

BOOK REVIEW

A Commentary on Silius Italicus' Punica 7. By R. JOY LITTLEWOOD. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xcix + 276. Hardcover, \$150.00. ISBN 978-0-19-957093-5.

Silius Italicus is enjoying a sustained revival of interest in European and Anglo-American scholarship, after centuries of scholarly disdain. His increasing appeal to scholars of Latin epic is perhaps most decisively confirmed by the publication of Antony Augoustakis' *Brill's Companion to Silius Italicus* in 2010; but the same year also witnessed the appearance of two Oxford monographs on Silius as well as the proceedings of a 2008 Innsbruck conference.¹ Although François Spaltenstein has authored a full-length commentary on the *Punica* in French—and other European scholars have produced commentaries on individual books—these volumes are not widely available in the UK and North America.²

Indeed, as the first commentary on an individual book of Silius' *Punica* to appear in the English language, Littlewood's commentary on Book 7 constitutes a welcome landmark in Anglo-American scholarship.³ For the volume finally makes a book of the poem available to English-speaking scholars and graduate students (if not, at that price-point, to undergraduate students) as a self-contained example of Silius' epic style, and thereby allows Silius to be studied in conjunction with his younger Flavian contemporaries, Valerius Flaccus and Papinius Statius. This is all the more important, because the most recent translation of the *Punica* available in English is that by J. D. Duff in the Loeb series.⁴

An excellent Introduction offers wide-ranging discussion of such standard features of the commentary genre as the author's life; the poem's literary models;

¹ A. Augoustakis, *Motherhood and the Other: Fashioning Female Power in Flavian Epic* (Oxford, 2010); B. Tipping, *Exemplary Epic: Silius Italicus' Punica* (Oxford, 2010); and F. Schaffner, ed., *Silius Italicus* (Frankfurt am Main, 2010).

² F. Spaltenstein, ed., *Commentaire des Punica de Silius Italicus*, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1986 and 1990); E. M. Ariemma, ed., *Alla vigilia di Canne: commentario al libro VIII dei Punica di Silio Italico* (Naples, 2000).

³ But note that Elizabeth Kennedy Klaassen is preparing a commentary on *Punica 14* for publication with Bryn Mawr in 2014.

⁴ J. D. Duff, ed., *Silius Italicus*, 2 vols. (Cambridge Mass., 1934).

protagonists of *Punica* 7; epic style; and the transmission and reception of the epic. Silius' biography is well known, but is of particular interest because he lived through signally turbulent times and yet enjoyed a public career spanning three imperial dynasties and a literary career that brought him to the attention of the leading contemporary men of letters, including Martial, Statius, Tacitus and the younger Pliny (the latter two, of course, also important politicians contemporary with, though younger than, Silius). In her discussion of the younger Pliny's obituary notice (*Epist.* 3.7), Littlewood unpacks its biases, which she attributes to the younger politician's rivalry with Silius in the Centumviral courts; apparently there was no literary rivalry.

The centerpiece of the Introduction, however, is her discussion of Silius' literary models in the poem both in general and, especially, in Book 7 (xix–lxii). Here Littlewood makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of Silius' poetic project in the *Punica* by documenting his narrative, thematic, and stylistic debts to a wide range of authors and genres, including the prose genres of rhetoric and historiography and the verse genres of epic and didactic poetry. She sensibly charts Silius' navigation of the famous accounts of the second Punic war by Polybius and Livy, but it is to Silius' poetic tastes that she is particularly sensitive throughout, showing that he drew not only on Homer and Vergil (in the *Aeneid*), but also on Ennius, Lucan, Statius and Valerius Flaccus amongst Roman epic poets and, further afield from martial epic, on Vergilian didactic (in the *Georgics*) and Ovidian aetiology (in the *Fasti*).

Littlewood is especially helpful in elucidating Silius' narrative and thematic debts to the *Georgics* and the *Fasti*, and she carefully articulates these poems' definitive structural importance to the shape of *Punica* 7. Given her sensitivity to Silius' Vergilian and Ovidian antiquarian verse, it is a pity that she does not devote a separate section in the Introduction to Silius' metre and prosody. Over forty years ago, Duckworth's studies definitively demonstrated Silius' metrical commitment to the composition of dactylic hexameters in accordance with Vergilian norms,⁵ but it would have been very interesting to bring that evidence into line with Littlewood's analysis of Silius' metrical use of the *Georgics* by comparison with that of

⁵ G. E. Duckworth, *Vergil and Classical Hexameter Poetry* (Ann Arbor, 1969), 100–10; cf. *id.* "Five Centuries of Latin Hexameter Poetry: Silver Age and Late Empire," *TAPA* 98 (1967) 77–150, at 88–100.

the *Aeneid* and the *Fasti*, the latter composed in elegiac distichs. Throughout, Littlewood is well up-to-date with contemporary bibliography and literary scholarship on Silius and the *Punica*.

The Latin text is taken unchanged from that of J. Delz's 1987 Teubner edition,⁶ and, although there is no facing commentary she translates every lemma in the commentary proper, with the result that this volume provides an excellent modern translation of *Punica* 7. Littlewood has a sure sense of Silius' Latinity and a very good ear for his poetry, and her translation is both accurate and idiomatic. The commentary itself focuses, like the Introduction, on literary and, to a lesser extent, historical issues, and Littlewood offers throughout a wealth of information about Silius' engagement with his literary sources and the artistic design of his narrative.

The one omission from the otherwise admirably thorough coverage of Silius' intertextual debts is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Her extensive treatment of the impact of Ovidian mythmaking in the *Fasti* on *Punica* 7 made this reviewer all the more alert to the almost casual Ovidianism in Silius' references to a variety of myths familiar from the *Metamorphoses*. Stephen Hinds has recently noted that "for any formal Roman poet of the mid- to late-1st century ce, the whole system of Greco-Roman myth has an important and inescapable post-Ovidian dimension,"⁷ and several important articles have shown that to be the case even with the arch-Vergilian Silius.⁸ Littlewood also tends to eschew commentary on Silius' metapoetics (as, for example, at 7.239ff.), though she has a nice note on the so-called "Alexandrian footnote" at 7.177. These are very minor blemishes, however, and more than compensated for by the provision of so much useful information throughout the Introduction and Commentary.

The occasional misprint has crept into the volume, but these are nugatory and in no way confusing for the reader, worth noting only because of the expense of the volume, as with other Oxford University Press commentaries. Littlewood's exemplary work on *Punica* 7 offers English-speaking students of Silius an opportunity to move beyond the opening Saguntine books of this complex poem and constitutes an attractive point of departure for the study of Hannibal's epic campaign in Italy.

⁶ J. Delz, ed., *Sili Italici Punica* (Stuttgart, 1987).

⁷ S. Hinds, "Seneca's Ovidian *Loci*," *SIFC* 9 (2011) 5–63, quotation at p. 9.

⁸ See, e.g., R.T. Bruère, "Color Ovidianus in Silius' *Punica* 1-7," in N.I. Herescu (ed.), *Ovidiana: Recherches sur Ovide* (Paris 1958), 475-99; *id.* "Color Ovidianus in Silius' *Punica* 8-17," *CP* 54 (1959) 228-45; and M. Wilson, "Ovidian Silius," *Arethusa* 37 (2004) 225-49.

It is very good news that she is now preparing a commentary on *Punica* 10, which will afford an entrée into the Capuan campaign and advance our understanding and appreciation of the *Punica* still further.

ALISON KEITH

University of Toronto, akeith@chass.utoronto.ca

