

BOOK REVIEW

Silius Italicus, Punica 2: Edited with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary. By NEIL W. BERNSTEIN. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. liv + 318. Hardcover, \$125. ISBN 978-0-198-74786-4.

Silius Italicus' *Punica*, a Flavian Latin epic poem on the Second Punic War, has benefitted from a mountain of scholarship in the last decade, including a number of excellent book-length commentaries. The latest is Neil Bernstein's commentary on *Punica 2*, under review here.

Bernstein's Introduction is packed with useful information preparing readers for major themes and issues in book 2 and in the *Punica* at large. The Carthaginian siege of Saguntum (Pun. 1–2) anticipates themes and events that follow in the poem, and Bernstein is quick to note how Silius' interest in (e.g.) domination and the fear of enslavement (xxi–xxii; xxvii), decapitation (xxiii), and suicide (xxxiii–xxxvi) in book 2 ultimately metastasize throughout the rest of Silius' epic corpus. The mini-essays detailing major episodes from book 2 (xix–xxxvi) offer an expert blend of summary and insight. For example, a quick review of the Amazonian warrior Asbyte's duel with the Saguntine priest-warrior Theron makes way for the brilliant suggestion that by inverting the traditional role of "late-arriving" Amazonian figures like Panthesilia (post-*Iliad*), Camilla (*Aen.* 11), and Hippolyte (*Theb.* 12), Silius gives his poem a feeling of "continuing" events from the first war; as Hannibal's ally, Asbyte's death anticipates Hannibal's ultimate defeat from the outset (xxiii–xxiv).

Theron's slaying of Asbyte necessitates a retaliatory duel between Hannibal and Theron modelled on earlier epic duels between Achilles and Hector and Aeneas and Turnus, all expertly unpacked here (xxiv–xxv, notes ad 233–69). It does Virgil a disservice, however, to claim that by leaving Theron's body unburied, Hannibal acts contrary to Aeneas in his treatment of Turnus (xxiv–xxv). Virgil pointedly refuses to tell us how Aeneas treats Turnus' corpse; his narrative silence leaves it for us to decide. The *Punica's* "re-writing" of the *Aeneid's* dramatic conclusion here (with a view to Homer) makes clear, I suspect, Silius' reading of Virgil's elliptical close.

What follows are useful discussions of Silian multi-tiered allusion, the always-fraught issue of the interrelation between Silius and Statius (Bernstein argues reasonably for bi-directional influence), and reception of the *Punica*. Most striking is a brief comment on Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's *Sómnica la cortesana* (1901), a novel reworking elements from Silius' fall of Saguntum, but cast as an "unrequited love affair" between Hannibal and Asbyte (xlili).

Bernstein's no-nonsense prose translation accompanies the Latin text. As Bernstein promises, it manages to "capture some of the varied linguistic registers featured in *Punica 2*" (lii), e.g. the elevated diction of mythological epic, vocabulary and phrasing of battle narrative, declamation, historiography, elegy, etc. (see xliii–xlvi).

The commentary proper is, of course, the star of the show, packed with learning and insights. I highlight a selection of notes for a range, but this is simply a taste. There is much in here to admire and far more than I can do justice in this review.

Notes detailing Silius' evocation of Virgil's Daedalus episode (*Aen.* 6) in the mini-tragedy of the Cretan exile Mopsus and his son Icarus deftly spell-out the intertextual network (notes 89–147, 140). A welcome surprise comes with notice of the blending of Virgilian and Homeric images. In his grief over the death of Icarus, Mopsus attempts three times to fire his trusty bow-and-arrow, three times he fails (*Pun.* 2.140). The scene combines Daedalus' inability to (twice) sketch Icarus into the temple at Cumae (*Aen.* 6.32–3) with Telemachus' triple attempt to string Odysseus' bow at Odyssey 21.125–6 (note 140). Surely Mopsus' suicide, hurling himself from a high tower onto his son's corpse, "unites" him, in a grim sense, with the fallen Icarus in Ovid's description (*Met.* 8.231–5: cf. n. 142, reservedly).

There are excellent notes on decapitation in the *Punica* and Roman history (197–205) and on corpse exposure (notes 264–9, 269). I suspect Theron's mutilated corpse (269: *deforme... cadaver*) anticipates Hannibal's own corpse, mutilated by poison, at the book's end (707: *deformata... membra*), blending Theron's fate with the description of the (ultimately) suicidal Saguntines (468: *...deformia membris*). The image of Hannibal's disfigured corpse in the post-script to book 2 completes the book's proleptic portrait of his inevitable defeat even at the moment of his initial victory.

Bernstein lays out a particular concern in *Punica 2* with spectacle and viewing, framed largely by the duel between Hannibal and Theron (presented in teichoscopic terms, e.g. 230–1, 251–5) and the later divine gaze of Hercules and Fides who endeavor to aid the suffering Saguntines (see index s.v. "viewing"). The Saguntines by this point are devastated by famine and plague, their description a

neat combination of Ovid's Fames, and Lucan's Massilians and his Pompeians in Spain and Dyrrachium. More intricate and surprising, as Bernstein well notes, is Silius' borrowing from Virgil's love-riddled Dido in his description of the Saguntines' suffering (n. 461–8 and *ad locc.*).

Bernstein assesses well Hannibal *tyrannus* (239), and there is excellent material on the snake portent anticipating the fall of Saguntum (580–91 and *ad locc.*). I might add Silius' play with *anguis* ~ *sanguis*. The terminal "s" in *squalentibus* "bleeds" into the *anguis* at line end (*Pun.* 2.585); *sanguinea* in the next line provides the punch-line. Surely (in book 2 no less) there is acknowledgment of similar play in Virgil's Laocoön passage (*Aen.* 2.204: *angues*; 207: *sanguineae*; 210: *sanguine*; 212: *exsanguis*; many thanks to Tim Stover for discussion on this point).

In sum, Bernstein has produced a masterful commentary that will be a valuable resource for scholars of Flavian epic going forward.

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