A Journal of Humanities and the Classics

ARION

FALL 2023

$15.00

Boston University

Punica 1

SILIUS ITALICUS

(Annotated verse translation by C. Luke Soucy)

Prefatory Remarks

In the half dozen centuries since its rediscovery, there have been—by the most generous of counts—six English translations of the *Punica* of Silius Italicus, two of which are currently in print. These, both academic prose translations from the last century, are James Duff Duff's thorough but thoroughly dated Loeb of 1934, and a meticulous joint endeavor by Antony Augoustakis and Neil W. Bernstein, today's preeminent Silians, published with occasional footnotes by Routledge in 2021. Of the literary translations, the only ones meaningfully available are an unannotated free-verse rendering released online by prolific hobbyist A.S. Kline, and a massive bloating into heroic couplets by Thomas Ross, first printed in 1661. Another set of rhymed pentameters, entitled *Punics* and issuing from the pen of Scottish physician H.W. Tytler, was published poorly and posthumously at Calcutta in 1828, where it achieved such renown as to escape the notice of both Duff and Dr. Tytler's biographer (a single copy is rumored, like the *Necronomicon*, to inhabit the depths of Widener Library). The last and least dates from Colonial America and is familiar only to specialists more special than I; credited to one Rev. Tho. Chase, it has reached the present day unpublished in its box at the Maryland Historical Society. There is no modern English edition with notable commentary, nor is there a full English commentary for any modern edition. In sum, any English reader or enterprising instructor who might wish to read the

work or assign it in translation must choose between an unsourced website, two sparsely annotated prose editions, and a verse adaptation predating Dryden.

This dismal state of affairs may be ascribed to traditional opinion that the *Punica* is tedious and bad, not only the longest extant Roman poem but also the worst. I find this an odd assessment for a number of reasons: first because few people appear to have actually read it, second because it would seem to indicate a sample size far larger than the nine Roman epics that survive (of which only five are meaningfully complete), and last because I have personally found much in the work to appreciate. Although spread out across seventeen books, the poem is only 207 lines longer than Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (several thousand shorter than the *Iliad*), and its retelling of Rome's existential war with Hannibal as both epic and history yields a genre-bending work whose efforts at mythologizing, politicking, and societal self-examination alone would make it worthy of study as a fascinating cultural relic, even if it made for a boring read—which it happily does not. Comparisons are inherently odious and I will not overstate the case by claiming for Silius the unified vision of Virgil, the invention of Ovid, or the dark allure of Lucan. But despite what one has been given to assume, he is in respectable command of all these qualities, and if one further remembers that Silius was a major statesman of his day, no less than a former consul of Rome, the true value of the *Punica* as a unique literary artifact and historical perspective is scarcely deniable.

Even so, the influence of poor reputation has had an understandably dampening effect on readership and scholarship alike, historically limiting both demand for a translation and the resources that would aid in accomplishing one. Yet although the poem's title today still causes Google to produce pictures of flowering fruit (the word *Punica* evidently being of greater note as the taxonomic genus of pomegranates than as the name of Rome's least loved epic), the academic tide over the last thirty years has seen the start of a remarkable turning. Dissertation

commentaries by K.O. Matier (Book 11, 1980) and Denis Feeney (Book 1, 1982), albeit unpublished, were the first major studies in any language to address the *Punica* in over a century, and they cracked the floodgates to a distinguished trickle of Silian scholars including Raymond Marks, William Dominik, John Jacobs, and Robert Cowan (to name a few). In particular, heroic efforts by Augoustakis, Bernstein, and R. Joy Littlewood have shone a collective light into the Flavian gloom, partly kindled by the commentaries they have furnished to several additional sections of the poem. Today, Dominik's 2010 call that "[a] translation of the *Punica* is needed in English, preferably matching the Latin line by line" (446) rings louder and more answerably than ever.

The following translation and commentary to Book 1 marks the beginning of my attempt to heed that call. Rendering the *Punica* into strict line-for-line blank verse with special attention to diction and pace, I believe I have uncovered a poetic power in Silius unrecoverable from the prose translations, admirably accurate as they are, revealing a work of great thoughtfulness on the legacy of Roman conquest and of prodigious learning in Roman literature. If I largely neglect in these brief remarks to confront aesthetic criticism of Silius head on, it is partly out of hope that his work—finally seen in *literary* translation—will speak for itself, proving that while it may falter occasionally in a specific image, transition, or simile, the *Punica* ultimately fails neither as a dramatization of the past nor as an engaging piece of poetry. At the absolute least, the poem's position as a work of historical mythmaking and generic experimentation ought to qualify it as a fascinating read; that it might also be an enjoyable one is icing on the extracanonical cake.

For suppose I told you that at the dawn of the high empire, an aging senator spent his retirement composing the only complete historical epic to survive antiquity. Suppose also that this former consul—a man who had known Nero, governed Asia, and seen a dozen emperors hold the purple—chose as his subject to retell the pivotal moment when his country

first achieved hegemony over the known world, casting back through three centuries of imperial hindsight at the grandeur that was just barely becoming Rome. Add that he situated his work as the sequel and fulfillment of Virgil's *Aeneid*, using Livy as his prime factual source in an ambitiously intertextual blend of myth and history whose narrative takes its foreign *antagonist* as the principal character, interweaving themes of fate, loyalty, historical legacy, and the origins of hate. Next, imagine that despite its reputation, the work is neither so long nor so boring as you have been told, but fast-paced, intelligently constructed, and barely seven-tenths of one percent longer than the *Odyssey*. Finally, suppose it were readily available. Would you not wish to read it?

Translation

I SHALL TAKE up those arms,* which raised to heaven
Aenead fame and, with Oenotrian laws,
Tamed Carthage!—let me, Muse, record the scale
Of old Hesperian feats, the count and class
Of men Rome reared to fight when Cadmus' clan,*
In breach of sacred bond, waged war to rule,
Settling at last which city Fortune set
To head the world. Three times, with ill-starred strife
Transgressing Jove and senatorial truce,
Were Sidon's chiefs forsworn;* sin's reckless sword
Three times brought them to break the common peace.
But in the Second, when each strove to wreck
And end the other, they drew nearest doom
Who triumphed: then, a Dardan general stormed
Agenor's keep, a Punic force besieged
The Palatine, and walls alone saved Rome.*
The causes of such wrath, the hatred nursed

By ceaseless drive, the arms passed sire to son
Are mine to bare, revealing heaven's plans*
As, from its roots, I trace this great event.

Pygmalion's land once, from beyond the blue,
To flee those realms profaned by fratricide,
Cast Dido onto Libya's fateful shores,
Where, for a price, she laid new city walls
Around the coast she'd won with cowskin strips.*
There, Juno (so the ancients thought) left Greece
And fair Mycenae, Agamemnon's home,
To found those exiles an eternal race.*
Yet when, above all states, Rome's head rose high
And even sent its ships asea to sail
Its battle-winning banners round the world,
She watched with dread and drove Phoenician hearts
To rage for war; but that first fight's attempt
Was crushed, the Libyans' labors dashed upon
Sicanian waves.* Again she went, rearmed,
And tried once more. One leader was enough
For her to roil all lands and stir the waves,
One *Hannibal*—with him, she dared duel fate.
  That warlord now donned all her godly wrath,
And she rejoiced this man of blood would soon
Rain storms of ruin on Latinus' realm:
"To Latium, flouting me, Troy's exile brought
Dardania and his twice-felled household gods,
And set Lavinium under Teucrian sway*—
At least till Roman corpses crowd your banks,
Ticinus!* and you, Trebia, flood Gaul's fields,
So clogged with Pergamese blood, weaponry,
And dead your tides turn back! till Trasimene
Shrinks from its once-still pools, soon frothing flesh!
Till I watch Cannae dig Hesperia's grave,
All Iapygia gush Ausonian gore,

And you, Aufidus, cramped as banks close in
With shields and helmets and men's severed limbs,
Scarce force your way to Adriatic shores!"
With words, she fired the youth for feats of war.
  By nature factious and of crooked faith
Was he, of towering guile but far from fair.
Once armed, he knew no god, made bold to sin,
And scorned the prize of peace; deep in his bones,
Thirst burned for human blood. His full youth yearned
To blot Aegates out, shame of his sires,
And drown their treaty in Sicilian seas:
Thus Juno's plan made his heart hope for fame.
By now, in dreams, he charged the Capitol
Or marched at speed across the highest Alps.
The slaves outside his door would wake in fear
From awful cries amidst the still of night
And find the man perspiring from the strain
Of future fights and waging fancied wars.
  Such rage at Italy's Saturnian soil
Arose in boyhood from his frenzied sire.
Through Barcas' ancient Surian line, he traced
Descent from Belus;* for when Dido fled
From Tyre a widowed slave, that youthful heir
To Belus dodged the wicked king's foul force
And linked his lot to hers in everything.
So high-born, battle-tested Hamilcar,
As soon as Hannibal's first words were said
Employed his skill at rousing wrath to plant
The seeds in his boy's heart for war with Rome.
  The city's center held Elissa's cult,
Where Tyrians gave the foundress' ghost their young;*
Around it, yews and pines threw scaly shade
That blocked out heaven's light and hid the shrine.
It's here that long ago, we're told, the queen
Cast off her mortal cares. Here, statues made
In mournful marble stood: lord Belus led

His Belid line, Agenor graced his clan,
And she—near Phoenix, namesake of the land—
At last sat with Sychaeus, feet atop
The Phrygian's sword.* A hundred altars stood
To heaven's gods and to the darkling lord.
Here, hell-garbed, hair unbound, the priestess called
On Enna's goddess and the Acheron.*
The earth roared, dreadful rasping pierced the gloom,
And on the altars blazed unkindled fire.
Then spellbound spirits soared up through the void,
And sweat streamed down Elissa's marble brow.
This sanctum Hannibal sought for his sire,
And inside, Hamilcar searched his son's face:
No fright at the Massylian's* bacchic cries,
Nor at the temple's wretched rites, the doors
Adrip with gore, or flames that flared with chants.*
So his sire kissed him, stroked his head, and stirred
His spirit with this rousing rush of words:
"The Phrygian race, restored, binds Cadmus' heirs
With unjust treaties; if fate cannot have
Our land's disgrace uprooted at my hands
Then wish that honor yours, son! Swear to war
The Laurentines to death—let Tyrrhene youths
Bewail your birth now, boy, and as you grow,
May Latium's wives refuse to mother sons."*
  This spurred him on to words not lightly said:
"In time, I'll hunt Rome down by land and sea
Till sword and fire reforge Rhoeteum's fate.
No gods shall stop me, no pacts pausing war,
Nor Alpine peaks, nor the Tarpeian rock!—
I pledge this by the might of *our* god Mars*
And by your ghost, O Queen!" Then a black beast,
Slain for the three-formed goddess,* was split wide
Still breathing so the priestess, seeking signs,
Could search the soul that fled its fresh-bared guts.
But when, in keeping with her ancient art,

She entered heaven's mind, this speech came forth:
"Aetolian wastes strewn wide with battle dead,
And lakes ablaze with Idan blood I see!*
How high the cliffs rise, reaching to the stars,
And from its airy summit hang your tents . . .
Now ranks rush down the ridges! ramparts quake
And smoke! in lands stretched under Western skies
Gleam flames of Sidon! watch the Po run blood!
A grim-faced man lies, heaped on arms and men,
The third to bring the Thunderer utmost spoils.*
Ah! what storm's this, whose sudden cloudspikes crack
High heaven's vault with flame's aetherial flash?
Vast are gods' ventures: thrones thunder on high,
While Jove makes war*—I see this!" Juno stopped
Her seeing more: the guts at once fell still
And hid their hardships and protracted toil.
So, with war safe in his son's secret heart,*
To mankind's bounds, Gibraltar and Cadiz,
Herculean Pillars, he bore Afric flags
In which fierce fight the Tyrian general fell.*
Then Hasdrubal received the reins of power,
And sacked the splendors of Spain's sunset land,
Its men and Baetic tribes, with wrongful rage.*
Grim was this leader's heart, cureless his wrath,
Violence his rule's reward. Grown hard from love
Of blood, his madness gloried to be feared,
And only novel tortures quenched his rage.
A man of beauty, battle-proven nerve,
And ancient stock was Tagus,* whom he fixed,
Defying god and man, high on a cross,
To flaunt at those who grieved their graveless king.
For Tagus, named for waves that run with gold,
Nymphs mourned throughout Spain's riverbanks and caves—
Wails he'd have wished no more from Lydia's waves,
Pactolus' pools, nor from the gold-washed plains
Which yellow with the Hermus' flooding sands.

First to take hand in war and last in peace,
When, mounting his swift steed, he loosed the reins,
No sword nor far-thrown spear could stop the man
From hurtling past in triumph, and both sides
Could pick out Tagus by his armor's gold.
On wicked wood he hung, deformed in death,
When his slave saw him, slyly seized a sword
(His master's favorite), burst into the court,
And tore twin gashes in the killer's breast.*
But Punic blood, when roused by wrath or woe,
Makes savage sport: they raced to torture him.
No flames nor white-hot steel, nor boundless blows
That sliced his mangled flesh with countless strokes,
Nor torturers' hands to bathe his marrow's depths
In anguish and set fires amidst the wounds
Were lacking. Deeds too wild to see or say—
With savage skill, as far as torment willed,
They stretched his body till all blood burst free,
His limbs went liquid, and hot bones belched smoke!
Yet still sound-minded, he laughed through the pain
As if just watching, shamed his flagging foes,
And clamored for a cross to match his lord's.
  While piteously he paid and scorned the price,
The army, shaken by its leader's loss,
Clamored for "Hannibal!" with one keen cry.
This stemmed from how he seemed his father's heir,
From widespread knowledge he was sworn to war,
From his fresh fearless youth, his fitting drive,
His trick-strewn heart, and inborn way with words.
First, Libya acclaimed him to command,
Then came the Pyrenees and warlike Spain.*
Soon, haughty confidence grew in his heart
That he held sway across such lands and seas.
For—parched by southern winds and Phoebus' torch
With Cancer boiling over—Libya
Is much of Asia, or a third of earth.*

Its rosy east is bound by Lagus' stream,
Which pounds the glutted sea through seven gulfs,
But where its fairer regions face the Bears,
Herculean straits stop its near peaks' approach
To Europe's sighted plains, blocked by the sea,
The furthest reach allowed to Atlas' name
By Atlas, he whose shrug would down the sky.
His cloud-capped head holds up the stars, the spheres'
Eternal structures rise from his high neck,
Frost pales his beard, vast pine-trees sheathe his brow
In shade, winds whip his hollow temples raw,
And frothing streams rush raining from his mouth,
His stone sides battered by those ocean depths
Where weary Titan bathes his panting steeds
To hide his flaming coach in fuming waves.*
Though Africa unwinds its scaly wastes
In regions rife with venom-seething snakes,
Its temperate zone is blessed with fertile fields
No Ennan or Egyptian farms outdo.
There rove Numidians, a reinless race,
Who steer their steeds by toying at their ears
With switches, which they work no worse than whips.
This land breeds wars and warlike men, though these
Play tricks instead of trusting naked blades.*
A second camp was full of Spanish troops
His sire's success in Europe won their side.*
Warhorses' whinnies here filled up the fields,
And here, stout hooves drew chariots to the fray,
Nor have Olympians raced with hotter wheels.*
They hold life cheap and lightly dash toward death,
For once their years have passed the prime of strength,
They chafe at time and, keen to shun old age,
Take fate in hand. The land there holds all ores:
Alongside white electrum's alloyed veins
The coarse ground grows black iron. Though the gods
Conceal these calls to crime, Asturian greed

Sends divers deep in Earth to rend her bowels
And come back cursed, stained by the gold they've gouged.
Here, Douro, Tagus, and Pactolus vie
With waves that wash the Grovii's shining sands
And wipe minds blank as Lethe does in hell.*
The soil treats Ceres kindly, Bacchus well,
And knows no peer in raising Pallas' trees.*
  Once these tribes let the Tyrian tyrant take
Their reins of state, he showed his father's skill
And allied them, now using arms, now bribes
To void the Senate's acts.* The first in toil,
First to set foot advancing, or pitch in
To speed a rising wall, he never slouched
In any quest for fame. Not needing sleep,
He kept the watch and spent his nights in arms,
Or on the ground beside his Libyan men,
Cloaked just like them,* to prove he shared their strength.
Now he rode high ahead his lengthy line
Parading his command, next bared his head
And bore the rainstorms' rage and falling skies.
As Punic troops watched, scared Asturians quaked
When on his startled steed, despite Jove's darts
And cloud-borne bolts the winds shook loose as fire,
They saw him passing. No long, dusty march
Could weaken him, for all the Dog-day heat.
When fiery rays cracked wide the scorching earth,
And when the noonday sunlight parched the sky,
He thought it womanly to set up shade,
But trained his thirst and shunned what springs he spied.
He'd likewise rein and break in bucking steeds
For battle, vaunt his throwing arm's dread fame,
Or swim through unknown rivers' roaring rocks
To call his comrades from the other side;
He'd likewise climb first up a conquered wall,
And every time he took the savage field
And rained swift steel, he'd leave wide wakes of red.

So—hounding fate and bent on breaking pacts
In time—for now, he fought Rome how he could,
And struck the Capitol from Earth's far ends.
  His trumpets first assailed Saguntum's gates,*
A war he waged for want of greater war.
Not far from shore, Herculean walls rose up
A gentle ridge, blessed with his noble name
By Zacynthos, long buried in its heights.
This comrade of Alcides,* bound for Thebes
On Geryon's death, had praised their feat on high:
For that fiend had three souls, three hands to arm
His bodies, and a triple neck of heads.
Earth saw no other man one death had brought
To no end: the harsh sisters, having cut
His life-threads twice, had woven him a third.
While there the victor* showed his vaunted spoils
And called the captive herds to midday drink,
He stepped upon a snake, whose sunbaked banes
Burst through its swollen throat with deadly force
And laid the Argive low on Spanish soil.
Soon settlers fled there, brought by the South Wind
From their home isle where, swirled in Grecian seas,
Laërtes' realm* had reached once: Zacynthos.
Slow starts soon sped when land-strapped Daunians
Came from the crush of thriving Ardea—
Then led by great-souled men, now just a name.*
This race stayed free and honored as of old
Through pacts that barred the town from Punic rule.*
  Advancing, Sidon's chief tore up this truce:
His barracks, hot for battle,* shook the plains.
Aquake with rage, atop his panting horse,
The fiend surveyed the walls and trembling eaves.
He'd warned them to stand down and part the gates,
That, shut inside, far from their truce and far
Ausonia, they'd meet merciless defeat;
The Senate's acts, their laws, rights, faith, and gods

Were in his hands. Keen to make good these words,
He sent a spear straight through the armor of
Caïcus, who stood taunting at the wall.
Astride the weapon driven through his guts,
He fell, limbs flailing, from the rampart's height,
And brought his killer back the blood-warmed shaft.
Then following his lead, with one great cry,
They cloaked the walls in a dark cloud of spears.
Clear courage far from lost amid the mass,
Each faced their leader fit to fight alone.
One's Balearic sling* ran thick with shots
Twirled thrice in its light strap high overhead
Then sent midair, the lead lost to the winds;
One swung stones hissing forth with sturdy arms,
While one threw lances, launched from lightweight bows.
  In front, their chief, decked in his father's arms,
Now hurled a fuming brand aflame with pitch,
Now pressed ahead with stakes, now spears, now stones,
Unstringing snake-baned arrows, doubling death
With tireless pleasure in his quiver's tricks,
Like Dacians in the warlike Getic lands,
Who spray darts, sharp with native toxins, down
The two-named Hister's unsuspecting banks.*
His tactic was to ring the hill with towers
And block the city in with circling forts.
How wholly lost now is the holy name
Of ancient Loyalty!*—*those* men stood firm
To see their flight cut off and walls closed in,
Sure Italy deserved Saguntum's death
Still loyal. Soon all strained with keener strength
To twist the Greek ballista's twanging ropes
And fling vast boulders forth, or likewise strive,
Once that great weapon changed its load, to spring
An ironclad ash-tree bursting through the ranks.
Roars rang out on both sides; the lines were linked
By fighting fierce as if the circled walls

Were Rome! And he cried: "Do our thousands halt,
Though armed from birth, amidst a captured foe?
Are you ashamed—ashamed to start? What good's
Your general's bold debut, when it's this news
We'll spread through Italy, these tales of war?"
  The hotheads cheered, for Hannibal seeped through
Their bones and stirred them up with wars to come.
They struck the walls barehanded and, repulsed,
Left severed limbs behind, then raised a ramp
To drop small bands of fighters on the town.
But those inside were armed to hold the gates
With a *phalarica** crowds had to heave:
A fearsome sight torn from the Pyrenees'
Snow-covered heights, this oak-tree's running point
Alone left walls scarce standing, yet the rest,
Smeared black with sulfur, smoked with dripping pitch
And, hurled like lightning from the town's high tower,
Fell plowing through the air with flickering flame,
Much as a comet's bloody torch-like tail
Will dull the eyes on route from sky to earth.
Each time it sped midair and smote his men,
The general gaped to see them burst in smoke;
And when mid-whirl it struck a turret's side,
Fire rose inside it, eating through its frame,
Till arms and men were crushed in burning ruins.
At last, with shields linked in a tortoise shell,*
The Punic force approached the fort unseen
To undermine the walls, and breached the town.
The conquered ramparts gave an awful crash
As Hercules' toil tumbled,* boulders broke,
And rumbling shook the sky. (High in the Alps,
When cliffs of rock shear off an airy peak,
The mountains likewise split in sounding shards.)
Still reaching for the clouds, the stones might yet
Have stopped the ranks, had they not rushed at once
From every side to fight amid the ruins.

First flashing forward, bright with blooming youth,
Was Murrus, of Rutulian blood (and Greek
From his Saguntine mother, so paired lines
Joined Zacynthos and Italy in him).*
He'd watched as Aradus cheered comrades on,
And, where his body showed between his helm
And breastplate, stopped his progress with a shaft
That pinned him down as overhead he jeered:
"Down, Punic fraud! So, you'd have been the first
To triumph up the Capitol?—dream on!
Now go fight Jove in Hell!"* And, seething forth,
He hurled a spear that stuck in <*someone's*>* groin,
Then stomped his face as it convulsed in death.
"This is the road," he cried, "to Rome for you,
O fearsome few, the end you're rushing toward!"
At that, he dodged the arms and snatched the shield
Hiberus had rejoined with, slashing him.
Land-rich and rich in flocks but lacking fame,
Hiberus had fought beasts with bow and lance:
A happy, blameless life of forest shade,
If he'd just kept his darts on family land!
In pity for him, Ladmus rushed to strike—
"Go tell dead Hamilcar," he* cruelly laughed,
"That once it's killed the ranks, my hand will send
Him Hannibal to join you!" And, reared high,
He stabbed deep in his helmet's brazen crest
And sprayed his crackling skull right through its sheet.
Chremetes next, whose unshorn tresses thatched
His brow like a fur cap, then Masulis
And Karthalo (fresh for the fight, though old)
Who did not fear to pet a nursing lion,
And Bagrada, whose stream's source decked his shield,*
And Nasamon Hiempsal, who dared seize
And strip the ships wrecked in vast Syrtis' swells*—
All fell as one, slain by his raging hand.
Nor did the venomed snake-defanger live,

Skilled Athyr, whose touch lulled seasnakes to sleep
And used horned vipers to test bastard blood.*
You, too—from Garamantia's mantic groves
And noted for your helmet's back-bent horns*—
Cursed countless sooths that said you'd come safe home,
And showed Jove's lie, Hiarbas, as you died.
And now, as ramparts swelled with heaps of dead
And smoke rose black above the bloodsoaked ruins,
With greedy shouts, he sought to duel their chief.
Yet someplace else (where young men, unforeseen,
Broke through the gates) as if no dart nor troop
Could bring him death or harm, on every side
Raged Hannibal, who brandished his new sword
Forged in enchanted fire by Temisus,
An elder from Hesperian shores, whose charms
And magic spells he swore embittered* steel.
As fierce as Mars, out ranging Thracian lands
Aloft his chariot, weapons all aglow,
To rout the Titans* till the fiery fray
Bent to his panting steeds and screeching wheels,
He'd now sent Hostus, red-haired Pholus, huge
Metiscus, Lygdus, Durius, and blond
Galaesus, and Gyas and Chromis (twins),
Down to the shades. Then Daunus, best of men
At moving mobs and molding minds with speech,
That cunning guard of laws, mixed these harsh words
With spears: "What madness of your Punic sire's
Has brought you here? These aren't Sidonian spires
A woman built or purchased for a fee,*
Nor shorelines parceled out as exiles' sands,
But god-laid walls and Roman pacts you see—!"
But while the whole field heard him, with a force
That tore him from the mass of men and spears
To bind his hands behind him, Hannibal
Sent him for torture at his anger's ease;
Then he rebuked his men, bade banners brought,

And led them raging through the very heaps
Of death and slaughter, rousing each by name
With lust for looting the untaken town.
  But after trembling tongues brought word the fight
Fared lucklessly elsewhere and heaven gave
The day to Murrus, he went mad and fled
In mindless frenzy from his mighty task.
Death glinted on his helmet's bobbing crest
As flame-tailed comets frighten savage kings
By bleeding fire when their black torches spew
Red beams through heaven, gleaming with cruel light—
A twinkling star that spells a nation's end.*
Pikes parted as he passed, past flags and men,*
And both sides quaked. His fiery spearpoint flared
With evil light, and far off shone his shield:
Thus the Aegean surges to the stars,
Long-swollen by the roaring Northwest Wind,
And brings its surf ashore, while sailors shake
With hearts gone cold, gales sound their gusts afar,
And crests traverse the trembling Cyclades.
No showers of spears all aimed at him, nor brands
That smoked his face, nor catapulted stones
Restrained him. Once he glimpsed his foe's bright helm
And bloodstained arms, ablaze like sunlit gold,
He raved: "Behold the man who would hold back
The Libyans and their labors, stalling war
On Rome. Now, Murrus, I will make you watch
Your pacts prove worthless as your Ebro's waves!*
Keep all your loyalty, your precious rights—
Leave me the thwarted gods!" Murrus replied,
"At last, you're here! I've long yearned for a duel
And burned to have your head. Take what fraud's fruits
You're owed and seek Italian soil in hell:
Long treks to Dardan land through snowy Alps
And Pyrenees, my hand shall see you spared!"
  Midspeech, he* spied his enemy at hand

And, trusting his bad footing, tore a stone
From rampart rubble, rolled it on his head,
And heaved the boulder hard in headlong dive.
Struck by this shard of wall, the climber crouched
Till shame inflamed his heart, which scorned to fail
From poor position. Teeth gnashed, he strove up
The rocks that blocked him, straining toward his foe.
But once drawn close, agleam with nearer light,
He hauled himself up, it was as if all
The Punic camps had swiftly closed their ranks
Round trembling Murrus, dazed before such foes.
A thousand hands seemed flashing thick with swords,
And on his helmet nodded countless crests.
Both sides cried out, as if fire flashed through all
Saguntum. Dragging limbs gone slack with death's
Approach, the trembling Murrus prayed his last:
"Founder Alcides, in whose steps we dwell
On sacred land, turn back this threatening storm,
If I don't slacken in your walls' defense!"
  But while the praying suppliant eyed heaven,
He cried, "We'll see if Hercules won't deem
Our cause the worthier! If you don't mind
Your boldness matched, unbowed Alcides, see
Your early years in mine. With friendly might,
Recalling now that you once sacked Troy first,*
Be with me as I wipe out Phrygia's heirs!"
At that, he drove his sword with Punic rage
Till halted by its hilt which, once withdrawn,
Drenched his dread armor in the dead man's gore.
  Shocked by the hero's fall, his men rushed forth
To keep his corpse and famous armor from
His haughty victor's spoils. Each called in turn
To swell their band till, joined, all marched en masse.
Here rocks, here lances clanged his casque and shield.
They struck with stakes, heaved leaden shots and vied
To launch them, shearing off the helmet plumes

That bobbed above the bloodshed, to his crest's
Disgrace. And now his limbs ran thick with sweat,
And spears stood bristling from his breastplate's scales
The blows gave neither chance nor place to change.
Knees buckling, his slack shoulders dropped his shield,
And heavy gasps dragged streaming jets of steam
From his parched lips—pained pants he forced aloud
In roars and moaning, muffled by his helm.
He blazed then, as when barking Spartan hounds
And hunters drive a boar beyond the trees,
Who rears his bristling back for one last fight,
His champing jaws afoam with gore, and turns
A flaming pair of tusks against their spears.*
Mind mastering pain, he cheered that courage shines
In hardship, deeming risk the price of fame.
  Then, suddenly, the cloud-packed sky was split
And rumbling shook the earth! Above the fray,
The Father thundered twice with double bolts.
Then through the clouds and winds' dark whirl there flashed
A javelin avenging unjust war
Which lodged its head in the opponent's thigh.*
O high Tarpeian rocks where gods reside,
And you, Troy's virgin shrine whose altars burn
Forever with Laömedontic flames*—
Oh, how much in the sight of that false spear
Heaven promised you! Had its point further pierced
That fiend, the Alps would still be barred to man,
Nor, Trasimene, would Allia bow to you.*
But Juno, perched atop the Pyrenees,
Watched his young ardor and first martial zeal,
And, seeing him wounded when the spearpoint flew,
Soared through the air, wrapped in a gloomy cloud,
And wrenched the rigid shaft from his stiff bones.
He used his shield to mask his bleeding limbs
And, slowly straining, step by shaky step,
He dragged himself away and left the wall.

Night's welcome shades at last hid land and sea
And broke the fighting, robbing it of light.
But stout hearts stayed up and restored the wall
In one night's work.* Doom sharpened the besieged,
Their last stand stauncher for their shattered state.
Fierce women here, here weak old men and boys
Vied in despair to share the piteous task,
While soldiers with wounds weeping ferried stones.
The leading elders now heard duty's call,
Met, and chose envoys whom they urged and prayed
To aid their ailing state, bring safety back,
And, facing fate, to beg for Latin arms:*
"Go quick now, speed your ship by oar and sail!
The fiend lies hurt in camp, the fight is paused—
It's time to brave the risks in search of fame.
Go quick! Plead loyalty and crumbling walls
To fetch a better ending from our source.*
And last—come back while still Saguntum stands!"
So, stepping swiftly for the nearest beach,*
They fled full-sail across the sea-blue spray.
Tithonus' dewy spouse* was ousting sleep,
Her ruddy horses breathing down the peaks
With their first whinnies, rosy reins astir.
Now, on the new-raised rampart's walls, young men
Revealed their town enclosed by that night's towers.
All action paused and grieving soldiers eased
The siege blockade as lust for battle lulled,
Their cares in crisis turned their general's way.
Meanwhile the Rutuli had sailed far seas
From whose depths the Herculean hills emerged
To raise the cloud-capped rock of Monaco.
The Thracian North Wind, ruling these cruel crags
Alone and always cold, now strikes their shores,
Now pounds the very Alps with whistling wings,
But where he flows out from the frozen pole,
No other wind dares rise opposing him.*

His whirling churns the sea, whose breakers gasp
And pile peaks underneath its heaving swirl—
As now through clouds he raised the Rhine and Rhône.
With this dire raging of the North Wind passed,
They mourned their run of luck in war and waves
And spoke of their uncertain end: "O home,
O Loyalty's famed house, where's your fate now?
Do holy towers still crown your hills, or—gods!—
Are ashes all that's left of such a name?
Bring gentle breezes and arouse fair winds,
If Punic flames don't yet dance on our shrines
And strength to succor lies in Latium's ships!"
They wailed both night and day with such laments
Until their keel had reached Laurentum's coast,
Where Father Tiber streams gold to the sea,
Enriched with tribute from the Anio's waves.*
From there, they sought the kindred walls of Rome.
The consul called a council, pure and poor,
Of grand patricians known by conquests' names*—
The senators, whose valor equaled heaven.
Their daring deeds and sacred drive for right
Exalted them, long-haired* and simply fed,
Whose plough-worn hands showed no sloth with a sword.
At ease with scraps, they wished no wealth at heart,
But rode from Triumphs back to humble homes.
Upon the temple threshold's sacred doors,*
War trophies, captured chariots, and arms
From conquered kings—a savage battle axe,
Pierced shields, still-bloodied spears, and bars from gates—
Were hung. Here, you could read the Punic War,*
Aegates and, torn off a sunken fleet,
Prows witnessing that Libya had drowned.
Here were Senonian helms, the wicked sword
That set gold's weight, and arms Camillus bore
When he paraded back to oust the Gauls.
Here were Aeacid spoils, Epirot flags,

Ligurians' bristling crests, crude shields brought back
From Spanish tribes, and Alpine javelins.
But once her envoys' squalid shape* spelled out
Dread war and doom, it seemed Saguntum's self
Stood in their sight to make its final pleas.
Then sadly, agèd Sicoris* began:
"O holy loyal race, rightly avowed
Mars' heirs by all who kneel before your sword,
Don't think we've crossed the sea for some small scrape:
We've seen our land besieged, our walls aquake,
And him mad seas or coupling beasts gave birth—
For we've seen Hannibal. O gods, I pray
You keep at war with us, far from these gates,
That youth's death-dealing hand! How vast he drives
His sounding spears, how great he grows when armed!
He's roused Gibraltar, riles the peoples sunk
In Syrtis' sands, and eyes still larger towns
Beyond the Pyrenees, Ebro be damned!
All Spain, all savage Gaul's swift cavalry,
All Libya looms, parched from its scorching pole.
This rising flood that foams amidst the deep,
If you stay put, will dash your cities down!
Or do you think, as peace breaks on his blades,
That for this youth who's sworn to reckless war
It's prize enough to rule Saguntum's ruins?
Go quickly, men, and douse this kindling flame,
Or troubles will return, their danger grown.
Yet oh, forget the fear that even now
Its sparks of war lie smoking—would you scorn
To lend your kin Saguntum your right hand?
As you've long honored the Rutulians' source,
Laurentum's gods, and Trojan mother's signs,
Preserve the righteous who were forced to change
Acrisian ramparts for Herculean heights!*
When Zancle faced Sicilian tyrant force,
You deigned to help, and saved Campania's walls

From Samnite strength—acts you deemed worthy of
Sigeum's sons.* As Daunia was my home
(I swear, Numicius, by your secret springs!)
When too-rich Ardea's ousted youth brought shrines
And sacraments from founder Turnus' house,
Past Pyrenees I bore Laurentum's name.*
Why should I, like a body's severed limbs,
Be scorned? And why's the treaty's price our blood?"
  At last, their speeches ceased and (wretched sight!)
With open hands upheld and garments torn,
They hurled their squalid selves flat on the floor.
The careworn elders argued then. As if
He saw Saguntum burning, Lentulus*
Called for the youth to pay, and for swift force
To torch the fields of Carthage if denied.
But wary-minded Fabius foresaw:*
Vexed by uncertainties, slow picking fights,
And best at leading war with swords undrawn,
He held, in such affairs, one first should find
If one mad warlord or their Senate had
Raised martial flags, and should send men to see.
Prophetic prescience poured out of his heart
As Fabius foretold the coming war,
The way an ancient helmsman, high and aft,
Spots signs a Northwest Wind will reach his sails,
And long before that rigs them to the mast.
But tears and woeful wrath drove all to rush
Toward hidden fate, and senators were picked
To seek their chief; if he stayed armed and deaf
To treaties, they would turn to Carthage next,
Nor wait to war upon its godless men.

Commentary

This translation is principally founded on the standard text of Josef Delz, though numerous departures are discussed below. The commentary draws on a variety of sources but owes its greatest debts to that by Denis Feeney and to the notes for the Italian edition of Maria Assunta Vinchesi. As always, I am grateful for the improving comments of this journal's readers and editors; for the encouragement of Chris Parton, Hannah Semmelhack, and Yelena Baraz; and for the continued interference of Timothy Ruszala, without whose scathing suggestions neither my works nor my days would likely make the trip from *ovum* to *malum*, forever soda just searching for hock.

1 *I shall take up those arms*: The *Punica* opens on a highly intertextual phrase (in Latin, *ordior arma*) loudly proclaiming the poem's marriage of history and poetry while also displaying its author's familiarity with Roman literary tradition. Placing great thematic importance on an epic's first word was a longstanding poetic precedent crystallized in Virgil's *Aeneid*, whose beginning word, *arma* ("arms" or "war"), recurs here, indicating that this poem will take up Virgil's martial thread. Silius, however, gives his *arms* a backseat to the verb *ordior* ("I begin" or "I compose"), a term more commonly used of prose composition—poets typically sing—and originally applied to the manufacture of textiles: "I weave." Although unexpected, this choice of word aptly describes the *Punica*'s project of inter*weaving* poetry and history even as it nods toward the latter genre, since Livy uses forms of *ordior* twice in the last sentence of the preface to his history of Rome, Silius's principal historical source for the *Punica*. By join-

ing Livy's *ordior* to Virgil's *arma*, now in second place behind his own first-person action, Silius confidently charts a new authorial course, weaving strands from Roman epic and historical writing together into the fabric of his own mythohistorical poem.

2–5 *Aenead . . . Oenotrian . . . Cadmus' clan*: A learned display of aliases elevates the tone but bamboozles the modern reader. *Oenotrian* and *Hesperian* appear here as little more than poetic terms for "Italian," but the additional synonym *Aenead* ("sons of Aeneas") cannot help but invoke the poem's adoptive prequel, the *Aeneid*, while emphasizing the time that has elapsed between them. Where Virgil sang of *arma uirumque* ("arms and a man") in his opening line, Silius's *arma* is paired instead with a plural *uiros* (*men*, 5), the single man Aeneas supplanted by whole generations of his Roman descendants. On the level of thematic statement, Silius's pluralization also signals the diffuse focus of his work: though arms will dominate the *Punica*, the poem has no overriding focal character. In a similar (if less thematic) turn, the phrase *Cadmus' clan* functions as both a poetic term for the Carthaginians and an allusion to the *Thebaid* of Silius's contemporary epicist Statius, recounting a war between the great-great-great-grandsons of Cadmus.

6–10 *breach of sacred bond . . . Three times . . . Sidon's chiefs forsworn*: Since Carthage originated as a colony of Phoenicia, whose principal cities were Sidon and Tyre, the terms *Phoenicians*, *Sidonians*, and *Tyrians* are all used interchangeably for "Carthaginians," a people the Romans identified under any name with perfidy and the breaking of treaties. Roman bias held Carthage responsible for instigating all three Punic Wars (*Three times . . .*), but from Polybius onward the Second Pu-

nic War has invariably been considered the decisive moment of Rome's rise, *settling at last which city* would achieve primacy in the ancient Mediterranean.

13–16 *they drew nearest doom . . . walls alone saved Rome*: Silius's debt to Livy is pervasive, but his sentiment that Rome came closer than Carthage to total annihilation before ultimately winning (*propiusque fuere periclo, / quis superare datum*) is an unusually direct paraphrase, drawn from Livy 21.1.2: *propius periculum fuerint qui vicerunt*. The *Dardan general* is Scipio Africanus (*Dardan* = Trojan, by extension Roman), who will eventually lead Rome to victory over Carthage (*Agenor's keep*, after King Agenor of Tyre). The term *Punic*, deriving from the original Latin word for the Phoenicians, also refers to the Carthaginians. The claim that *walls alone saved Rome* forecasts the city's desperate condition following the disastrous Battle of Cannae; reliance on defensive walls means that defending men have failed.

19 *heaven's plans*: Unlike in Virgil, where destiny straightforwardly hounds Aeneas into a glorious Italian kingship no matter the hero's resistance, the narrative role of fate in the *Punica* is hamstrung by the poem's historical subject and literary inheritance. As the Roman reader well knew, Virgil set Hannibal a mythic trap, foreordaining his avenging war with Rome through Dido's curse in *Aeneid* 4 even as Jupiter's pledge of Rome's immortality in *Aeneid* 1 foreordains his failure. With Juno helping the Carthaginians much as she hindered Virgil's Trojans, Hannibal is therefore driven onward by fate in a manner reminiscent of Aeneas, only along a forking path winding between his momentous victories and his inevitable disgrace. On the historical level, the problems of predestination are even more obvious—as opposed to the events of the *Aeneid*, the

Punic War actually happened. Consequently, in taking up Virgil's theme of fate, Silius must balance real with supernatural forces, historical motives with *heaven's plans*. Opinion of the *Punica* largely depends on how well one thinks Silius strikes it.

21–25 *Pygmalion's land . . . cowskin strips*: These lines summarize the Virgilian myth of the founding of Carthage. When King Pygmalion of Tyre killed his brother Sychaeus, the latter's widow Dido fled across the seas to Africa (*Libya*), carrying the family treasure with her. There, she was allowed to purchase as much land as she could encircle in a single day with strips of bullhide, upon which plot she founded Carthage. The invidious clause *for a price* conjures up Greco-Roman prejudice regarding the Phoenician and Carthaginian merchant empires as avaricious moneygrubbers.

26–28 *Juno . . . an eternal race*: Virgil magnified Hera's support of Agamemnon and the Greeks against Homer's Trojans into his Juno's outright hatred of Aeneas. The fact that the Romans also identified Juno with the chief deity of the Punic pantheon, the goddess Tanit, allows Silius to extend this mythical enmity into history. Here, Juno's wish to *found . . . an eternal race* (*aeternam condere gentem*) perversely recalls one of the *Aeneid*'s most famous lines, in which Aeneas does the same for the Romans (*Romanam condere gentem*, 1.33).

29–35 *Yet when, above all states . . . Sicanian waves*: A jingoistically bloviating take on the First Punic War, at whose outset the Roman Republic, far from sailing *battle-winning banners round the world*, was a formidable but regional power with next to no experience at sea. This made their ultimate defeat of the seafaring Carthaginians at the naval Battle of the Aegates in 241 BCE all the

more impressive. The Aegates are an island chain off the Sicilian (*Sicanian*) west coast.

36–39 These lines are disputed. I concur with Feeney in accepting Ker's reversal of 38 and 39, which solves several grammatical issues and actually makes something of Hannibal's postponed namedrop in 39. The manuscripts have an orphan *agmina* at 36 defended by Delz, for which Duff printed and translated Madvig's emendation *omnia*, as do Augoustakis and Bernstein (though they claim not to). I follow Feeney's modification to *omnes*, read with *terras*: "all lands."

41–44 *Latinus' realm . . . Teucrian sway*: Another stream of antonomasia abridges the events of the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas (*Troy's exile*) came to the Roman region of Latium and married king Latinus's daughter Lavinia, for whom the town Lavinium is named. Trojans were also called *Dardanians* and *Teucrians* after their ancient ancestors Dardanus and Teucer. Their household gods are *twice-felled* since the city was sacked by Hercules a generation before the Greeks did the same.

46–54 *Ticinus . . .* : Juno mentions four of Hannibal's victories over the Romans, each associated with a body of water. These are the battles of Ticinus (218 BCE), of the Trebia in Cisalpine Gaul (218 BCE), of Lake Trasimene (217 BCE), and of Cannae (216 BCE), the last a crushing defeat on the banks of the river Aufidus. Being descendants of Troy (Pergamum) makes the Romans *Pergamese*, while Hesperia, Ausonia, and Iapygia are all regions or synonyms of Italy.

and you, Trebia: A vexed line. The manuscripts have *similisque mihi*, for which Gronovius read *similisque tibi*, hence my translation. Postgate proposed *famulusque*

mihi which Duff translates "obedient to me," while Delz prints *Simoisque*, an allusion to a similar episode in the Trojan War.

70–73 *Saturnian soil . . . Belus . . .* : True to his braiding of myth and history, Silius supplies Hannibal an inherited human motivation to complement Juno's divinely inspired one. Hannibal's father Hamilcar Barca (c. 275–229/8 BCE) had commanded Carthaginian forces at the end of the First Punic War, and Silius invents him a descent from one *Barcas*, son of Belus, who fled with Dido from Tyre. *Belus* (mentioned at 87) was the go-to name for Roman fantasies of ancient Phoenicia, deriving from the god Baal. *Surian*, too, is simply a more accurate rendering of "Tyrian" in the native Phoenician language, used here to accentuate the foreign atmosphere. Finally, Italy's soil is *Saturnian* because Saturn once reigned there during the Golden Age, a time of peace and prosperity Silius evokes only for Hannibal's family to shatter.

81–82 *Elissa's cult . . . their young*: Elissa is another name for Dido, whom Romans believed the Carthaginians to worship, likely misinterpreting the cult of Tanit. Roman prejudice aside, Punic religion probably did involve child sacrifice conducted at large ceremonial sites called *tophets*, though the frequency and scale of such rituals is widely debated.

89–91 *Phoenix, namesake of the land . . . Phrygian's sword*: A son of King Agenor of Tyre, Phoenix lent his name to Phoenicia. In the *Aeneid*, Dido copes with her abandonment by Aeneas (*Phrygian* = Trojan) by clambering up a flaming pyre and falling on his sword. Virgil, too, shows Dido reunited in death with her husband Sychaeus (*Aen.* 6.474), albeit in the underworld rather than the very place she *cast off her mortal cares* (86).

94 *Enna's goddess and the Acheron*: Underworld deities. *Enna's goddess* is Proserpine, whose abduction by the king of the underworld (*darkling lord*, 92) was traditionally set near the Sicilian settlement of Enna. The Acheron is one of the underworldly rivers, though the priestess seems to be invoking its god.

101 *Massylian*: The Massylii were a Berber kingdom of eastern Numidia, allied to Carthage and sufficiently proximal for poetic purposes. They were not typically associated with witchcraft, much less Bacchus. But Virgil mentions a Massylian priestess at Dido's death in *Aen.* 4.483, so precedent presumably prevailed.

103 *with chants*: In Latin, the widely accepted *carmine*, picking up from 95–97. Delz, however, defends the transmitted *cardine*, whence Augoustakis and Bernstein translate, "at the door hinge's creaking."

109–12 *Swear to war / The Laurentines . . . mother sons*: Hamilcar's swearing his son to eternal hatred of Rome is well attested historically—*Laurentine*, *Tyrrhene*, and *Latian* are all used here for "Roman." The exact import of line 112 is ambiguous in the Latin; Duff takes it to mean that mothers may refuse to rear their children (i.e., to fighting age), while Augoustakis and Bernstein think they may refuse to bear them. My translation charts a middle course.

115–18 *Rhoeteum's fate . . . our god Mars*: Much like Lucan's Caesar, the Silian Hannibal is characterized by his blasphemy. His defiance of the gods in 116 carries over to the following line, since the *Tarpeian rock* is a stone outcropping on the Capitoline Hill, site of Rome's great temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus. As the father of Romulus, Mars was closely identified with

Rome, making Hannibal's appropriation of the war god (*nostri . . . Martis*) a shocking affront. Rhoeteum is a promontory near Troy.

120 *three-formed goddess*: Hecate, goddess of magic, often depicted in triplicate.

125–26 *Aetolian wastes . . . Idan blood I see . . .* : Down to the phrase *sanguine cerno* ("blood I see"), this speech echoes the Cumaean Sibyl's similar prophecy at *Aeneid* 6.83–97, with the key difference that Aeneas is expressly told he will win. The *Aetolian wastes* are the fields of Apulia in southern Italy, where the Aetolian hero Diomedes legendarily settled after the Trojan War. In a comparable word association, the Romans are *Idan* due to Mount Ida's proximity to Troy. What follows is a decidedly ambiguous vision of Hannibal's Italian campaigns, per standard prophetic procedure. There are references to Hannibal's crossing the Alps and inflicting great slaughter in Italy, but whether the quaking ramparts of 129 are the walls of Rome—as Hamilcar surely hopes—Juno neglects to reveal (137–38).

132–33 *A grim-faced man . . . utmost spoils*: This is Marcus Claudius Marcellus (c. 270–208 BCE), a military leader five times elected to the consulship and one of the *Punica*'s larger characters, killed in action in Book 15. Silius refers to his best-remembered feat (actually from a different war), the securing of the *spolia opima*. These "rich spoils"—which required defeating an enemy king in single combat, stripping his armor, and dedicating them at the ancient temple of Jupiter Feretrius (*the Thunderer*) in Rome—were the most prestigious military honor a Roman could attain. It was also the rarest, with just three canonical recipients (the others being Romulus and a shadowy figure named Aulus Cornelius Cossus), of whom only Marcel-

lus is considered firmly historical. By the time of Silius, the *spolia opima* had become a figment of history rather than an achievable accomplishment.

134–37 *what storm's this . . . While Jove makes war*: In terms clear to the Roman audience, but not to Hannibal, the priestess begins prophesying the reversal of Carthaginian fortunes. Storms will stop Hannibal's advancing on Rome in Book 12, shortly before Jupiter enters the war in person.

140 *his son's secret heart*: The Latin does not specify whose heart this is and the grammar implies that it is Hamilcar's. Both Duff and Augoustakis–Bernstein translate accordingly, but given the way Silius led into the oath scene at 79–80 (*to plant / The seeds in his boy's heart for war with Rome*), it would be perverse not to interpret it as Hannibal's.

141–43 *To mankind's bounds . . . the Tyrian general fell*: As the westernmost point of the Mediterranean and the gateway to the ocean beyond, the straits of Gibraltar (still called the Pillars of Hercules) marked the far end of the known world. In fact, Hamilcar died subduing a section of Spain farther to the north, but Silius is stressing Carthage's international power. For the same reason, he calls Hamilcar's forces *Garamantica*, the demonym of a region on the other extreme of the Punic empire, which I translate with the more familiarly exotic *Afric*.

144–46 *Then Hasdrubal . . . wrongful rage*: One of the attendant vexations in studying the Punic Wars is the frankly silly number of Carthaginians named Hasdrubal; Silius mercifully has only three. Appearing here is the one popularly known as Hasdrubal the Fair, Hamilcar's successor in the Spanish command as well as his son-in-law. The

mainstream historical tradition (Livy, Polybius) portrayed him as a reasonably just leader, but Silius draws on a more colorfully biased version.

152–59 *Tagus . . . graveless king . . .* : The name is historically unattested; the crucifixion is not. (Readers of Sophocles' *Antigone* will be familiar with the special horror a lack of proper burial carried in the classical mind.) Less grippingly, lines 155–59 wane poetic in a series of far-flung fluvial allusions bolstering Silius's choice of name, the rivers' sole connection being that the Tagus, the Lydian Pactolus, and the Hermus were all famous for the high gold content of their waters.

166–68 *When his slave . . . killer's breast*: Hasdrubal's assassination brings us to 221 BCE. The slave's subsequent torture and death appear in Livy (21.2.6), but the episode's epic intensity stems from the Silian imagination.

190 *Then came the Pyrenees and warlike Spain*: Poetic imprecision, since Hannibal's new Spanish posting had yet to encompass the Pyrenees. The geographic laxity introduces two long ethnographic digressions (one for Africa, one for Spain) of a kind typical in Greek historical writing, and which Silius imports into epic. The bellicose Spaniard was a stock type.

195 *much of Asia, or a third of earth . . .* : Early Greek models divided the world into two continents: Europe and Asia. Debate simmered in subsequent centuries over whether Africa (*Libya*, interchangeably) constituted a third, or a part of the other two. While emphasizing the region's overall heat, the rest of the passage divides Africa into an eastern region (196–97), defined by the seven-channeled Nile (*Lagus' stream*, after the ancestor

of the Ptolemaic Pharaohs), and a northwestern region, defined by the Atlas Mountains of modern Morocco, here portrayed as the actual deity Atlas turned to stone (198–210). A smaller third region of fertile land marks the Berber kingdom of Numidia in present-day Libya (211–9).

209–10 *Titan . . . fuming waves*: That is, western seas where the Sun's chariot sets. The Sun is Sol, son of the Titan Hyperion, though by this point in the literary tradition his identity had become increasingly muddied (at 193, he was Phoebus).

219 *Play tricks instead of trusting naked blades*: Africans were notorious in the Roman mind for wielding poisoned weapons. In addition to preserving this line's sense, my translation also mimics the consonance of the Latin: *nec fidens nudo sine fraudibus ensi*.

220–21 *Spanish troops / His sire's success in Europe won their side*: According to Livy, Hamilcar spent nine years expanding Carthage's Spanish dominions (21.2.1), an assiduous effort the historian takes as proof of the general's designs on Rome.

224 *nor have Olympians raced with hotter wheels*: Referring to competitors in the Olympic games, not the divine dwellers of Mount Olympus. Then as now, Spain was famous for its horses, and the lack of modern lubricants in antiquity made axle temperature a constant concern.

234–36 *Douro, Tagus, and Pactolus vie . . . Lethe does in hell*: The Grovii were an ancient Galician tribe living on the banks of the river Limia, which the Romans identified with the underworld river Lethe, said to confer oblivion. Such was the Romans' fear of the Limia that as late

as 137 BCE, a legionary army refused to cross it until led by their commander's example.

237–38 *The soil treats Ceres . . . Bacchus . . . Pallas' trees*: That is, the land is good for growing cereal grains, wine grapes, and olive trees.

242 *To void the Senate's acts*: Perhaps intentionally ambiguous. This may be either the Roman Senate, whose treaties Hannibal will break, or the Carthaginian Senate, whose diplomatic efforts Silius would then be accusing him of circumventing by the enumerated hook and crook.

248 *Cloaked just like them*: As Feeney notes, previous translations are almost certainly wrong. The Latin reads *insignis sagulo* (literally, "conspicuous for his little cloak"), which Duff renders "distinguished by the general's cloak" and Augoustakis and Bernstein, "Standing out in his battle cloak." But the *sagum* under diminution is not the cape of a commandant but the coarse wool covering of the common soldier; as context confirms, what marks Hannibal out is his lowly display of fitting in.

271 *Saguntum's gates . . .* : Silius elides two years of preparatory skirmishing and skips straight to the eight-month siege of Saguntum, the first major action of the war. One of the wealthiest and most fortified Spanish towns, Saguntum was allegedly protected by a special treaty with the Romans who, however, ignored all warnings of Hannibal's impending attack. (Roman historians' biased accounts make this *casus belli* especially difficult to parse: see note to 295.)

The Saguntines were a mixed people of indigenous Iberian and colonial Greek descent, whom the an-

cients imaginatively linked with the similar-sounding Ionian isle of Zacynthos. The *Punica*'s version is more complicated still, owing to another overstuffed emulsification of myth and history. According to Silius, Saguntum was co-founded by Hercules and Zacynthos—namesake of the island—while they were out adventuring in Spain (273–87). The town was later peopled by waves of genuine Zacynthians (288–90) and Rutulians from Ardea in Italy (*Daunians*, 291–93). Considering Hercules was a patron god of Rome, the hero Zacynthos was of Trojan descent, and the Rutulians were ancestors of the Romans (Aeneas conquers them in the *Aeneid*), this quadripartite origin permits Silius to follow tradition while binding Saguntum as closely to Rome as mythic backstory will allow.

276–82 *This comrade of Alcides . . .* : Silius has Zacynthos join Hercules (*Alcides*) for the latter's tenth labor, capturing the cattle (*captive herds*, 284) of the monster Geryon, reputed to reside in Spain. Since Geryon had three bodies, killing him required slaying all three, as explained at 278–82. The *harsh sisters* of 281 are the Fates, who measure mortal lifespans.

283 *the victor*: Flavian epic is notoriously murky with regard to subjects and pronouns; despite the associations, this must be Zacynthos.

290 *Laërtes' realm*: Laertes was the father of Odysseus, whose kingdom of Ithaca Homer and Virgil portray extending as far as Zacynthos.

292–93 *Ardea . . . now just a name*: Ardea was the capital of the Rutulians (or *Daunians*, after their king Daunus). In Latin, this reads *nunc Ardea nomen*, a phrase frequently obelized but occasionally defended. In any case, an

obvious debt to lines in Virgil (*Aen*. 7.412) and Ovid (*Met*. 14.579–80) makes the sense recoverable and removes all difficulty in translation; there is no need to adopt Bauer's emendation (*clarum Ardea nomen*), whence Duff's "Ardea of famous name."

295 *Through pacts that barred the town from Punic rule*: Signed in 226 BCE, the Ebro Treaty set the river Ebro as a boundary between the Roman and Carthaginian spheres of influence. Inconveniently for Rome and Roman propagandists, their allied town of Saguntum lay south of the Ebro in the Carthaginian sphere, thereby lending Hannibal a pretext to attack. Some Roman writers claimed that a separate agreement exempted Saguntum from the terms of the treaty, but the flimsiness of the Roman case is exposed by a competing line of defense falsely situating Saguntum north of the river. On this point, Silius is particularly confused; he forwards the former position here but seems to side with the latter at 480.

297 *hot for battle*: The commonly accepted construe of *flagrantia* (burning), though Duff curiously literalizes the metaphor into "camp-fires."

314 *Balearic sling*: Like their modern countryman Rafael Nadal, the ancient natives of Majorca and the other Balearic Islands were famed for their skill with a shot. Slingers are ubiquitously Balearic in Roman poetry, though the Spanish setting of this siege makes the mention unusually apt.

324–26 *Like Dacians . . . unsuspecting banks*: As barbarian peoples on the northeastern fringe of the Roman Empire, the Dacians and Getae were ascribed the archetypal fondness for poisoned arrows (*cf*. 219). The *two-named*

Hister is known today by its other appellation, the Danube.

329–30 *How wholly lost now is the holy name / Of ancient Loyalty*: Literally rendered, this reads, "Alas for a divinity to ancient peoples, now known on earth only as a name—Loyalty!" (*heu priscis numen populis, at nomine solo / in terris iam nota fides*). My unusually loose translation attempts to capture Silius's punning play on *numen* (divinity) and *nomen* (name).

351 *phalarica*: The *phalarica* was an enormous, exotic projectile Livy describes being employed in the siege (21.8.10–12). It consisted of a vast trunk of fir whose ironclad head had been wrapped in fabric, steeped in pitch, and ignited prior to launch.

365 *shields linked in a tortoise shell*: Beaten back by the *phalarica*, the Carthaginians adopt the *testudo* or "tortoise" formation, a kind of shield wall favored by Roman armies in which a unit of soldiers would advance with their shields interlocked above and in front, mimicking the shell of a tortoise.

369 *Hercules' toil tumbled*: The walls of Saguntum, built by Hercules. In Livy, Hannibal's army effects the breach with battering rams (21.7–8), but as Feeney notes, undermining the walls accords with the poem's sustained portrayal of underhanded Carthaginians.

377–79 *Rutulian blood . . . Joined Zacynthos and Italy in him*: Here begins something of an *aristeia*, an epic set-piece in which the narrator's focus is held by one hero's superhuman feats. Stepping forward from the crowd is Murrus, the quintessential Saguntine as shown in his mixed heritage which symbolically allies the ancient

Trojan, Italian, *and* Greek peoples against the Carthaginians, eleven of whom he shortly slays. Given the importance of defensive walls (*murus*) in this book, Lundström's suggestion of a double-meaning to this defender's name is well taken (cf. note to 13–16).

385–86 *triumph up the Capitol . . . fight Jove in Hell*: Roman triumphal parades ended with a procession up the Capitoline Hill, a course Aradus would have perversely recreated in conquering Rome. Murrus's final taunt is a play on this objective: instead of attacking the Capitol and its Temple of Jupiter, Aradus is sent to fight the Jupiter of the underworld (i.e. Pluto or Dis).

387 *<someone's>*: The manuscripts name the victim Hiberus, but this must be a scribal error since another soldier of that name appears immediately after. With no means of recovering the missing name, editors almost invariably obelize the text.

398 *he*: Still Murrus (see note to 283).

407 *Bagrada, whose stream's source decked his shield*: Per standard Homeric practice, a number of Murrus's victims are given brief humanizing characteristics at their demise. This soldier is apparently named for the Carthaginian river Bagrada, today the Medjerda of Tunisia.

408–9 *Nasamon Hiempsal . . . Syrtis' swells*: The Nasamones were a Berber tribe of modern Libya, here portrayed scavenging the shipwrecks of Great Syrtis (now the Gulf of Sidra), whose sandbars posed sailors an infamous threat.

413 *used horned vipers to test bastard blood*: The African

snake-charmer held as much exoticized fascination for ancient Europeans as for their Victorian descendants. According to Lucan 9.906–8, the purportedly venom-proof Psylli tribe assessed a child's ease around snakes as proof of parentage.

414–15 *Garamantia's mantic groves . . . helmet's back-bent horns*: The Garamantes were identified with the worship of Jove Ammon, a god whose horns this fighter evidently mimics with his Viking-style helmet. Like Zeus in his oracle at Dodona, the Garamantic Jove apparently gave prophecies through the rustling leaves of a sacred copse.

421–26 I follow Bauer, Duff, and Feeney in transposing these five lines to after 532. The simile of a warrior reeling around to face an onslaught like a boar fleeing the chase is completely wrong for Murrus in this moment, who is instead pressing his advantage and on the prowl himself. It is quite right, however, for Hannibal at the later juncture, where it also does not interrupt the logic of the scene. Some modest page-turning will allow readers to judge for themselves.

432 *embittered*: The odd aside on the swordsmith Temisus ends with a fascinating choice of verb, *crudescere*, which connotes simultaneous increases in material toughness and murderous cruelty. In a good example of translators' propensity to flatten the Latin's most interesting phrases, this word is everywhere rendered with versions of "temper" or "harden."

433–35 *As fierce as Mars . . . Titans*: In the standard myth, Mars was afoot in Thrace while at war with the *Giants*, but by Silius's point in the literary tradition the Titanomachy and Gigantomachy had been much confounded.

444–45 *These aren't Sidonian spires / A woman built or purchased for a fee . . . :* Bigoted allusions to the founding of Carthage by Dido, again playing on the Phoenicians' mercenary character (cf. 24).

461–64 *As flame-tailed comets . . . spells a nation's end*: Comets were considered among the most portentous of portents, portending turmoil on a dynastic scale. Silius is perhaps overfond of this simile (cf. 358–59).

465 *Pikes parted as he passed, past flags and men*: My translation nods toward the repetition of the original line, *praecipiti dant tela uiam, dant signa uirique*.

480 *Your pacts prove worthless as your Ebro's waves*: Evidently, the Ebro Treaty now does apply (see note to 295).

488 *he*: Another stray pronoun. As most commentators, editors, and foreign translators agree, this can only be Murrus. Yet the Duff and Augoustakis–Bernstein translations (not to mention Kline's) all misread the entire scene, making it Hannibal who stands atop the wall and Murrus who must climb up to attack him, even though it is Murrus who is defending the city and whom we have just seen hail Hannibal's approach (482–83). Are we to imagine that Hannibal had already surmounted the rampart before dashing off in search of Murrus at 458?

510–13 *see / Your early years in mine . . . sacked Troy first*: Few acts in epic could be more hubristic than Hannibal's inviting the god Hercules to identify with himself in the middle of razing a town Hercules founded. As alluded to at 43, Hercules sacked the city of Troy a generation before its eponymous war. In a display of receptional pyrotechnics, Silius has now identified

the besieged Saguntines with Trojans, Thebans, Romans, the followers of Aeneas, and Trojans yet again.

424–25 *and turns / A flaming pair of tusks against their spears*: (On the transposition, see note at 426.) For this vexed line, I translate Delz's reading, *iamque ignem geminum contra uenabula torquens*, whose verb and object continue the lightning imagery from 421's *fulmineus* ("he blazed"), taking the twin flames (*ignem geminum*) as metaphorical tusks. Duff follows a more explicit school in reading *iamque gemens geminat contra uenabula dentem*, which he renders, "and now with a yell he dashes his twin tusks against the spears."

539–40 *A javelin . . . opponent's thigh*: During the siege, Hannibal did in fact suffer a spear-wound to the thigh (albeit much earlier on), a dramatic turn to which Silius assigns providential provenance. Intriguingly, this episode parallels *Aeneid* 12, when a possibly godsent arrow wounds Aeneas (318–23).

541–43 *O high Tarpeian rocks . . . Laömedontic flames*: Silius invokes the holiest holies of Roman religion. The Tarpeian Rock is a stone outcropping on the Capitoline Hill, where stood the principal temples of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva (cf. 117). The *virgin shrine* is that of the Vestal Virgins, keepers of the eternal flame Aeneas brought from Troy, the city of king Laömedon.

546–47 *the Alps would have stayed barred to man . . . Allia bow to you*: Tradition held that Hannibal was the first person ever to cross the Alps, previously considered impregnable. Thus far in the poem, however, everyone from Hannibal's slaves to his Saguntine opponents seems aware of his supposedly unprecedented route (65, 486).

Line 547 is more tortuous: Hannibal's victory at Lake Trasimene would supplant the 390 BCE Battle of the Allia as the greatest disgrace in Roman military history.

559 *one night's work*: A delightful hyperbole. Cf. Livy 21.11.5:

> Saguntini ut a proeliis quietem habuerant nec lacessentes nec lacessiti per aliquot dies, ita non nocte non die unquam cessaverant ab opere, ut novum murum ab ea parte qua patefactum oppidum ruinis erat reficerent.
>
> The Saguntines, though they had enjoyed several days' respite from battle without attacking or being attacked, had never stopped working day and night to rebuild the wall anew where its collapse had left the town exposed.

This is epic, after all; Silius doubles down at 580.

567 *beg for Latin arms*: Polybius and Livy both describe Saguntum sending embassies to Rome in anticipation of Hannibal's attack, while Appian has the envoys departing afterward. Silius duly adopts the version more flattering to the Romans, though Feeney rightly points out that it is also the most dramatic.

572 *our source*: Insofar as the Saguntines are Rutulian descendants, they claim Italy as their ancestral home. Once in Rome, the ambassadors will naturally emphasize these bonds of kinship, which the narrator abets by calling them *Rutuli* at 584. Considering the Rutuli's enmity toward the proto-Romans of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the wholesale assumption of that people into the Ro-

man family foreshadows a similar fate for Carthage, which by Silian times was longstanding Roman territory.

574–75 *stepping swiftly for the nearest beach . . . :* Silius does not explain how they are able to do this, despite escape having been *cut off and walls closed in* at 331. Appian at least leaves a possibility that they set out before the siege blockade was closed (*Hisp*. 2.10–11).

576 *Tithonus' dewy spouse*: This is the goddess Dawn, roseate bringer of dew. Like the Sun, she evidently has a chariot of her own.

587–91 *The Thracian North Wind . . . opposing him*: The Greek north wind, Boreas, was understandably identified with the northern region of Thrace, though Silius is clearly describing the Mistral—a forceful, cold, northwesterly storm-wind that governs the climate of the French Riviera.

606–7 *Father Tiber streams gold . . . Anio's waves*: Rome is built on the banks of the river Tiber, which had turned yellow through poetic convention. The Anio is one of its principal tributaries.

610 *The consul . . . known by conquests' names*: Roman historians disagreed as to who was consul at this time—Livy appears confused—and Silius will not mention him again. What follows is a stock nostalgic paean to the virtuous poverty of the archaic Romans, before the decadence of empire came to soften and corrupt them (the *plough-worn hands* at 614 are surely a nod to Cincinnatus, a legendary hero who learned of his appointment to the dictatorship while at his plough, to which he immediately returned after resolving the crisis days

later). The senators are *known by conquests' names* according to a practice whereby the most august generals were accorded an additional name in commemoration of their conquests (e.g., Lucius Aemilius Mamercinus *Privernas*, victor at Privernum). The best-known example of this tradition, Scipio *Africanus*, will be so dubbed in the *Punica*'s final pages, following his defeat of Hannibal.

613 *long-haired*: I translate Delz's *hirtaeque comae*. Feeney and Duff both plump for *hirtaeque togae*, referring to the unluxuriously shaggy clothing of the hardy ancients (hair shirts, to a mythical man).

617 *Upon the temple threshold's sacred doors*: The ancient Senate often met in religious spaces, and the subsequent description of a hall adorned with war trophies is clearly meant to evoke the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter, whose columns the war left so clogged with shields and standards that they were decluttered by order of the censor in 179 BCE.

621 *Here, you could read the Punic War . . .* : The First one, that is, whose decisive naval battle at the Aegates furnishes the ship's beaks that begin this catalogue of Roman wars and trophies (622–23). The *Senones* were the tribe of Gauls that sacked Rome in 390 BCE (see note to 546–47), on which occasion legend had their leader Brennus exact a gold tribute, whose weight he intentionally miscalculated by casting his sword on the scale with the infamous words *uae uictis*, "woe to the conquered" (624–25). Brennus presumably left the weapon behind when he was driven from the city by the hero Camillus (625–26). The *Aeacid spoils* and *Epirot flags* date from Rome's war with King Pyrrhus of Epirus (he of Pyrrhic victories), who claimed descent

from Achilles, grandson of Aeacus (627). Finally, the Republic was in a constant state of skirmishing with the barbarians of Liguria, Hispania, and the Alps (628–29).

630 *squalid shape*: Petitioners, mourners, and those on trial conventionally signaled the depth of their distress by cultivating an unkempt appearance.

633 *Sicoris*: The character is a Silian invention.

642–57 Broad editorial consensus holds that some reordering is in order here, though there is much disagreement as to the degree required. As originally numbered, 656–7 are clearly out of place, making Sicoris interrupt his kinship-based plea in order to emphasize the scale of Carthaginian resources, only to resume his case immediately afterward. Postgate's proposed transposition to before 646 restores sense to the passage by removing the obstruction and recontextualizing the Punic menace such that it more fruitfully applies not to Saguntum but to Rome. Both Feeney and Delz accept this proposal (unlike Duff).

Even more absurd is the transmitted placement of 643, *trans iuga Pyrenes medium indignatus Hiberum*, which Augoustakis–Bernstein renders, "He crossed the Pyrenees, spurned the Ebro River . . ." But Hannibal has not crossed the Pyrenees, nor would he have reason to before *rousing Gibraltar*, per 644. However, if 643 is moved to after 645, as Griffith suggests and Feeney defends, all difficulty dissolves: now it is *future* campaigns Hannibal intends for lands across the Pyrenees and despite the Ebro Treaty. Nor does Griffith's transposition conflict with Postgate's, instead helping shift the scene back to Spain for 656. The resulting text is more accurate to history, sensical to geography, and

concerning to Sicoris's Roman listeners. I am at a loss as to why it is not more widely accepted.

658–61 *the Rutulians' source . . . Acrisian ramparts for Herculean heights*: In pressing the Saguntines' Rutulian descent, Sicoris invokes their common gods (*Laurentum* is an ancient Latin settlement closely related to Rome) and the Vestal Fire (see note to 541–43). The *forced . . . change* at 660 is that from the Rutulian city of Ardea (founded by Danaë, daughter of Acrisius) to Saguntum, founded by Hercules. Sicoris elaborates at 665.

662–65 *When Zancle faced Sicilian tyrant force . . . Sigeum's sons*: The point, somewhat occluded by example, is that the Saguntines are at least as worthy of salvation as previous allied towns Rome has rescued from siege. The first case is the city of Messina (*Zancle*), whose involvement of Rome in its opposition to Hiero II, tyrant of Syracuse, precipitated the First Punic War. Rome's defense of Campania during the First Samnite War in the fourth century BCE, however, is shrouded in legend. Sigeum is a promontory near Troy, making its sons the Romans.

665–68 *As Daunia was my home . . . Laurentum's name*: Now speaking in the voice of Saguntum itself, Sicoris continues emphasizing its shared ancestry with Rome, claiming the city carried the spirit (and name) of Laurentum into Spain. In his Saguntine ethnography at 192–93, Silius explained that their Rutulian ancestors left Ardea (where Numicius the sacred rivulet ran), in said search for land. In the *Aeneid*, the king of the Rutuli is named Turnus, after whose father Daunus the area is also called *Daunia*.

676 *Lentulus*: Most likely Lucius Cornelius Lentulus

Caudinus, a former consul and reigning *pontifex maximus*, though not one of outstanding historical significance. He appears here merely as a cipher for the hawkish Senatorial party; the *youth* he calls for to be punished is, of course, Hannibal (cf. 55, 187, 641, 649).

679 *Fabius foresaw*: Silius brings Book One to a close with the cliffhanger introduction of the poem's first major Roman protagonist, Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus (c. 280–203 BCE), who by this point had already served two consulships, one term as censor, and perhaps even a brief stint in the dictatorship. Of Rome's leaders in the Second Punic War, Fabius is second in fame only to Scipio Africanus, and his unpopular but highly successful military strategy of evasion and guerilla warfare would earn him the name *Cunctator*, "the Delayer." In contrast to firebrands like Lentulus (however often they prevailed), Fabius was held up as a paragon of prudence and caution; his powers of foresight were considered almost supernatural (cf. 685–86).

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