’ Horace (Carm. 4.4.39-41) over whether Marcellus’ victory outside Nola or Claudius Nero’s victory at the Metaurus River was the more significant to the outcome of the war. Both victories were significant for different reasons, and Silius does not, it seems to me, downplay the importance of either victory. Fucecchi concludes that Silius presents Marcellus and Fabius as the noblest of the Roman republican aristocracy with an interesting observation that Silius juxtaposes their final appearances (15.320-98) to frame them within the narrative of Scipio’s Spanish campaign and the battle at the Metaurus River.

In Chapter Eleven Enrico Ariemma focuses on the portrait of Varro in Punica 8-10 as Silius entwines myth and history around Cannae. Ariemma argues that Silius’ depiction of Varro is both autonomous (he was consul, after all) and contingent on the depictions of Flamininus and Minucius. In this latter respect Ariemma agrees with Ahl, Davis and Pomeroy (1986) who argued that Silius follows Livy in terms of the ‘blistering treatment’ he gives Varro, portraying him as ‘unscrupulous and cowardly to create the two paradigms of Roman conduct for each consul, one glorious, one shameful.’ However, although Silius Italicus draws similarities between Varro and Flaminius he also combines the negative features about Varro found in the Polybian tradition (where Varro is depicted as a coward) to present Varro as militarily inexperienced, as rash as Flaminius and cowardly (Pun. 8.258-262; 310-16).

_Ekphrasis_ and imagery are integral parts of epic poetry, and Stephen Harrison opens this section with an essay on proleptic _ekphrasis_ in the _Punica_ which he defines as a symbolic anticipation of a poem’s plot in the formal description of an object. Harrison selects a series of objects featured in the _Punica_, beginning with Dido’s temple at which Hannibal swears his childhood oath. The Trojan sword lying at the feet of the cult statue (Pun. 1.91) silently indicates the battles ahead and ultimately, Hannibal’s end. The images on Hannibal’s

---


*Prudentia* 40.1&2 (2008) 84
shield in *Punica* 2.406-52 also predict Hannibal's eventual downfall although Hannibal himself misinterprets it as an omen of eventual success (Pun. 2.453-56). The description of the doors to the temple of Hercules at Gades (Pun. 3.32-44) recalls the temple of Apollo at Cumae (Aen. 6.20-33) but Hannibal's reaction is interrupted by Silius' discourse on Atlantic tides.

Eleni Manolaraki considers the importance of waterscapes in the *Punica*, particularly through Hannibal as the primary viewer of the monumental artworks within the *Punica* and the description of the Atlantic tides at Gades (*Punica* 3.45-61). She argues that Silius contrasts Hannibal's limited view and knowledge of the tides against his own deeper understanding which is reinforced by a number of intratextual and intertextual echoes across different authors and genres. On the other hand, that Livy refers to Hannibal at the Heraklion (Livy, 21.21.9) but does not have Hannibal gaze on the tides at Gades does not necessarily mean that the passage about the tides is wholly Silius' creation; there are too many lost texts and lost sections of texts for such definitive statements.

The final essay in this section is Robert Cowans discussion of virtual epic in the *Punica*, centred on the effect of counterfactuals and sideshadowing in the *Punica*. Silius' use of 'what ifs,' such as if Hannibal had been born in Italy or Scipio in Africa (*Punica* 17.401-5), shows a Flavian perception about the historical importance of these figures. There is a sense of distraction from the *Punica* as Cowan seeks to explain his topic first through examples taken from outside the poem. Nonetheless Cowan draws attention to some interesting points, such as Silius' paradoxical location of victorious Carthaginians continuing Roman traditions at *Punica* 13.619-20.

The theme of gender in relation to certain female characters is discussed by Alison Keith in Chapter Fifteen. She argues for the orientalising features around many of the female deities and other figures in the *Punica* as Silius takes his cue from Virgil's treatment of Dido and the Carthaginians. Hannibal, as Juno's agent and avenger...
Reviews

of Dido is closely associated with other feminine figures through the *Punica* in contrast to the masculinity of the Romans.

Neil Bernstein explores the overlap of roles presented by Silius for the aristocratic leaders as members of a family as well as leaders of men and states.

The final section of this wonderful volume comprises two essays by Frances Muecke and William Dominik respectively. They each cover aspects of the particularly varied reception of Silius Italicus since the fifteenth century to the present day. Frances Muecke argues for the fifteenth century as the time of Silius’ greatest popularity with an interesting study of the lecture courses by Domizio Calderini plus the first two printed editions of the *Punica* coming out from Rome in the 1470s and printed commentary appearing from Venice soon afterwards. William Dominik covers the later reception of Silius and shows how the negative attitude to Silius is steadily changing as scholars offer new insights into the *Punica*.

In sum, this volume would be a very useful addition to the bookshelf for anyone studying Silius Italicus’ *Punica*. Its main drawback is not the content, but price. At US$180 on Amazon.com it is likely to be beyond the pocket of many students.

Typographical errors:

P 89, line 6 missing word ‘Aeneas gazes the pictures’
P 207, line 14, missing s ‘remind us’

Frances Billot
University of Auckland