

R. J. LITTLEWOOD, *A Commentary on Silius Italicus' Punica 7*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. xcix + 276, ISBN 978-0-19-957093-5.¹

The recent revitalized interest in Silius Italicus' *Punica* has led to fine scholarship already, but the field has been in dire need of commentaries. There was Spaltenstein's work on the entire epic, but only a few commentaries have been devoted to single books. R.J. Littlewood's volume on *Punica 7* (which narrates the confrontation between the dictator Fabius Cunctator and Hannibal) may now be added to the list, and it is a worthy addition at that, not only because it is the first English commentary on a full book available to the public², but also for its wealth of insightful observations. The work breathes (a contagious) enthusiasm for Silius, which is a healthy antidote to the poisonous verdicts that have plagued the poet in the past, and will hopefully enable a larger readership to appreciate the *Punica*.

In the comprehensive introduction, we find a discussion of Silius' life, literary models (both historiographical and poetical) and allusive technique, character sketches of the main protagonists Fabius and Hannibal, the structure of book 7, the poet's epic style and the transmission and reception of the *Punica*. Littlewood prints Delz's Teubner text in full (along with critical apparatus), and deviates from it almost nowhere. Each of the sections of the commentary itself is headed by a loose translation which is followed by notes on the individual clauses. The book features a bibliography (including 'Further Reading'), an Index Verborum and an Index Nominum et Rerum, and is printed as OUP's customary (and pretty) hardcover (which does make the book somewhat pricy).

Littlewood has based herself on the most recent views³, offering a helpful introduction to the novice reader without devoting too much space to the well-trodden topics; she focuses instead on Silius' artistry in intertextuality (which is prominent in the general introduction) and verbal play, with a keen eye for meaningful juxtapositioning, metre, sound effects and other stylistic features, both in the excellent section 'Language and style' and the

¹ It is regrettable that this review comes so late after the publication of the commentary; it was delayed for reasons beyond my control. The list of suggestions and observations may still confer some worth on it, however.

² Apart from the unpublished theses by Feeney, Goldman and Bennett on book 1 and parts of book 8 and 13, respectively.

³ The sections of the introduction and some larger notes are headed by a short overview of literature used; in a few cases, such as the recurring comments on 'Flavian values' under Vespasian's dynasty (e.g. xxv "the Flavian ethos of military responsibility"), such source references are regrettably lacking.

notes. She does not hesitate to go beyond the accepted intertexts for the *Punica* (such as Livy and Vergil's *Aeneid*) and performs groundbreaking work towards the recognition of Silius' broad allusive range, convincingly showing, for instance, that book 7 engages not only with the post-Augustan epics, but also with Vergil's *Georgics* and Ovid's *Fasti*. In some cases, a more detailed discussion of the implications of seemingly meaningful associations (e.g. between Silius' Minucius and Lucan's Caesar) would have been welcome. Her interpretation of the structure of book 7 as an alternation of military narrative and (anti-)pastoral passages is illuminating. Silius' poetic ability has not always been duly recognized, but this book succeeds very well at bringing it into the limelight.

One of the book's other main strengths is the immersion it allows to the reader, through providing historical background information, character sketches of Fabius and Hannibal and 'visualisation' through the excellent maps, helpful descriptions of the strategic manoeuvres which Silius has captured in poetry, and images of cultural artefacts, which, while in most cases not directly relevant to the text, put the story in a broader archaeological framework. At times we also find a smattering of (mostly English) literary reception in the renaissance and beyond. To this we may add that the book is very readable; Littlewood uses few abbreviations and does not economize on clarifications, while the book is still not overly long.

The way the commentary is structured invites some mixed reactions, however. Although the loose translations are very often complemented by more literal versions in the individual notes, sometimes the combination still does not cover all lines in the section; since Littlewood's capabilities as a translator are manifest in her fluid and modern rendering of Silius' Latin, it seems a shame that she did not opt for a complete translation. As linguistic support for difficult sentences is also rare, this renders the book less useful to undergraduate students. All notes consist of a single paragraph, resulting in a sometimes confusing mix of different topics treated in sequence. While these are mere nuisances, the fact that some important parallels are only mentioned, not cited, makes it difficult for the reader to check the parallel or even appreciate its relevance. Two other issues are more awkward. Firstly, there are almost no cross references; although the fine index makes up for this somewhat, a result is that Littlewood often repeats her main points at all relevant places, which can lead to unwieldy notes which are not strictly relevant to the lines commented upon. While this is partly a matter of editorial taste, her arguments (which are mostly convincing) would probably have profited if all evidence would have been presented in one place. Secondly, some notes are quite erudite, but discuss subjects that are connected to the text only in a loose way; this includes both treatment of other passages of the *Punica* (e.g. n.252 is actually a commentary on 4.798, providing information on Carthaginian child sacrifice which is quite out of place here,

rather than the expected note on Fabius as synecdochic hero), or topics that are vaguely associated with, but not actually mentioned in, Silius' lines (e.g. n.291-3 with Fig. 4 on Carthaginian nomenclature, although Mago's *name* is actually not found in the text). A number of such drifting comments should have focused more on the text, and may now be rather confusing to the unexpecting reader. Lastly, there is a surprising amount of typographical errors, but this is nowhere detrimental to an understanding of the text⁴.

These slight imperfections do not offset the general excellence of the work, though. I will now go into more specific points to do my nitpicking duty, which will be followed up by some observations of my own which in most cases serve to corroborate Littlewood's main findings. lxxx: *ductor* is not really an "epic archaism"; it is found rarely before Vergil, frequently after him, and also in prose (Cicero, Livy, Hyginus, Tacitus), although it is true that Silius is exceptionally fond of the word. | xc: It seems special pleading that the physical prowess of Hercules would be represented by Brutus' powerfully driven spear. | xcvi: Bennett (1978) wrote on book 13 and Goldman (1997) on 8, not the other way around. | 34: The translation renders lines 5-11 as focalization of Fabius, but they seem narratorial comment to me. | 35: *praeceps* is read as "hinting at impetuous recklessness", but after Flaminius' fatal rashness in book 5, such behaviour would be most unwanted in Fabius! | 41: *Dardanius* implies "tragic nobility", but even more casts Minucius as a doomed Trojan in Hannibal's replay of the Trojan war (cf. n.585-6 "unpropitious resonance"). | 45-6 n.23: The similarities to *Aeneid* 1 and 4 can be pressed; Hannibal is cast as Dido (also 20 *at Libycae ductor* ~ *Aen.* 4.1; *aegram vulnere* ~ *Aen.* 4.2), anticipating his defeat at the hands of Fabius-Aeneas. | 59 n.55: I do not understand the reasoning that Vergil's intertext *haud ulli* "raises the question whether *nulli* [in Silius] might be a manuscript corruption of the metrically unacceptable *nec ulli*"; what else could it be but *nulli*? | 59 n.57-8: The story of the Fabii, about Fortune's fickleness, not only shows Rome's "reserves of heroism" (50), but is also a lesson for Hannibal personally (given his reliance on *Fortuna*), which he fails to take to heart. | 64 n.78 *gens casta* seems ambiguous, referring not only to the chastity of the women, but also to the Roman virtue of *casta fides* (cf. 1.634 *sacrata gens clara fide*). | 66 n.84-5: "There is irony in the promise that Juno will be given jewels for her crown if she will drive Hannibal out of Italy"; indeed, and the same irony applies in the Homeric intertext, where Athena has herself incited Diomedes. | 67 n.86: The suggestion that Statius had Silius

⁴ Furthermore, section headings are not always correct (e.g. 634-51 should be 634-60). Some other oversights: xcii: Livineus > Livineius; xcv n.351: *neruuuos* > *neruos*; 39 n.6-8: Fucecchi 2009 > 2010; 48 n.33: Murrus > Daunus; 53 n.34: Fernandelli 2005 > 2006; 53 n.35: *P.* 4. 420-41 > *P.* 3. 420-41; 57 n.50: *mugitus* > *mugivit*; 81 n.128-30: *saevit iuuentos* > *saevitque iuuentos*; 87 n.152: *ad fingens* > *adfingens*; 102 n.187: *Aen.* 8.254 > *Aen.* 8.252; 107 n.209: *Aen.* 130, 404 > *Aen.* 4. 404; 224 n.627: *extabat* > *exstabat*.

specifically in mind in *silv.* 4.1.22 is unconvincing, since the topos of Minerva's peplos is universal. | 67 n.88-9 "[Silius'] sardonic comment [on the lack of religion in peace time]" may, rather than reflect "a lighter attitude to traditional cult under the Flavians", signal Silius' identification of a crucial problem in Roman society, similar to his treatment of *luxuria* (I doubt Littlewood's assertion that "Silius does not ... attack Roman *luxuria* as the root of evil", lvi). | 70 n.96-7: These lines are focalized by Hannibal (cf. *procul*), so "Fabius' revitalized legions" do not "symbolize new hope and optimism" for Rome but for Hannibal, as is shown by what immediately follows – 98 *arrectae spes Sidoniae*. | 79 n.120-1: Saying that Silius' allusions to the Trojan war "give a literary dimension" to the Punic war is a bit shallow. | 84-5 nn.141-2 and 143-5: Silius' use of Aeneas in *Aeneid* 8 as a model for Hannibal, with the inversion of roles, is significant; Hannibal, the anti-Aeneas, has Italy raised in arms against him. | 93-4: It is now unclear whether Domitian's vine edict bears any relevance to Silius' story of Falernus; if so, such an interesting notion should have been elaborated. | 106 n.201-3: The observation that the quality of the passage "echoes scenes from Statius' *Silvae*" would benefit from examples. | 107 n.205-6: The allusion to Phaeton at the end of the story of Falernus is not "suffused" by the peace of the Golden Age, but rather anticipates Hannibal's fateful torching of the vineyards, suggesting Hannibal's own Phaeton-ness. | 118 n.241: What is also relevant to the image of Hannibal as steersman is that the same image is used for Fabius at 1.687ff. | 118 n.244-5: That Silius' Fabius echoes Ennius' Paulus seems no reason to attribute the latter's lines to Ennius' Fabius instead; Silius is good at redistributing roles in his allusions. | 120 n.249-50 *iam* is here 'already' rather than 'now'; Fabius comments on the swift resurgence of recklessness after the Trasimene-induced defeatism. | 124 n.261-2: The echo of Verg. *georg.* 4.127-8 *pauca relictis iugera ruris* (which is not cited in Latin) seems most relevant; Fabius as the ideal farmer of the *Georgics* (the old man of Tarentum) wages war with Hannibal, the destroyer of the *Georgics*. | 136-7 Figure 4: Shouldn't the suffix -car be -milcar (from Melqart)? | 138 n.303-4: Connecting Mago's waking of his men with his foot with "archaic simplicity" and thus with "hints of African primitivism and barbarity" may be a bit far-fetched. | 138 n.305-6: the inverted *cum* (mss.) seems perfectly acceptable, especially after 303 *constiterat*, which in a main clause would probably rather be *constituit*. | 148 n.351-2: *subdo* does normally go with a dative, but then the object is the fire (as in the example from Vergil), not the firewood; the examples from the *Punica* could be either dative or ablative. | 149 n.356: The mere presence of the adjective *atra* does not make this a reminiscence of Vergil's Troy, even if that is an important intertext; similarly, the madness of the oxen should not be compared to Aeneas' battle fury in defence of Troy. | 157 n.384: The subject of *iubebat* is

mos, not *Fabius*⁵; the actions of the latter are narrated with present tenses. | 159 n.390: The phrase “closely packed battalions” is not negative (“compressed”, in reference to the defeats at Lake Trasimene and Cannae), but rather describes the best formation foot soldiers could use against Hannibal’s cavalry; Fabius comments that not the troops’ discipline and formation, but only his own strategy and tactics hemmed Hannibal in. | 172 n.426-7: Despite the humorous suggestion that *quisve ora repente pervasit pallor* refers to fear of Proteus himself (“Scared you, didn’t I”), I still think that fear of Hannibal is intended. | 174 n.436: *ambiguus* may be itself ambiguous, referring both to Proteus’ riddling oracle *and* to his changeable appearance. | 183 n.476-7: The very point is that these are *not* ἀδύνατα! It is probably an inversion of Verg. *ecl.* 1.59-62 (with the same order sea-heaven-east/west). | 185 n.483: In defence of the prophecy of Marcius may be said that it spoke of the *Diomedis campi*, the name which *campo* and *Aetolae* (484) allude to. | 190 and 195: The introductions of 494-515 and 515-90 overlap in part. | 197 n.518: The quote from Livy (22.26.7) seems especially relevant for line 516: *imperia aequantur* ~ Livy’s *artem imperandi aequatam*. | 205 n.547: Fabius’ tears at the words of his son are due to the latter’s lack of patriotism (cf. 548 *tam tristia dicta*) rather than to his filial piety. | 212 n.564: *socia* refers rather to the bond between the Fabii and Minucius (which the elder Fabius seeks to restore with *pone ... iras*) than to unified purpose of father and son. | 213 n.567-8: The Propertian intertext is a bit far-fetched. | 220 n.604: While Bibulus is a victim, he does not fall to Fabius, as the wording suggests. | 220 n.605-8: I fail to see the relevance either of the information that *maxilla* is the diminutive of *mala*, or of the information on Etruscan trumpeters, which is more a comment on 4.169-74. | 230: Line 674 is loosely translated as ‘transfix a bird’, but the fowler is using birdlime (cf. *viscata*). | 231 n.665: Silius’ deviation from historiography regarding Xanthippus’ victory seems irrelevant here. | 234 n.683: Teucer’s clothing is not so much ‘effeminate’ as ‘hollow’, i.e. nothing more than an illusion (cf. 698 *cassa ... umbra*); Keith’s gender theory, while indeed useful elsewhere, should not be applied at every instance. | 240: In the translation of 717-29, “So Fabius” appears to be a draft for a translation of the obelized lines 723-4. | 248-9 n.738-9: If the conjecture *libitum* is accepted (for which I see no need), the translation is not ‘did it please you’ but ‘did it please us!’ Littlewood’s note on Minucius’ supposed hidden reproach is thus unfounded. The sense must be that Minucius cannot comprehend why Fabius allowed his command to be divided at all; otherwise Minucius would not have learnt anything at all, and line 745 would be inept.

Generally, however, I find myself in agreement with Littlewood; most observations I wholeheartedly endorse, or, at the worst, accept as

⁵ Cf. e.g. Hor. *serm.* 2.7.79-80 *mos ... ait*, Ov. *rem.* 438 *mos ... vetat*.

possibility. In a number of cases, Littlewood's perceptive observations may be strengthened by even more evidence. First, some more examples of verbal play and significant word order: a. (*ad lxxxi*) Regarding polysyllables with *circum-*, it is striking that in all cases the 'surrounding noun' actually frames the verb (7.61 *subitis circumvenientibus armis*, 7.308 *armata circumfundare corona*, 7.583 *denso circumvallaverat orbe*); b. (*ad 141 n.313-14*) There seems to be word play between the beginning of 312 *armenta* and 314 *sarmenti*: the oxen are turned into torches; c. (*ad 232 n.672-3*) The word order is significant; the *longa ... hasta* is long indeed, extending over two lines, all the way through (the description of) its victim. | Some examples where significant phrases respond to earlier lines: a. (*ad 127 and 129*) Fabius' countering Hannibal is emphasized by verbal parallelisms: 268 *intellectus* counterbalances 260 *sensit*, while Hannibal's *fraudis veneno* (260) is answered with *fraude locorum* (279); b. (*ad 204 n.543-4*) *aequent imperio* picks up 516 *imperia aequantur*; c. (*ad 219 n.595*) *telorum nubibus* picks up 584 *coniectis undique telis*; once more, Fabius uses Hannibal's own tactics against him. | The observation that Fabius' war is modelled after the defence of Italy in the *Aeneid* is corroborated by another intertext for the Roman call upon Juno (62 n.74-5), viz. the procession of Latin ladies to the temple of Minerva at Verg. *Aen.* 11.477-85; similarly, the council of Hannibal and Mago just before their nightly assault (lines 282ff.) alludes to that in the Trojan camp prior to the night raid of Nisus and Euryalus (cf. lxxviii)⁶. | Hannibal's Cacus-ness (xxi, xl) may be anticipated through *angebant* (7.26; cf. *Aen.* 8.260 *angit*), just as Fabius' descent from Hercules is emphasized through *progeniem* and *labores* (7.28). | Some more adaptations of Ennius' famous line on Fabius (*cunctando restituit rem*) (cf. n.1) may be found at lines 10 *sistere cunctando Fortunam* and 244 *in rem cunctari* (esp. after 243 *destituat*). | Regarding the identification of *Punica 7* as counterpart to Vergil's *Georgics*: a. (*ad 124 n.260-1*) That Hannibal, with his *fraudisque veneno*, is the anti-farmer, is corroborated by the verbal parallel with 13.536, where farmers are *fraudum illaesa veneno*. b. At line 351, *maiores umbrae* (a rare phrase) may be a reminiscence of Verg. *ecl.* 1.83 (where the approaching night invites to sleep); in the bucolic/georgic world the countryman rests at night, but anti-Georgic Hannibal is active at that moment! c. The correspondence of Silius' Nereids with Catullus', who witness the Argo (169-70 n.414), heralding the beginning of violence, suggests that Hannibal with his war ends the Saturnian peace of Georgic Italy. | War with Hannibal as anticipation of civil war: a. (*ad 223 n.621-3*) Bibulus, who is pierced by a weapon sticking from the corpse of one of his companions (624

⁶ Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 9.224 *cetera per terras omnis* (~ Sil. 7.282 *cuncta per et terras*), 9.226 *ductores Teucrum primi* (~ 286 *ductorem*), 9.229 *stant longis adnixa hastis* (~ 294 *stat procul hasta viri terrae defixa*), 9.226 *delecta iuventus* (~ 298 *iuxta lecta manus, iuvenes*).

socium), may be an image of civil war, since he is killed by one of his own (even though that one is already dead himself); in this he foreshadows the fate of his descendant. b. More broadly speaking, the observed analogy between Vergil's allusions to civil war in the *Georgics* and Hannibal's destruction of the Italy celebrated by Vergil suggests that the Punic war is also a sort of civil war. | To the resonances of Regulus in the figure of Fabius (cf. e.g. nn.148 and 711-13), we may add the verbal echo *stimulante dolore* (6.256 ~ 7.316); the serpent of Bagrada attacking Regulus (an infernal creature) is like the alighted oxen (nocturnal, and thus as hellish). | Lastly, some stray comments: That Fabius 'carries' the epic forward – Littlewood's metapoetical reading of *arma virosque gerebat* (7.8) – is also suggested by 7.19 *caput insere caelo*, which picks up the proem *ordior arma, quibus caelo se gloria tollit / Aeneadum*; Fabius (with his fame) represents Rome. | (*ad* 98 n.171-2) The fact that Bacchus travels *ad litora Calpes* and thus reverses Hercules' direction as he visits Euander and slays Cacus seems significant. | (*ad* 117 n.239-40) The allusion to Vergil's words on returning from the underworld anticipates the image of Minucius being saved from the jaws of Hell later in the book. | (*ad* 187 n.487-8) The avenger Scipio that Proteus foretells seems a response to the avenger Dido calls for (i.e. Hannibal) at Verg. *Aen.* 4.625-6, given the verbal echoes (cf. 4.625 *aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor* ~ 487-8 *ille e furto genitus ... ultor*, 4.626 *face ... ferroque* ~ 489 *flammis* and the echo of *Aen.* 5.3-4 which Littlewood identifies in n.488-9).

It is to be hoped that Littlewood will grace our bookshelves with more commentaries of the same quality. For now, this fine example of good scholarship should be of great interest to both specialists and aspiring readers of the *Punica*.

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