Summary

The object of study in this thesis is the thirteenth book of Silius Italicus’ epic poem *Punica*. This volume offers a detailed interpretation of the text, and is made up of three parts: a general introduction, the text of *Punica* 13 and a commentary. For the commentary, the text has been divided into eighteen scenes, each of which has its own introduction. The focus in these introductions lies on the two elements of this thesis’ subtitle: intertextuality and narrative structure. The main findings of the commentary are reflected in the general introduction, which will therefore be discussed in more detail below. First, however, a synopsis will be given of the *Punica* as a whole and of book 13 in particular.

SYNOPSIS

The *Punica* is an epic in 17 books on the Second Punic War between Carthage (under the leadership of Hannibal) and Rome. The motivation for the war is to be sought on various levels: the goddess Juno, fearing for the prosperity of her beloved city Carthage, pits Hannibal against fate; Hannibal’s father Hamilcar tasks him with avenging his city’s defeat in the previous war; and Hannibal is also the avenger of Dido, the ancient queen of Carthage who committed suicide when she had been abandoned by Aeneas, the founding father of the Romans.

The first part of the poem relates the series of Carthaginian successes, which begins in the first two books with the capture of the Spanish city of Saguntum (an ally of Rome). Hannibal’s crossing of the Alps is followed by victories at the Ticinus, Trebia and lake Trasimene in northern Italy (books 3 to 5). Book six offers a brief intermezzo as an internal narrator tells the story of Regulus, hero of the First Punic War. In book seven, the Roman dictator Fabius is able to save his troops with his delaying tactics and thus brings the Carthaginian string of victories temporarily to a halt; in the next books, however, as the rash Varro has gained the consulship, Hannibal obtains his greatest victory: the catastrophic Roman defeat at Cannae, which has a central position in the epic (books 8 to 10).

Hannibal is warned (in a dream sent by Juno) against marching on Rome, however. The Carthaginian army spends the winter in the rich and decadent city of Capua, a former ally of Rome which had defected to Hannibal (book 11). The Capuan luxuries, and the machinations of Venus, weaken the Carthaginians, and when spring arrives (book 12), the enervated army is unable to take various cities in Campania. When in the meantime Capua is threatened by the Romans and Hannibal does not manage to lift the Roman siege, he decides to attack Rome itself; he is driven off, however, by none other than Jupiter and his thunderstorms.

At the beginning of book 13 (1–93), Hannibal halts his retreat and delivers a speech to reinvigorate his troops, in order to march on Rome a second time. The defector Dasius of Arpi tells him, however, that his ancestor Diomedes had brought the Palladium from Troy to Aeneas; the sacred image safeguards the city. Hannibal abandons his plan and, after plundering the sanctuary of Feronia, moves to southern Italy.

The Romans turn their attention again to the ongoing siege of Capua (94–380). Before they assault the city, two events of great symbolic significance take place: the Romans
manage to capture and sacrifice the white deer of Capua (which may be described as its totemic animal), and the Roman Claudius defeats the enemy champion Taurea and chases him through Capua. Inspired by his example, the Roman army assaults the city, defeating all Capuan resistance, including an unsuccessful sortie. Only nightfall prevents the fall of the city. During the night, the Capuan elite commits suicide during a banquet, but in their last hours, they are haunted by the goddess Fides (“Good Faith”) whom they have violated with their betrayal of Rome. At dawn, Capua surrenders; the god Pan softens the Romans’ hearts and thus prevents the destruction of the city. Capua is plundered and its champion, Taurea, kills himself, an act for which he is rebuked by the Roman commander Fulvius.

When just after the fall of Capua, the Roman hero Scipio learns of the deaths of his father and uncle, he first grieves uncontrollably, but then resolves to seek the aid of the priestess of Cumae to perform a nekyia, a blood offering to summon the shades of the dead and to learn the future (381–895). When ghosts drink of the blood, they will be able to speak with him. The first phantom to come is Appius, who has only just died and has not yet been buried. Then the ghost of the ancient Sibyl arrives, who will be Scipio’s guide for the rest of the book. She proposes Scipio’s future and describes the underworld to him. Thereafter Scipio encounters the shades of his mother and of his father and uncle; he meets the consuls who have died during the war and also the heroes who had saved Rome in former days; he converses with the ghost of Hamilcar, the father of Hannibal. He also sees the ghosts of Greeks; he speaks with Alexander the Great, and admires the phantom of Homer and the heroes of the Homeric epics. The Sibyl then draws Scipio’s attention to Roman women, both virtuous and wicked. Finally, she gives him a glimpse of Rome’s future: the civil wars of the first century B.C. This is counterbalanced by her prophecy on Hannibal’s final years and demise, which closes book 13.

The next book is devoted to the Roman capture of Syracuse. The last part of the epic (books 15 to 17) narrates the Roman successes under the leadership of Scipio. The hero crosses to Spain with his army, where he takes the city of New Carthage and vanquishes the Carthaginian forces. Hannibal’s brother Hasdrubal flees over the Alps to Italy, where he is defeated and killed by the Romans. In book 16, Scipio performs funerary games for his father and uncle. In the last book, he crosses to Africa, thus forcing Hannibal to leave Italy. The Carthaginians are defeated in the battle of Zama, although Hannibal is saved by Juno. The epic ends with the triumph of Scipio.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The first two paragraphs of the General introduction give an outline of the thesis and provide background information on the life of Silius Italicus (ca. AD 26/27 to ca. AD 101/102), who composed the Punica during his retirement after a successful political career. The next paragraphs treat various aspects of Punica 13: its structure (§ 3), motifs and intertextual models (§ 4), its place within the Punica as a whole (§ 5) and, finally, the difficulties of dating the Punica and the passages in Book 13 which may be interpreted as references to contemporary Rome (§ 6). The last paragraph (§ 7) discusses the scope of the various parts of the commentary.
The general structure of *Punica* 13 (as discussed in § 3) is quite clear. The book is composed of three episodes of unequal length: lines 1–93, 94–380 and 381–895. Each of these episodes displays a clear internal structure based on contrast and symmetry. The beginning of each episode is picked up by its ending. The first episode begins and ends with the theme of withdrawal from Rome; in between we find the invigorating speech by Hannibal, and the counter-speech by Dasius which undoes Hannibal’s effort. A similar symmetry can be discerned in the Capuan episode (94–380). The episode is framed by two short incriminating speeches by Fulvius (99–103 and 377–80), and the first two scenes (the death of the hind and the flight of Capua’s champion Taurea) both anticipate the end of the episode—the fall of Capua. In between this framing narrative, the siege narrative itself is described in three passages, which also display a symmetrical structure. In the last and longest of the three episodes, the *Nekyia*, the symmetry is found in the series of encounters with the dead from the moment the ghost of the ancient Sibyl of Cumae arrives. Her prophecy on Scipio’s future is counterbalanced at the end by the prophecy on Hannibal’s future. The encounter with the shades which is recounted in between can be divided into two symmetrical narrative parts; the *Nekyia* first pushes deeper and deeper into the past, until Scipio meets the heroes of myth; the movement is then reversed and the narrative moves back towards Roman history and, eventually, Rome’s future. The discussion of the order of elements in the *Nekyia* includes a comparison with Homer’s *Odyssey* 11 and Vergil’s *Aeneid* 6. The last section of the paragraph (§ 3.4) discusses the connections between the three main episodes of Book 13, and shows that the framing technique which was identified in each episode also characterizes the book as a whole.

Paragraph 4 is titled ‘Intertextuality and motifs’. Its first subsection treats three different aspects of Silius’ allusive technique: his simultaneous engagement with multiple intertexts in nearly every scene, whereby he creates a coherent narrative which operates at several levels at once; his poetics of inversion (i.e. the inversion of key elements of his model); his use of retroactive intertextuality (i.e. the poet colours his description of a certain element by alluding to another literary text which has that element as its own model; an example is the panegyrical tradition around Alexander the Great, which is evoked in Vergil’s description of Augustus; Silius’ Alexander, in turn, evokes Vergil’s Augustus).

The next subsection (§ 4.2) discusses Silius’ use of the Roman historiographical tradition. It is argued that, for Book 13, there is little reason to presume other sources than Livy alone; deviations from Livy in most cases point to Silius’ engagement with a specific poetic (rather than historiographical) intertext. Livian influence is unmistakable, but verbal echoes often does not so much underscore parallelism as mark the poet’s adaptations. In several scenes, Silius has created a new narrative by making selective use of the Livian material.

The poetic sources for *Punica* 13 are the subject of § 4.3, which discusses in its three subsections a few recurrent motifs in the book (and in the epic as a whole). The first of these is the suicide of the Carthaginian queen Dido and her curse of the Trojans, as narrated in Vergil’s *Aeneid* 4, which is given as a mythical cause of the Second Punic War. Her fate is replayed several times in the *Punica*, both by Romans and by their enemies, such as the Capuan senator Virrius or, eventually, Hannibal himself. These replays are not perfect copies, however; subtle contrasts with Vergil’s portrayal illustrates the reversal of moral positions in the *Punica*. The second motif is that of repeating the Trojan war. Hannibal
Summary

seeks to destroy new Troy, Rome; but which of the two cities in this new Trojan war vying for world dominance will play the role of old Troy and fall? By developing Vergil’s reception of the *Iliad* and by re-distributing literary roles, Silius casts Carthage as the loser in this re-enacted war. The last important motif is that of civil war. Scholars have observed that the *Punica* foreshadows the Roman civil wars of the first centuries BC and AD, a theme which also pervades many other Roman epics. Silius appropriates the treatments of the theme by his predecessors and contemporaries, and manipulates these intertexts to suggest also the conclusion of civil war; the plot of the *Punica* should be seen as a parallel to civil war, featuring both the conflict itself and its resolution. The Roman hero Scipio may be viewed as a parallel of Augustus.

The last subsection is devoted to metapoetics: the way in which the text reflects upon itself as heir to a long literary tradition. Especially in the underworld episode, which (narrating an encounter with the shades of the past) particularly invites poetic self-reflection; the *Nekyia* may be seen as an overview of various epic intertexts, which are all integrated into the fabric of Silius’ epic. Metapoetic phrases can also be found in other parts of *Punica* 13.

In the past, many theories have been offered to explain the *Makrostruktur* of the *Punica*; in § 5, it is suggested that trying to find such a single principle of arrangement in the epic might be a futile endeavour. The paragraph discusses the place of Book 13 in two coexisting structures, the first being the opposing fortunes of Carthage and Rome (with Book 11 being the point from which Rome starts to be victorious), the second being the epic missions of Hannibal (Books 1–12) and Scipio (Books 13–17). Unity is achieved through the central theme of Book 13: the anticipation of Rome’s ultimate victory.

Since Book 11, the tides of the war have turned, to the advantage of Rome; that both the war and the epic have entered a new phase is marked through intertextual and intratextual allusions. The suggestion of a ‘new part’ is made through imitation of elements in *Aeneid* 7 (the beginning of the second half of the *Aeneid*) and through a complex imitation of the first books of the *Aeneid* (as the sequel to the *Iliad*). Hannibal, who seeks to turn the tide again in favour of Carthage, is parallel to Fabius, who in the first part of the epic checked the Carthaginian successes; but the parallelism primarily underlines their differences.

Book 13 also witnesses the transition from Hannibal to Scipio as the hero on whose epic mission the poem focuses. Hannibal, who has been obsessed with replaying the roles of earlier epic heroes, now fails to repeat his own earlier successes and more and more plays the loser’s role. Scipio, on the other hand, is prepared for his task of facing and defeating Hannibal through the *Nekyia*, in which he receives a variety of lessons. There are three more ways in which Book 13 anticipates the end, the defeat of Carthage: firstly, the fall of Capua, which is the opening move of Rome’s campaign against Carthage; secondly, a series of images throughout the book suggestive of Carthage’s future defeat; and lastly, a number of scenes in Book 13 which have a direct counterpart in the final book of the epic (most clearly, the prophecy of Hannibal’s death which closes Book 13 and Scipio’s triumph at the end of 17).

Paragraph 6 discusses the dating of the epic’s composition. While the *Punica* cannot be dated with certainty, it is clear that it was written at least partially during the reign of emperor Domitian (81–96 AD). But was it also finished under the same emperor? Three
Summary

passages in Book 13 may hint at contemporary events. One presumably refers to an incident around AD 91; of two other passages, both concerning tyrants, it has been argued that they could only have been written after the death of Domitian, but when read in context, such an interpretation does not hold up. Book 13 gives little reason to suppose a post-Domitianic composition or revision; on the contrary, Silius’ epic seems to narrate the rise of the Flavian dynasty to which Domitian belonged, through prefiguration and characterization. The poet moves away from the Julio-Claudian myths and their claim to having Aeneas as the progenitor of their dynasty, in favour of heroes such as Scipio who may claim to be the heirs of Aeneas through deeds rather than blood. Another argument in support of a Flavian interpretation is the important role Silius has given to Minerva, the favourite deity of Domitian. Finally, the role models and aims to which Scipio should aspire parallel the poet’s description of the Flavians and their achievements.

The final paragraph discusses the scope of the various parts of the commentary; a short outline will be given below, as well.

Text

The volume also contains the text of *Punica* 13. The commentary is preceded by the text as it is printed in the critical edition by Delz (1987). Within the commentary itself, the notes alternate with short passages of the text, this time with my modifications, which are defended in the notes. I have deviated little from Delz’ text, which is generally excellent.

Commentary

Each of the eighteen scenes of *Punica* 13 has received its own introduction and a series of more detailed notes. All introductions consist of two sections. The first section mainly discusses intertextuality; it considers the literary models for the scene, the interpretation of Silius’ engagement with these models, its role in developing major themes and motifs, and interrelations with other scenes in Book 13 and the rest of the *Punica*. It is the findings from these sections which make up the bulk of the General introduction.

The second section of each introduction (labelled “Analysis of the presentation”) is devoted to the narrative structure of the scene. It examines narratological and discourse linguistic features; the discussion is supported by observations on metre and stylistic features such as alliteration. The focus lies on the various markers of textual cohesion, such as tense usage, anaphoric reference and particles. These give insight into the structure of the text and the alternation of discourse modes, that is, the different modes in which the narrator presents his material: narrative, description, information or comment. By studying this alternation, we may distinguish the different narrative steps as the story progresses, and discern what is presented as, for instance, background setting or narrative climax; the analysis of the narrative structure may therefore be usefully combined with a literary approach for the interpretation of the text and its message.

The greatest part of the volume follows the traditional commentary format, consisting of detailed notes to the text (line by line). The primary aims of the notes are to make the text
accessible and understandable to a modern reader, to provide the background information necessary to understand its basic meaning and to open up deeper layers of interpretation. To these ends, each line or group of lines is translated, to reflect my reading of the text, followed by a series of entries on single words or phrases; these focus on interpretation, elucidate matters of syntax or textual criticism, point out verbal or conceptual parallels with other texts and discuss a selection of realia. There is also attention to Silius’ style, his use of figures of speech and the composition of his lines. Topics which do not receive ample discussion in the introduction to the scene are addressed in the longer notes.

The Appendix focuses on the interrelation between the works of the contemporary poets Silius and Statius. It discusses those passages in Punica 13 which display a notable correspondence with passages from Statius’ Thebaid and Silvae, and closes with a longer case study on the interrelation between Silvae 4.3 and the Punica.