

BOOK REVIEW

Silius Italicus, Punica, Book 3 (Oxford Commentaries on Flavian Poetry). Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary by ANTONY AUGOUSTAKIS AND R. JOY LITTLEWOOD. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 416. Hardback, \$170.00. ISBN: 9780198821281.

The *Oxford Commentaries on Flavian Poetry* series continues with a superlative edition of Book 3 of the *Punica* of Silius Italicus. Thanks to the work of this project, we have come very far in relatively brief compass from the time when anglophone audiences with any interest in Silius had Duff's Loeb and little else to satisfy curiosity about one of Rome's more intriguing extant epic poets.

The Augoustakis and Littlewood *Punica 3* follows the usual series format of introduction, text/translation and commentary. The text is essentially Delz's Teubner, with ten editorial changes. The intention of the series is to complete the poem, but Book 3 is a standout installment amid a dense throng of sixteen competitors. Herein we find the dramatic account of Hannibal's crossing of the Alps, alongside haunting, formidable oneiric parallels to Homeric, Virgilian and later scenes from classical epic. *Punica 3* is a book of dreams and prophecies, of geography and fantastic locales. It is one of the gems of Flavian verse, a text in which it is all too easy to lose oneself happily in the evocative splendor of the high style. The editors have provided an edition that does justice to the great achievement of the erudite composer.

The commentary is especially good on inter- and intratextual parallels, and on the (not insignificant) peculiarities of Silius' Latin. The editors wisely avoid the easy enough trap of becoming too entangled in the geographical problems that abound in *Punica 3*. On the whole, the notes are geared more to literary than to historical matters, with the welcome approach of treating Silius with the seriousness he merits as an accomplished (if not consummate) artist, a poet of considerable (and underappreciated) merit. Silius' reception of Lucan is given particular attention, as is his considerable debt to Livy. The evocation of Alexander the Great in Hannibal is treated adroitly, with ample consideration of the depiction

of the Macedonian monarch in earlier Latin epic. The introductions to the various sections of the book are especially rich, with helpful guides for further research and highlighting of the structural questions at play in this densely organized, intricately and elegantly arranged section of the epic. Silius' pervasive interest in natural science offers another point of noteworthy coverage by the editors.

A special mention should be made regarding the reproductions of numismatic evidence that enrich this edition. This is a volume that offers good coverage of archaeological and material evidence relevant to a study of Silius in his historical context, and the photographic reproductions of Flavian coinage offer helpful ancillaries to the notes, together with information on excavations that have shed light on various items of interest in the poet's text.

This commentary will be of service to a wide range of potential readers, in part thanks to the inclusion of an English translation of the book. Those approaching Silius with a firm foundation in Latin will profit most, and the commentary offers the expected special treat to those with specialized interests in imperial epic. One could gain a considerable education in the lexical nuances of poetic Latin from working systematically through the notes, not to mention a deeper understanding of the ways in which Silius manipulates and reinvents the tropes and themes of his predecessors. Silius is undeservedly excluded from doctoral reading lists, and it is to be hoped that editions like that of Augoustakis and Littlewood might inspire redressing this omission.

In brief, the Augoustakis and Littlewood *Punica* 3 is reliable, insightful and replete with nuggets of interesting information and inspiring insights into a challenging poet.

The book is beautifully produced, with few typographical errors (for example, the bibliography of Latin texts should be entitled "Greek and Latin"; the index entry 8.655-55 at the bottom left of p. 385 should read 8.655-66). The bibliography offers an impressive guide for further study, with few omissions (for example, Bouquet's *Le songe dans l'épopée latine d'Ennius à Claudien*). The indices are especially noteworthy for comprehensiveness, especially the helpful *index locorum*.

Augoustakis and Littlewood have done a masterful job in the continuing work of rehabilitating the deserving epic poet Silius after so long and lamentable a period of neglect, and the press is to be thanked for taking on this large and much appreciated project. Something approaching a quarter of the longest surviving Latin epic is now well served by the commentaries in this series, and we look forward to future installments in the collection.

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