A Commentary on Silius Italicus’ *Punica* 13

Intertextuality and Narrative Structure
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Preface

It is perhaps not altogether strange that one who has spent so much time on a book largely devoted to the underworld, will come to view his own project in such terms. Buried behind my desk and its towering books, I have explored the depths of Silius’ text, engaging with this literary relic much as the poet himself was engaging with the ghosts of his predecessors. At times, such a project seemed Hell itself, with its own daunting monsters and never-ending hosts of notes waiting for me to allow them speech. More often, I have stood in awe before the crowd of literary ghosts populating the *Punica* and witnessed the echoes of a long tradition reverberating through its rich and spacious books. No, notwithstanding the slightly ominous opening, writing a commentary is actually one of the most pleasurable ways of engaging with ancient texts, due to the great variety of topics to be addressed and the mental versatility that is allowed to the commentator—new sights at every corner, as it were. Writing a commentary on a highly intertextual poem such as the *Punica* is doubly enjoyable, since the work offers its own privileged window into the entirety of classical literature.

I was fortunate to have not one, but two wise Sibyls as my guides. A great debt is due to my *promotores*, professor Caroline Kroon and dr. Harm-Jan van Dam, since I could hardly have wished for a better pair of supervisors. Ever since I was a student, they have inspired me with their love for Latin literature, and Latin poetry in particular. Their warmth and openness encouraged me, and I am grateful that they were gentle guides and watched my progress while allowing me to find my own way. Caroline showed me the value of linguistic analysis for the interpretation of literary texts; her ability to elucidate even the most difficult theories in plain terms continues to amaze and inspire me. Harm-Jan proved to be a true *doctus vates*. I admire his erudition (the source of many valuable suggestions), and appreciate his great sense of humour; he always in good cheer ensured that I kept a level head with his sobering protestations that—whatever my observations on Silius—Statius still was the better poet (a sentiment with which Statius himself would surely have agreed).

The journey did not only take place behind my desk. In 2011 I was able to visit Oxford (and its wonderful university libraries) for a few months, where I was warmly welcomed by professor Stephen Harrison; I would like to thank him for kindly commenting on parts of my work. I am also grateful that the Faculty of Humanities of VU University Amsterdam granted the necessary funding, both for this stay abroad, and for my attending a conference on Silius in Sydney.

My *labores* would have been much lonelier and less enjoyable if not for my wonderful colleagues, Suzanne Adema, Rutger Allan, Gerard Boter, Michel Buijs, Lidewij van Gils, Mark Heerink, Eva van Hooijdonk, Mieke Koenen, Arjan Nijk, Emilie van Opstall, Paula Rose, David Stienaers, Nienke Vos and Gerben Wartena. I want to thank them for answering dozens of questions (especially Suzanne, who patiently explained time and again the finer points of the discourse modes theory), and for sharing many lunches and contemplating the joys and toils of university life together while munching our sandwiches. I am similarly grateful to Jörn Soerink and Marco van der Schuur for their companionship on our joint Flavian expeditions across Europe and in the mind.
The last years of this project were brightened by the advent of my greatest and yet smallest fans, Eline and Aron. Thank you, little ones, for your boundless laughter, and for sleeping so well (so that I could too). I am also deeply grateful to my parents, my parents-in-law and my aunt Hermien, for their love, support and the time they have spent with the children, allowing me to work. Similar words of gratitude would not suffice, however, to express my profound admiration for my wife Mareike, whose devotion, endless patience and strength have carried me all the way—through Hell and back again.
## Contents

Preface................................................................................................................................. v

Contents................................................................................................................................. vii

### General introduction

1 Preliminaries...................................................................................................................... ix

2 Silius’ life........................................................................................................................... x

3 The structure of *Punica* 13.......................................................................................... xi
   3.1 Hannibal’s retreat (1–93)....................................................................................... xii
   3.2 The fall of Capua (94–380)................................................................................... xii
   3.3 Scipio’s *Nekyia* (381–895)............................................................................. xiv
   3.4 The internal cohesion of *Punica* 13................................................................. xvii

4 Intertextuality and motifs............................................................................................... xviii
   4.1 Silius’ allusive technique.................................................................................... xviii
   4.2 Historical intertext: Livy...................................................................................... xxi
   4.3 Poetic models and motifs.................................................................................... xxii
      4.3.1 Haunting Dido.......................................................................................... xxii
      4.3.2 Heirs of Troy........................................................................................... xxiv
      4.3.3 Civil war ................................................................................................. xxvi
   4.4 Metapoetics ........................................................................................................ xxix

5 The position of book 13 in the *Punica* ..................................................................... xxx
   5.1 A new phase in the war (The decline of Carthage, 11–17)................................. xxxii
   5.2 Hannibal’s exit (The epic mission of Scipio, 13–17)........................................... xxxiv
      5.2.1 Hannibal’s failed repetition................................................................... xxxiv
      5.2.2 The Nekyia: the preparation of Scipio ................................................... xxxv
      5.2.3 The anticipation of the end ................................................................... xxxvi

6 The dating of the *Punica* and its relation to contemporary Rome ......................... xxxvii

7 Introduction to the commentary..................................................................................... xli
   7.1 Arrangement of the commentary...................................................................... xli
   7.2 Analyses: linguistic framework......................................................................... xlii
   7.3 Note on the translations..................................................................................... xlv
   7.4 Note on the text................................................................................................... xlv

Sigla.................................................................................................................................... xlvii